

## Ten things to consider about "The Star of Logy Bay"

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Newfoundland song-maker Mark Walker was born in 1846, and died in 1924. He is best known for two songs that today are sung widely in Newfoundland: "Tickle Cove Pond" and "The Antis of Plate Cove." Several other Walker songs are less famous, but are well-known among singers. They include "Fanny's Harbour Bawn" and "Lovely Katie-Oh."<sup>1</sup> Among his descendants, he is additionally said to have written one of Newfoundland's most famous songs, "The Star of Logy Bay," known in the family as "True Love's Lamentation." Nonetheless, there is no direct evidence of his authorship. In this paper, I investigate some of the pros and cons of the family's claims, looking at the relative weight you can place on style, narrative form and other aspects of the song.

"The Star of Logy Bay" was one of the very most popular songs in the public traditions of Newfoundland in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Paul Mercer's *Index of Newfoundland Songs and Ballads in Print* lists 21 times the song was published between its earliest known publication (in 1902) and 1974, Mercer's cut-off date.<sup>2</sup> Only one song has more listings – "Kelligrews Soiree," with 23 listings – while second place was shared with "The Ryans and the Pittmans." The next place – 4<sup>th</sup> – is held by "The Squid Jiggin' Ground" at 18 listings. In print anyway, these four are the superstars of Newfoundland vernacular song. The authorship of three of these four songs is not only known, but also widely celebrated. But "The Star of Logy Bay" has no widespread attribution.

Another indicator of 20<sup>th</sup> century popularity is Michael Taft's index of commercial sound recordings up to 1972.<sup>3</sup> Taft lists nine recorded versions of the song, which ties it with "The Badger Drive." However, ten other songs have more listings, up to 17 for "Jack was Every Inch a Sailor" and 22 for "I's the B'y."<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, nine recordings in the first thirty years of recorded music in Newfoundland is not bad, and shows the great popularity of the song. We might also come at this quantitative study of popularity by another route, a more complex one. This is the Song Title Index in the MUN Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) where about 5000

versions of songs are noted; they represent about 2000 titles. "The Star of Logy Bay" is reported only eight times, including twice by the same person at one session.<sup>5</sup> Of the seven informants, one was a song collector singing a tiny fragment of the song to prime his informant.<sup>6</sup> That leaves a half dozen recordings of the song, one of which was a group singing and another a young student at a school concert.<sup>7</sup>

The number of "field recordings" – four or five – seems rather low for such a "popular" song.<sup>8</sup> But, as Casey, Rosenberg, and Wareham pointed out thirty years ago about Newfoundland singers and songs, the fact of media popularity can throw water on the fires of field popularity.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, singers feel no special cachet in singing songs well-known in the media. On the other hand, field collectors have been more interested in hearing little-known songs. We are then left with a pretty poor quantitative measure of "real" popularity of the song. Just the same, the song clearly has been very well-known, among the first to be sung at sing-along functions, or to be included in printed songsters and sound recordings of "well-known Newfoundland songs."

Besides being popular, "The Star of Logy Bay" has also been a contentious song. Logy Bay itself is a cove about five miles north of St. John's. It has been a well-known community for over a hundred years, including in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for its healthful spa.<sup>10</sup> The road to Torbay originally went through Logy Bay, and both were fairly prosperous farming communities, supplying St. John's with dairy products, vegetables, and hay, the gasoline of its time. The contention lies in the line "Between Torbay and Outer Cove, 'tis there my love did dwell." Logy Bay is not between Torbay and Outer Cove. Going north from St. John's, the road passes through Logy Bay, Outer Cove, Middle Cove and Torbay. To this day, people discuss, and argue about, the meaning or mistake of that line. Some singers have tried to recast the text to get it geographically right. Others have tried to reanalyse the meaning so that the true love is hiding out in Middle Cove – in other words,

the song for them is a kind of secret map.<sup>11</sup> It is a song with a lot of popular interest.

Is there a chance that Mark Walker wrote "The Star of Logy Bay"? Yes, there is. But the evidence is thin on the ground and, as a defence lawyer might say, "merely circumstantial."

### The Ten Things

1. I've already mentioned the family oral history. Or rather, the regional oral history of the song in Bonavista South, where Mark Walker lived. According to the oral history of the oral history (the "metafolklore" in Alan Dundes' terminology), that Mark Walker wrote the song was passed in the 1920s to Walker's grandson, Mark Kelly, by an elderly neighbour, Mr. Tom Maloney.<sup>12</sup> The oral historical memory is today kept alive through four generations of Kellys (Walkers through a daughter) and their families.
2. No competing claims. The song has recently been recorded in Ireland and there identified as "a Newfoundland song."<sup>13</sup> I've seen no evidence of the song being otherwise known outside Newfoundland, at least not in oral tradition. As it happened, when I gave this paper at the CSTM conference in October 2002, I was recorded for radio. Until then I had seen no other claims to its authorship in Newfoundland and said so in the part of my paper reported on air. In the wake of the radio coverage, I received a call from an octogenarian resident of Sugar Loaf Road, on the edge of Logy Bay. She told me that it was said in her childhood that the song was not only a true story, but that it was written by the girl herself, not very long after the events in the song, events that took place at least a couple of generations before her time. The girl died soon after penning the song and there is no record of her name. Other than the Kelly claim, this is the only traditional report I've come across of the authorship of the song. It is not a widespread claim and seems to have no documentary tracks. That there has been no widespread claim on this song's authorship is a strong statement in a country where so many songs are of known authorship, or claimed authorship, and more so given the fact that for at least two or three generations this song has been among the most popular of local songs. Indeed, many songs have disputed claims: some of the more popular songs (for instance, "It's The B'y" and "Hard, Hard Times") have multiple claims on them.<sup>14</sup> "The Star of Logy Bay" has only this one by the Walker family.

