

FOLK SONGS IN ONTARIO

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WHEN CANADIAN FOLK SONGS are mentioned, most people think first of French Canada, and then of our Maritime provinces, particularly Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. These are the areas where collecting has been concentrated, and until recently little was known of the folk songs of Ontario. In fact, it was generally assumed that we had few folk songs and that it was too late to find the ones that might have existed earlier now that Ontario has become so highly industrialized. However, when I got a tape recorder in the fall of 1956, I decided to do a little scouting, and soon uncovered enough traditional material to indicate that the only reason so few Ontario songs were known was that no particular effort had been made to find them. During the last six years I have recorded nearly a thousand traditional songs in somewhat sporadic trips to various parts of the province, and that number could easily be increased if I devoted more time to collecting.

From the time when they first began to take an interest in folk songs, collectors have been lamenting that traditional singers are a disappearing breed. Back in 1855 when the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne started to collect Northumbrian ballads, they noted that so far as the words were concerned they were half a century too late, and in 1907 Cecil Sharp wrote that "The English ballad is moribund; its account is well-nigh closed." Similarly, when Dr. Roy Mackenzie started his pioneer collecting in Nova Scotia in 1909, he bemoaned "the mournful truth that the oral propagation of ballads has in our day and generation almost ceased."

In the fifty-odd years since then we have learned that the folksinger is a much hardier breed than anyone gave him credit for being, but even so I have been

amazed to find how well the tradition has been preserved in a province formerly regarded as barren. It has been very satisfying to record today many ballads which Dr. Mackenzie first noted half a century ago, and which he then feared were disappearing.

When I started collecting, I was lucky enough to begin in the Peterborough region, some ninety miles north-east of Toronto. Although I have since sampled various other areas of the province, I have found no other region so rich in songs. In this province the Irish settlers seem to have preserved their songs and the habit of singing them much better than people of Scottish or English descent. Peterborough is a particularly fruitful field because it is far enough from the main industrial areas to have developed slowly, and many of the people living there today are descendants of the original settlers Peter Robinson brought out from Ireland in 1825. Also, as the only sizable centre within fifty miles, it has become the home of many farm folk who have moved in from the surrounding country. In the little villages around it: Lakefield, Ennismore, Douro, Downer's Corners, live many people whose forefathers carved farms out of the wilderness early in the nineteenth century.

Another reason why Peterborough has proved a particularly rich source of songs is that during the nineteenth century it was a great lumbering centre, and even when the lumber camps moved farther north, many Peterborough men followed them. Until recent times it was the custom for farmers to work their fields in the summer and spend the winter in the woods, coming back each spring with their winter's wages and a fresh batch of songs.

Most of the folk songs that can still be found in Ontario owe their survival to the lumber camps. With remarkably few exceptions, the songs I have recorded have come either from men who worked in the woods in their youth or from people who learned the songs from fathers, uncles, or grandfathers who had gone shantying. Indeed, I soon learned that the best way to get traditional songs was to ask not for folk songs or old-time songs but for shanty songs.

In the long winter nights in the shanties the men took turns in singing all the songs they could remember: old British ballads, music-hall ditties, love songs, songs of the sea and of the lumber camps, and popular songs of the day. Thus the shantyboys preserved and spread folk songs of many types, with the result that songs which might originally have been known only in one family became part of the repertoire of traditional singers across the province.

Individually those traditional singers are quite varied, ranging in education from illiterates to university graduates, in age from seven to ninety-seven, and

in status from unemployed laborers to a controller of the city of Toronto. Generally, however, most of them have a rural background, having spent at least part of their lives on a farm; and the largest number are now in their seventies and eighties. Folksinging can no longer be considered a living tradition, for most of the singers are recalling songs they have not sung for twenty, forty, or sixty years. Nevertheless, a surprising number can reproduce lengthy ballads without hesitation. Every collector is tantalized by fragments of songs once known and now forgotten, but on the whole the Ontario singers manage to provide complete and well-rounded versions.

