

So I'll see you in the springtime when the ice goes down the river,
And the noisy geese are winging o'er the bay;
To those secret trysting places in those wide and open spaces
Up the muddy Duncan River far away.

Songs of the North Woods

Songs of the North Woods, as sung by O. J. Abbott and collected by Edith Fowke, edited by Laszlo Vikar & Jeanette Panagapka. Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2004.

This is a very welcome publication. The core of the book is sixty-six transcriptions by Laszlo Vikar of songs sung by O. J. Abbott into Edith Fowke's tape-recorder. He has also written a short (three page) but concise and substantive discussion of the challenges he faced in making the transcriptions, which alerts us to some of the musical/editorial decisions he had to make while doing the job. There is also a technical 'song analysis', which indicates the metre and range of each song and sorts them into major/minor scales or modes.

Jeanette Panagapka seems to have been responsible for most of the other editorial matter in the book. It includes brief biographies (would they were longer!) of Edith Fowke and O. J. Abbott, and transcripts of two interviews, one with Frank Fowke and one with Richard Johnstone. There is an appendix giving the texts of two stories, "Cutting Square Timbers" and "Curing the Toothache", that Edith recorded from Abbott, and there is a listing of Edith's books and recordings held in Special Collections at the University of Calgary Library.

Most useful of all is an attempt to list all the songs noted and/or recorded from Abbott. There are 120 of them, and to see or hear them all a researcher would have to visit not only the University of Calgary but also the Museum of Civilization, as well as listen to Abbott's Folkways LP and peruse *Traditional Singers and Songs of Ontario*, *Lumbering Songs of the Northern Woods* and the *Penguin Book of Canadian Folksongs*. The chart indicating where each song may be located is therefore invaluable.

When so much has been done, and in such a scholarly way, it seems uncharitable to be critical of the resultant publication, but I did have a couple of unanswered questions. It is never really made clear why the decision was taken to transcribe only 66 of 120 songs. Obviously a complete collection of Abbott's songs would have entailed nearly twice as much work by Vikar and would have resulted in a two-hundred page book rather than a 108 page one, but wouldn't it have been worth the extra effort?

And why the decision to include among the 66 some 26 songs that have already been published in Edith's books? Yes, I recognise that the transcriptions have been made anew, and that they are probably more accurate than the old ones, but I would still have preferred to have been given additional rather than repeat items from the 120.

Having got those two grumbles off my chest, I want to emphasize that this book is a real treasure. We are lucky to have it because there are significant copyright issues concerning Edith's collecting and publications. University of Calgary Press is to be congratulated on its fortitude in working through these problems and not abandoning a publication that sadly will only find a small, specialized market. Of course, to complement the book we need a double CD set of O. J. Abbott singing these sixty-six songs. If CSTM had its own record label, this would be the sort of project we could do. How about it, folks? In the meantime we will have to be content with the song-book. It contains many interesting traditional songs, some of which have lovely melodies. For lovers of Anglo-Irish traditional song, this is a 'must have' item: don't be without it.

David Gregory, Athabasca, Alberta

Six Songs from *Songs of the North Woods*

It was not easy to choose just six examples of O. J. Abbott's songs to give you a taste of Laszlo Vikar's transcriptions in *Songs of the North Woods*. We decided that, first of all, they should be renditions that are likely to be new to you, so we limited the pool of possibles to those that Edith had never printed. Second, we restricted the choice to songs with distinctive tunes as well as interesting lyrics. And, finally, we opted for variety within our chosen six, so that different aspects of Abbott's cultural inheritance should be illustrated. Hence we have songs that reflect his British ancestry ("A Bunch of Watercresses" and "The Banks of the Dee"), his Irish connections ("The Colleen Bawn"), his knowledge of broadsides ("The Green Linnet") and the time he spent as a youth in the logging camps of the Ottawa valley ("Lost Jimmy Whelan"), plus one about a notorious Ontario institution of law and order ("The Banks of the Don"). We begin with a fairly well known Canadian ballad, "Lost Jimmy Whelan". Abbott's version has slightly stilted lyrics but a beautiful tune.

Lost Jimmy Whelan

O. J. Abbott

One evening I strayed by the
banks of a river,
Viewing the
sun - beams as evening drew nigh. All a -
- lone as I wand - ered I spied a fair
dam - sel, Weep - ing and wail - ing with
man - ys a sigh.

One evening I strayed by the banks of a river,
Viewing the sunbeams as evening drew nigh,
All alone as I wandered I spied a fair damsel,
Weeping and wailing with manys a sigh.