The finest traditional singer I have come across was an old gentleman named O. J. Abbott who died in 1962 in his ninetieth year. He sang some hundred and twenty songs for me, including some unusual Irish ballads and Canadian lumber-camp songs. Born in England, he came to Canada as a boy, and for about fifteen years lived and worked on farms in the Ottawa valley. It was an Irish community, and he learned most of his songs from the farmers and their sons, and from the men he met in the lumber camps where he worked for several winters. As he said, "All I had to do was hear a song once and I could sing it." After 1900 he worked in Hull where he had little opportunity to learn new songs. When he was recording, he would repeatedly remark, "Why, I haven't sung that song for sixty years."

Except for the fact that he remembered more songs than most, Mr. Abbott is fairly typical of the Ontario traditional singers. Most of them learned the songs in their youth and rarely sing them today. There are a few in their thirties or forties who still remember some of the songs they heard their fathers or mothers sing, and occasionally a farm boy or girl picks up a few songs from an older member of the family, but on the whole the younger generation are now learning their songs from radio and television.

TRADITIONAL ONTARIO SONGS can be divided into those that originated in Britain and those that were composed in North America. The songs that collectors prize most highly are the Child ballads: those that Francis James Child collected and classified in his monumental five-volume work: *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, which has become a folklorists' Bible. My collecting to date indicates that Ontario singers have not preserved as many of these as have

been found in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the eastern states, but nevertheless some interesting samples have turned up. Versions of such widespread favourites as "Lord Randall", "Barbara Allen", "Mary Hamilton", "Our Goodman", "The House Carpenter", "The Wife Wrapt in Wetherskin", "The Farmer's Curst Wife", and "The Golden Vanity" are common here as elsewhere in North America. A very complete version of "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight" has survived under the somewhat misleading title of "The Dapherd (Dappled) Gray", with its tale of the elopement, the drowning of the false lover, and the final conversation with the lady's little cock. "Katharine Jaffray" (which the singer identified as "There Was a Lord in Edinburgh") gives the story of the marriage interrupted by the true lover who carries his girl off in the best Lochinvar style. An unusual version of "The Gray Cock" has eliminated the supernatural element found in the old-country versions and become simply an account of a night visit. The bloody tale of "Little Musgrave and Lord Barnard" has survived as "Lord Banner's Wife", complete with the cuckolding leading to double murder and suicide. Rarer is the version of "Hind Horn" which retains the magic ring that grows pale when the wandering lord's sweetheart gives him up and agrees to marry another, thus warning him in time to return and interrupt the wedding dressed as an old beggarman. Also unusual is the version of "The Lass of Roch Royal": this ballad is remembered in America chiefly for the lyric verses that begin: "Who will shoe your pretty little foot?" but the Ontario version tells of Lord Gregory's mother turning away his sweetheart, and of Lord Gregory finding her dead body "in Lochland lane". A somewhat light-hearted form of "The Gypsy Laddie" is common on this continent, but an Ontario version is the first reported in North America that preserves the tragic ending in which the band of gypsies is hanged "for the stealing of Lord Castle's lady O". Another rare item is "The Dowie Dens of Yarrow": almost unknown in North America, it has survived among the Scots of Glengarry county as "The Dewy Dells of Yarrow".

While such Child ballads have survived in Ontario, they are vastly outnumbered by the later broadside ballads. This is consistent with the province's history, for while the first settlers in the eastern part of the continent came out from Britain in the seventeenth century, most of the Ontario pioneers came out in the nineteenth. By that time the older Child ballads were being submerged by the great tide flowing from the broadside presses, and these, naturally enough, made up the major part of the repertoire of the emigrants who sailed from the British Isles in last century's "Great Migration". Also, as the Irish tradition was predominant in the lumber camps, the later broadsides or "come-all-ye's" tended to get wider

circulation than the older English and Scottish ballads.

Almost half of the two hundred and fifty titles Dr. Malcolm Laws catalogued in his bibliographical guide, *American Balladry from British Broadsides*, have turned up in Ontario, and in addition nearly a hundred others not previously reported in North America. An impression of the remarkably varied types may be given by mentioning a few from each of the eight subject headings Laws uses to classify such ballads.

Under "War Ballads" come "The Bonny Bunch of Roses O" from the Napoleonic Wars, "The Heights of Alma" from the Crimean War, "The Croppy Boy", "Kelly the Fenian Boy", and "Kevin Barry" from the Irish rebellions, the Jacobite "Johnny Cope", and laments of the Irish who fought in England's wars, like "The Kerry Recruit", "Patrick Sheehan", and "Old Erin Far Away".

For an inland province, Ontario has preserved a surprising number of "Ballads of Sailors and the Sea": some of these were brought here by east-coast sailors who came to work in the northern lumberwoods. Particularly notable are the pirate tales of "The Flying Cloud", "Kelly the Pirate", "Captain Colstein", and "The Ocean Bee".

"Ballads of Crime and Criminals" recall England's Dick Turpin in "Bonny Black Bess", Ireland's "Brennan on the Moor", and Australia's "Bold Jack Donahue" and "The Wild Colonial Boy". The most unusual murder ballad to turn up here recounts the sad fate of "Dr. Pritchard" who was hanged in Edinburgh in 1865 for poisoning his wife and mother-in-law.

"Ballads of Family Opposition to Lovers" usually and tragically, like "The Constant Farmer's Son" who is killed by his sweetheart's brothers, or "Edwin in the Lowlands Low" who is murdered by his girl's parents. Occasionally the tide is turned as in "The Bold Soldier" where the girl's father and brothers are beaten in battle, or "The Banks of Dundee" where the girl shoots her interfering uncle.

"Ballads of Lovers' Disguises and Tricks" fall largely into two groups: those in which the girl disguises herself and goes to sea or to war with or in pursuit of her lover, as in "The Female Warrior", "The Lady Leroy", "The Banks of the Nile", or "Pretty Polly Oliver"; and those in which the lover returns in disguise after a prolonged absence to test his sweetheart's faithfulness, as in "The Dark-Eyed Sailor", "The Mantle So Green", "MacDonald's Return to Glencoe", or "The Pretty Fair Maid in Her Father's Garden".

"Ballads of Faithful Lovers" tell of noblemen who marry maidens of low degree, as in "The Lass of Glenshee" or "When W'll Ye Gang Awa', James?"

of pastoral romance as in "Branded Lambs" or "The Brown Girl", and of tragedy as in "Molly Bawn" whose lover shot her because he took her for a swan, or "The Sheffield Apprentice" whose mistress caused him to be arrested and hanged because he preferred her chambermaid to her.

"Ballads of Unfaithful Lovers" include many ballads of wayside seduction like "The Nightingale" or "The Dawning of the Day", tragic tales of girls forsaken and dying like "Mary of the Wild Moor" or "The Butcher Boy", and of girls murdered by their sweethearts like "The Wexford Girl" or "The Cruel Ship's Carpenter".

"Humorous and Miscellaneous Ballads" include all those not easily classified: the tale of "The Old Woman of Slapsadam" who sought to kill her husband by making him eat eggs and marrowbones, Irish music-hall ditties like "Finnegan's Wake" and "Doran's Ass", the tale of the famous Irish race horse, "Skewball", and of the lost "Children in the Wood".

Not only the narrative ballads but many lyric songs came to this province with the early immigrants from the British Isles. Many old-country love songs have been preserved here: for example, Mr. O. J. Abbott sang a fine version of the Irish street song, "Limerick Is Beautiful", or "The Colleen Bawn", which concludes with these verses:

Oh if I were made the emperor all Russia to command,
Julius Caesar, or the Lord Lieutenant of the land,
I'd give the crown down off my head, my people on their knees,
Likewise a fleet of sailing ships out on the briny seas,

I'd give the crown down off my head, my people on their knees,
Likewise a fleet of sailing ships out on the briny seas,
A beggar I would go to bed and happy rise at dawn
If by my side all for a bride I'd find the Colleen Bawn.