Sighing for one who is now lying lonely,
Weeping for one who no mortal could save.

For the cold cruel waters fly sadly around him,
As onwards they flow over young Jimmy's grave.

"Oh, Jimmy," she says, "won't you come to my
arms?"

Come to me, Jimmy, from your silent grave,

You promised you'd meet me this evening,
 my darling,
 But death's cruel anger has sealed your sad
 fate."

"You promised you'd meet me by the banks
 of this river,
 To give me sweet kisses as you oft did before,
 To enfold me again in your strong loving
 arms.
 Come to me, Jimmy, oh come from your
 grave."

Up he arose from the depths of the water,
 A vision of beauty more bright than the sun.
 Realms of crimson surrounded young Jimmy,
 And unto this fair one to speak he began.

"Oh why did you call me from realms of glory,
 Back to this world where I'll soon have to part?"
 Cold were the arms that did her encircle,
 And cold was the bosom he pressed to her heart.

"All alone as you wander by the banks of this
 river,
 I will be with you to guard and to save.
 My spirit will hover, and keep you from danger,
 'Til death takes you down to your cold, silent
 grave."

Throwing herself on the ground she wept sorely,
 With great words of anguish this maiden did rave,
 Saying, "Adieu, oh adieu, my lost Jimmy Whelan,
 I'll sigh 'til I die by the side of your grave."

A Bunch of Watercresses

O. J. Abbott



Oh, I am a dai-ry farm-er, from
 Belv-e-shire I came, To see some friends and re-
 - la - tions, and Mor - gan is my name. If
 you will sit and list - en, I'll tell with - out de -
 - lay, Of a pret - ty lit - tle dam - sel my at -
 - ten - tion stole a - way.

Oh, I am a dairy farmer, from Belveshire I came,
To see some friends and relations, and Morgan is my name.
If you will sit and listen, I'll tell without delay,
Of a pretty little damsel my attention stole away.

It was on the first of April when I arrived in town,
And being quite a stranger I rambled up and down,
'Till I lost myself entirely, I cannot tell you where,
'Twas a very quiet place near the corner of a square.

When a neatly dressed young maiden came walking up that way,
As long as I remember I shall never forget the day.
She promised she would marry me upon the first of May,
And she left me with a bunch of watercresses.

Oh, politely I addressed her, and this to her did say,
"I want to go to Camberwell, can you direct the way?"
"Oh yes, sir, oh yes, sir," she modestly replied,
"Take the turning to the left, and then go down the other side."

Her voice it was the sweetest that ever I did hear,
Her hands were like the lily, and so very white and clear,
She had some early onions, a half a pint of beer,
Some pickles, and a bunch of watercresses.

I bowed to her, I thanked her, I passed by her side,
I thought how neatly she would look as a dairy farmer's bride,
So I gathered resolutions, half in earnest, half in joke,
I hinted matrimony, these are the very words I spoke:

"I've a farm of forty acres, stocked with horses, cows and geese,
Besides I have a dairy house of butter, milk and cheese.
Kind maiden, would you marry me, and be mistress of all these,
And we'll spend our days in loving watercresses."

"Oh yes, sir, oh yes, sir, oh dear if you choose,
You are so very generous, I cannot well refuse,
I've a wedding dress to buy, and some little bills to pay."
I handed her a sovereign, her expenses to defray.

Next day a letter I received, I read it with surprise,
"Kind sir, for disappointing you I must apologize,
But next time you ask a stranger into partnership for life,
Be sure that she's a maiden or a widow, not a wife.

I've a husband of my own, and his name is Willy Gray,
And when I can afford it, your sovereign I will repay,
But to think that I would marry you upon the first of May,
Why you must have been as green as watercresses."

The Green Linnet

O. J. Abbott



Cur-i-os - it - y bore a young nat - ive of Er - in to
view the gay banks of the Rhine.... When an Em - press he saw, and the
robe she was wear - ing all ov - er with dia - monds did shine..... No
god - dess of splen - dor was ev - er yet seen that could e - qual this fair one so
mild and ser - ene, In soft mur - mur she says, "My lin - net so green, are you
gone, will I e'er see you more?"

Curiosity bore a young native of Erin to view the gay banks of the Rhine,
When an Empress he saw, and the robe she was wearing all over with diamonds did shine.
No goddess of splendor was ever yet seen that could equal this fair one so mild and serene,
In soft murmur she says, "My linnet so green, are you gone, will I e'er see you more?"