More surprising was the discovery of the Irish folk song from which Yeats fashioned his "Down By the Sally Gardens". When working in the lumberwoods during the First World War, a now elderly Lakefield farmer had learned this love lament which he called "Down By Sally's Garden":

Come you rambling boys of pleasure, give ear to those few lines I
write,
Although I'm a rover and in roving I take great delight,
I set my mind on a handsome girl who at all times did me slight,
But my mind was never easy till my darling were in my sight.

It was down by Sally's garden one evening late I took my way,
'Twas there I spied this pretty little girl and those words to me sure
she did say,
She advised me to take love easy as the leaves grew on the tree,
But I was young and foolish, with my darling could not agree.

The very next time I met my love, sure I thought her heart was
mine,
But as the weather changes, my true love she changed her mind.
Cursed gold is the root of evil, oh it shines with a glittering blue,
Causes many the lad and lass to part, let their hearts and minds be
ever so true.

Sure I wish I was in Dublin town, and my true love along with me,
With money to support us and keep us in good company,
With lots of liquor plentiful, flowing bowls on every side.
Let fortune never daunt you, my love, we're both young and the
world is wide.

But there's one thing more that grieves me sore is to be called a
runaway,
And to leave the spot I was born in, oh Cupid cannot set me free,
And to leave that darling girl I love, oh, alas, what will I do?
Will I become a rover, sleep with the girl I never knew?

The British influence is also evident in a number of bawdy ballads that survive in Ontario. For example, a young Peterborough man sang a ditty he called "Derby Town" which had changed but little in the two and a half centuries since it was printed in D'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy* as "A Tottenham Frolick". Another ballad which is at least as old but has not previously appeared in print dates from the time before the industrial revolution when travelling weavers had a reputation more recently associated with travelling salesmen:

Oh as I roved out one moonlight night,
The stars were shining and all things bright.
I spied a pretty maid by the light of the moon
And under her apron she carried a loom,

REFRAIN: To me right whack fal the do a di do day
Right whack fal the do a di do day,
Toora loora loora lay,
To me right whack fal the do a di do day.

She says, "Young man, what trade do you bear?"
 Says I, "I'm a weaver I do declare.
 I am a weaver brisk and free."
 "Would you weave upon my loom, kind sir?" said she.

There was Nancy Right and Nancy Rill,
 For them I wove the Diamond Twill.
 Nancy Blue and Nancy Brown,
 For them I wove the Rose and the Crown.

So I laid her down upon the grass,
 I braced her loom both tight and fast,
 And for to finish it with a joke,
 I topped it off with double stroke.

IN ADDITION to the large body of songs brought to Ontario from the British Isles, a considerable number of native American ballads drifted north from the United States. Most of these reached Ontario by way of the lumber camps: either through American shantyboys who came to work in Ontario camps, or Canadians who crossed the border to work in the woods of Michigan.

Strangely enough, many cowboy and western pioneer songs are known here. "The Texas Rangers" is probably the most common of these: I have recorded it five times in different parts of the province. The Canadian versions differ little from American texts except for one which included these lines:

When at the age of sixteen years I joined a royal band,
 We marched to San Francisco and then the Rio Grande.

The "royal band" is a fairly evident sign of British influence — the Rangers would have been surprised to know they had enlisted under our Queen, and perhaps gratified to have their territory extended to San Francisco.

Other western songs frequently found in Ontario are the ubiquitous "Cowboy's Lament" about the lad who died in the streets of Laredo, and the tale of the western desperado, "Cole Younger". These are widely known, but one unusual song that circulated in the Ontario woods has not been reported elsewhere: a cowboy version of "The Broken Ring" which is interesting because it closely parallels the original story of "Hind Horn".

The California gold rush also produced several echoes in Ontario. In one ballad about "A Dying Californian", the singer laments that he is dying far from his home and sends messages to his family and friends. Another, "My California Boys", said to have been written by an Ontario woman in the early 1850's, takes the form of a letter from a Canadian parent to two boys who joined in the gold rush. It can hardly be said to possess poetic merit, but it does convey the strict moral tone of rural Ontario:

Although you are far away from here, I always hope and pray
That you do walk in innocence and mind the Sabbath Day.
Never gamble, drink nor swear, which happiness destroys,
And don't you fear, should death appear, my California Boys.

The ancestors of several common cowboy songs are also to be found here: for example, "Michigan-I-O", the forerunner of "The Buffalo Skinners"; the Irish version of "The Girl I Left Behind", and "Early, Early in the Spring", on which "The Trail to Mexico" was based. I have also taped a local song to the tune of "I'm Going to Leave Old Texas Now", a song called "Jogging Along" to the tune of "Jerry Go and Ile That Car", and a little river-driver's song that obviously has the same ancestry as "Whisky, Rye Whisky":

I'll eat when I'm hungry and drink when I'm dry,
If the river don't drown me, I'll live till I die,
If the river don't drown me while over it I roam,
For I am a river driver and far away from home.

Of course the largest group of native North American ballads found here are those that have to do with lumbering. While the shantyboys sang songs of all kinds, their favourites were those that told of life in the woods or of the adventures of other shantyboys. Many of these were common to lumber camps on both sides of the border: whether they originated in Maine or New Brunswick, Michigan or Ontario, they were sung and passed on in the Ontario camps.

The lumberjack songs fall into three main groups. The first describes life and work in the woods, often taking the form of an account of a winter in a particular camp, as in "Turner's Camp" or "Hogan's Lake":

'Twas up on the Black River at a place called Hogan's Lake
Those able-bodied fellows went square timber for to make.
The echo of their axes rung from shore to shore,
The lofty pine they fell so fast, like cannons they did roar.

The second group tells of tragic accidents in the woods or on the river: like "The Jam on Gerry's Rocks", "The Hanging Limb", or "Johnny Doyle":

Bad luck was with Johnny that morning,
His foot it got caught in the jam,
And you know how those waters go howling
From the flood of the reservoir dam.

The third group tells of the lively times the shantyboys had in the spring when they headed for the bright lights of the cities with their winter's pay in their pockets:

The winter is all over and the hard work is all done,
We'll all go down to Saginaw and have a little fun.
Some will go on Stanley's coach and others take the train,
But if you get there before me, you can whoop 'er up, Liza Jane.

Taken together, they create a vivid picture of the early days of lumbering and of the conditions that promoted the spread of folk songs:

If you were in the shanty when they came in at night,
To see them dance, to hear them sing, it would your heart delight.
Some asked for patriotic songs, some for love songs did call;
Fitzsimmons sang about the girl that wore the waterfall.

A smaller number of songs came from the sailors on the Great Lakes. These also include ballads from both sides of the border, the most popular being two lengthy ditties describing "The Cruise of the *Bigler*" and "The Cruise of the *E. C. Roberts*". The first is a humorous account of a flat-bottomed scow hauling timber from Buffalo to Milwaukee, a boat so slow that she "could have passed the whole darn fleet if they'd hove to and wait"; and the second tells of the hardships suffered by a crew engaged in hauling red iron ore from Escanaba to Cleveland. Apart from these, most of the Great Lakes' songs are dismal tales of ships lost in storms: "The Loss of the *Persia*" is well known in both Canada and the States, while other Canadian ballads chronicle the loss of the *Asia*, the *Maggie Hunter*, the *Belle Sheridan*, and the *Antelope*. Most of them are so pedestrian and lugubrious that they create an unintentionally humorous effect; occasionally, however, the anonymous chroniclers produce an effective image:

Oh it's all around the Presqu'isle buoys the lake gulls flit and skim,
They all join in the chorus of the *Persian's* funeral hymn.
They skim along the water's edge and then aloft they soar
In memory of the *Persian's* crew drowned on Lake Huron's shore.