"The cold, lofty Alps you freely went over, which nature had placed in your way,
That Marengo Saloney all round you did hover, all Paris rejoiced the next day.
It grieves me the hardships that you did undergo or mountains you travelled all covered with snow,
The balance of power your courage laid low; are you gone, will I e'er see you more?"

"That numbers of men are eager to slay you, their malice you viewed with a smile.
Their goal through all Europe, they sought to betray you, and joined with the Mamelukes on the Nile.
Like ravens for blood their vile passions did burn, orphans they slain, and left widows for to mourn.
They say my linnet's gone, will he ever return, oh, sweet Bony, will I e're see you more?"

"I will roam through the desert of wild Abyssinia and yet find no cure for my pain.
Will I go and inquire at the Isle of St. Helena? Oh no, we will whisper in vain.
Tell me, ye critics, oh, tell to me in time, or the world I'll range o'er, my green linnet for to find,
Was he slain at Waterloo, the Elbe, or the Rhine? If he was I shall ne'er see him more."

The Banks of the Dee

O. J. Abbott

The musical score is written on six staves of music. Each staff contains a line of lyrics. The lyrics are: "It was summer so soft-ly the breezes were blow-ing and", "sweet-ly a night-in-gale sang in a tree, At the foot of a rock where the", "ri-ver was flow-ing, I sat my-self down on the banks of the Dee. Flow", "on love-ly Dee, flow on thou blest riv-er, thy banks pur-est stream shall be", "dear to me ev-er, It was there I first gained the af-fec-tion and fav-our of", and "Jim-my, the glo-ry and pride of the Dee."

It was summer, so softly the breezes were blowing,
And sweetly a nightingale sang in a tree,
At the foot of a rock where the river was flowing,
I sat myself down on the banks of the Dee.
Flow on, lovely Dee, flow on, thou blest river,
Thy banks, purest stream, shall be dear to me ever,
It was there I first gained the affection and favour
Of Jimmy, the glory and pride of the Dee.

But now he has gone, he has left me this morning,
To quell the proud rebel, so valiant was he,
And there is no sign of his speedy returning,
To wander again on the banks of the Dee.
He is gone, hapless youth, o'er the wild raging billows,
The sweetest and kindest of all those brave fellows,
And he has left me to wander among these green willows,
The loneliest maid on the banks of the Dee.

But time, and prayer, oh, may it restore him,
Blest peace may restore my dear shepherd to me,
And when he comes back with such care I'll watch o'er him,
He'll never again quit the banks of the Dee.
The Dee it will flow, all its beauties displaying,
The lambs on its banks shall again be seen playing,

Whilst I with my Jimmy will be carelessly straying,
And tasting again all the sweets of the Dee.

The Colleen Bawn

O.J. Abbott



Oh the town of Limerick is beau-ti-ful, as
ev-'ry bo-dy knows. The ri-ver Shan-non,
full of fish, through that famed ci-ty flows. It's
not the ri-ver, nor the fish, that's run-ning through my
mind, Nor with the town of Lim-er-ick have I
a-ny fault to find.

Oh the town of Limerick is beautiful, as everybody knows,
The river Shannon, full of fish, through that famed city flows.
It's not the river, nor the fish, that's running through my mind,
Nor with the town of Limerick have I any fault to find.

But the girl I love is beautiful, she's gentle as a fawn,
She dwells in Limerick city, and she's called the Colleen Bawn.
Just as swiftly as that river flows through that far famed city,
Just as coolly, and without a word, my Colleen passes me.

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

I'd give the crown down off my head, my people on their knee,
Likewise a fleet of sailing ships out on the briny sea.
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.

On the Banks of the Don

O. J. Abbott

The musical score is written on six staves of music in 3/4 time. The lyrics are: On the banks of the Don there's a dear little spot, A boarding house proper where you get your meals hot. You'll get fine bread and water, and you won't pay a cent, Your taxes are paid for your board and your rent.

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

So turn out every man of you all in a line,
From the cell to the stone yard you all must keep time,
You'll work like a Turk 'til the bell it strikes one,
In the grand institution just over the Don.

If you ever want to get into that palace so neat,
Take Tanglefoot whiskey and get drunk on the street,
You'll have a fine family carriage to drive you from town,
To the grand institution just over the Don.

Our boarders are honest, not one of them steal,
For we count all our knives and forks, after each meal.
Our windows are airy, and barred up besides,
To keep our good boarders from falling outside.

So turn out every man of you all in a line,
From the cell to the stoneyard you all must keep time,
You'll work like a Turk, 'til the bell it strikes one,
In that grand institution just over the Don.