Another group of Ontario songs reflects outstanding events in Canada's history. The Battle of the Plains of Abraham inspired two ballads that have survived in oral tradition down to the present: one of these, usually identified as "Brave Wolfe", was widely known in the New England states and the Canadian Maritimes; the other, "General Wolfe", has been recorded from oral tradition in Britain but was unreported in North America until an old lady of eighty sang it for me some five years ago. Originally published as a broadside ballad, it has preserved through two centuries a fairly accurate picture of the famous battle.

The American Revolution is recalled in "Revolutionary Tea", a ballad brought to Canada by the United Empire Loyalists, which describes the Revolution as a squabble between a mother and daughter. The siege of Quebec in 1775 probably inspired a little play-party game that begins:

We're marching down to old Quebec
And the fifes and the drums are a-beating,
For the British boys have gained the day
And the Yankees are retreating.

Incidentally, the same ditty is sung in the States with the roles reversed.

The Battle of Detroit at the beginning of the War of 1812 produced a lively song beginning "Come All You Bold Canadians", and in "The Battle of the Windmill" set to the tune of "The Girl I Left Behind Me" the Prescott Volunteers boast of their victory over Mackenzie's supporters who crossed the St. Lawrence to take possession of a huge stone windmill near Cornwall in 1838. The Fenian raids of 1866 produced several songs: one little ditty passed on by an Irish sailor on the Great Lakes recalls the humiliating defeat of the Queen's Own Rifles in their clash with the Fenians at Lime Ridge, and in an "Anti-Fenian Song" set to the Civil War tune of "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, the Boys Are Marching", the Ontario boys boasted that "Beneath the Union Jack we will drive the Fenians back and be happy in our own Canadian home."

Other events of less historical importance have also been preserved in song. For example, a typical gallows ballad spread across Ontario shortly after Reginald Birchall was hanged in Woodstock jail in 1890 for killing an English lad named Frederick Benwell. Its opening, "My name is J. R. Birchall, that name I'll never deny", indicates its debt to a similar American ballad, "Charles Guiteau", describing the assassination of President Garfield in 1881, which in its turn had been patterned on an earlier ballad entitled "My Name Is John T. Williams".

A less famous murder case, in which Michael Lee killed his sweetheart, Maggie

Howie, in Napanee in 1882, also inspired a ballad that included such deathless lines as:

She wrung her hands in anguish and wept most bitterly,
Saying, 'Michael, do have mercy and do not murder me.'
But I was deaf to all her cries, no mercy could I show,
And in my hands I took the axe and struck that fatal blow.

More light-hearted are the accounts of men who have spent some time as guests of the government in various Ontario institutions. Toronto's Don jail is saluted in a ditty beginning:

On the banks of the Don there's a dear little spot,
A boarding house proper where you get your meals hot.
You get fine bread and water, and you won't pay a cent,
Your taxes are paid for, your board and your rent,

and the same theme is expanded in an ode to "Johnson's Hotel" in Peterborough, the jail that stands "on the banks of the Ottonabee". Another ditty describes the fate of a group of Americans who came up to Ontario, ran afoul of the law, and spent some time in "Sault St. Mary's Jail".

THE STRONG IRISH FLAVOUR of many Ontario songs is often emphasized by an accent so marked that you would swear the singer had landed from Cork last week, even when his great grandparents came here well over a century ago. Such Irishisms as "arrums" for "arms" and "merned" for "mourned" are almost standard usage in Ontario ballads, and most of the old shanty singers finish off their songs by speaking the last word or phrase; a characteristic of the traditional Irish come-all-ye style.

The outstanding example of the Irish influence is a typical come-all-ye commemorating a riot that took place in Montreal in 1877. Its flavour is that of the innumerable nationalist ballads composed about the various battles and rebellions of Ireland's stormy history, complete to the perennial complaint about "what King Billy and Cromwell did"; the event that inspired it happened on the Twelfth of July back in 1877 when antagonism between Catholics and Protestants in Montreal was at fever heat:

Come all you gallant Irishmen who love your church and creed,
I hope you'll pay attention to the few lines that you read,

Concerning your church and countrymen, your brothers one and all,
It's how we licked the Yellowbacks in the city of Montreal.

It was on the twelfth of last July the Orangemen did draw nigh,
And to insult the Catholics they waved their colors high;
To insult the Catholics it was their one design,
And they played the tunes King Billy played on the day he crossed
the Boyne.

They marched from Vyve and Circle down to Victoria Square,
It's there that they halted for the Union boys were there.
Then Fawcett drew a revolver and he let go with a ball,
And swore he'd kill every Papist dog in the city of Montreal.

So Hackett followed after him and fired just once again,
And he received a fatal ball which entered in his brain.
He cast his eyes around him as downward he did fall,
And he bid adieu to that Orange crew in the city of Montreal.

So come all you true-bred Catholics who love your church and creed,
I hope you'll pay attention to what King Billy and Cromwell did.
They tore down Catholic churches from Lewis to Donegal,
But they can't come across with no games like that in the city of
Montreal.

The young Peterborough man who sang that for me had learned it from his father, and he knew nothing of the events that inspired it.

While that has the style of the Irish rebel ballads, it was obviously composed in Canada. Other Ontario songs show an even closer relationship to older British songs. For example, "The Roving Journeyman" has been transformed into "Ye Maidens of Ontario", and the old Irish song called "The Bonny Laboring Boy" has been adapted to the Ontario scene as "The Jolly Shanty Boy" or "The Railroad Boy":

If I had all the riches that's in my father's store,
Oh freely I would share it with the boy that I adore.
We'll fill our glasses to the brim, let the toast go merrily round,
And we'll drink to the health of the railroad boy, from Ottawa to
Owen Sound.

It is easy to see how such songs were adapted from older models, but occasionally I come across one which is less easily identified. For example, a Glengarry

woman sang a little ode to "The Jolly Raftsman O" which has all the charm of the older British love songs but seems to be a fresh creation :

I am sixteen, I do confess,
I'm sure I am no older, O.
I place my mind, it never shall move,
It's on a jolly raftsman O.

REFRAIN: To hew and score it is his plan,
And handle a broad-axe neatly O.
It's lay the line and mark the pine
And do it most completely O.

Oh she is daily scolding me
To marry some freeholder O.
I place my mind, it never shall move,
It's on a jolly raftsman O.

My love is marching through the pine
As brave as Alexander O,
And none can I find to please my mind
As well as the jolly raftsman O.

Less poetic but more widely known was the lament of "The Poor Little Girls of Ontario" who were left behind when their fellows headed westward :

I'll sing you a song of the lone pest,
It goes by the name of the great north-west.
I cannot have a beau at all,
They all skip out there in the fall.

CHORUS: One by one they all clear out,
Thinking to better themselves no doubt,
Caring little how far they go
From the poor little girls of Ontario.

This little ditty circulated in Ontario between 1890 and 1910, taking slightly different forms depending upon the regions that were currently attracting the boys. In the 1890's it contained verses mentioning Thunder Bay and Keewatin; later it referred to "Manitobay", Saskatchewan, and the Cariboo.

A few more recent songs have also passed into oral tradition, notably some from the great depression of the 'thirties. Typical is a ditty that was sung by men

working on a highway being built as a relief project which contained this somewhat bitter topical reference:

It's hailing, it's raining, but during the day
The Lord works with Bennett to keep clouds away.
Now if I had Bennett where Bennett's got me,
The very first morning he'd be weak at the knees.

NOTE

A survey like this can indicate only in fairly general terms the various types of folk songs still to be found in Ontario, and, of course, can give no idea of the tunes to which they were sung. Those who would like to hear some of the Ontario songs sung by traditional singers will find samples on the following records:

"Folk Songs of Ontario": Folkways FM 4005; "Irish and British Songs from the Ottawa Valley" sung by O. J. Abbot: Folkways FM 4051; "Lumbering Songs from the Ontario Shanties": Folkways FM 4052; "Songs of the Great Lakes": Folkways FM 4053; "Ontario Ballads and Folksongs": Prestige International 25014; "Songs of Tom Brandon, Peterborough, Ontario": Folk Legacy FSC 9.