3. I said "no direct evidence." But what is "direct evidence," anyway? We have only oral evidence (or parallel, informal print sources) for evidence for most of the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of attributed Newfoundland songs. We do not have signed manuscripts, nor can we expect to have that kind of documentary evidence. Oral history is our only possible source.

4. Geographic mix-up. "The Star of Logy Bay" has that peculiar twist of placing Logy Bay between Torbay and Outer Cove, where it is not. This is a mistake that someone who lived near St. John's would not likely have made. But it is the kind of mistake an infrequent visitor to the area might have made. This suggests that someone like Walker (a "peripatetic philosopher," someone called him while he was still alive) might have been the author.<sup>15</sup> That the oral tradition, in its propensity for "self-correction",<sup>16</sup> did not find a way around the mistake, suggests a fairly recent authorship before publication and consequent crystallization. (The re-analysis of meaning I mentioned earlier [her hiding place] is, of course, a species of self-correction, at the semiotic level instead of the textual level. But it has not led to a widespread sense-shift.)

5. Dating. The first publication of "The Star of Logy Bay" was about the same time as the first publication of some of Walker's known (or accepted) songs. It appears to have first gotten into print in 1902 in James Murphy's small book, *Songs and Ballads of Newfoundland, Ancient and Modern*. "Fanny's Harbour Bawn" (another Walker song) first shows up in the same booklet. They both appear next in 1906, together in an article written, under the pen name "Old Timer," by someone who may have been James Murphy. "The Antis of Plate Cove" first appears in print in a newspaper article by P. K. Devine in 1912. The article deals with the song culture of the then-famous 1869 general election in which "Curst Confederation" lost the day.<sup>17</sup> "Tickle Cove Pond" appears in print much later, in 1937 in Smallwood's *Book of Newfoundland*, along with another of Walker's songs, "Nellie Neil, My Little Kettle."

As Mercer's *Index* shows, popular Newfoundland songs were coming into print long before the beginning of the twentieth century. But we cannot use a late date of publication as a sign of late composition; many songs remained known only to the oral tradition for generations. Nonetheless, in putting together books aimed at singers, the fresh and new song has a cachet for the compiler that an old

chestnut hasn't. The 1902 date suggests to me that the song came to the attention of singers (and publishers), especially those near the publishing centre of St. John's, in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In 1906, Old Timer wrote that "The Star of Logy Bay" was a favourite among "the most popular social ditties and love songs of over 40 years ago." Murphy, himself, wrote in 1902 that the song "was composed over forty years ago." If the 1906 claim is accurate, the song's earlier popularity can be placed in the late 1860s. This was Mark Walker's hey-day. Is this good evidence? If the 1902 claim is accurate, the song is placed in the late 1850s or very early 1860s, when Walker was a boy of ten or twelve. Is this counter-evidence? Just exactly how accurate or exact James Murphy may have been is moot; he was born in 1868, making him a man of 33 or 34 when he published his songster.<sup>18</sup> Speaking of "forty years ago" was therefore speaking of before his birth. He was not speaking from personal experience and no doubt there was some rounding. Up or down.

6. Newfoundland-Irishisms. In support of its local composition (perhaps against the argument of being carried over from, say, Ireland, a common popular belief), we can point to several examples of vernacular Newfoundland speech, some of which are also Anglo-Irishisms. Ye as plural form is common vernacular speech in Eastern, Irish-influenced, Newfoundland. But it is also common archaism in English poetry, not to mention the King James Bible. Down in Logy Bay: This is parallel to oral forms used to this day especially on the Southern Shore of the Avalon Peninsula where "down" means "north" and "up" means "south." Thus the song's viewpoint is that of the capital city. It is situated in St. John's. The reference to Amerikay (or America) does not indicate linguistic localism. The term is common enough in speech in Great Britain and Ireland. But in Canada and Newfoundland, that word is not commonly used as a pro-name for the United States. But within the Walker/Kelly family in Newfoundland, "America" is used unhesitatingly and regularly when referring to the emigration of the Walker family and to their present descendants a century later. Is this grasping evidential straws?

7. Lexical register. Like some "known" Walker songs, "The Star of Logy Bay" has a tongue-in-cheek formal register. Rather than representing a colloquial or casual style, words and phrases are chosen for their high-falutin flavour: "Venus was no fairer, nor the lovely month of May" or "her place of habitation." Compare from "Fanny's Harbour Bawn" the phrases, "those verdant hills I rambled..." and "I

lay there prostrated and quite lifeless." Michael Gray refers to it as "flowery language" but really what we have is a joy in the use of a register of vocabulary aimed a little higher than normal speech.<sup>19</sup> The usual title, "The Star of Logy Bay," uses this register, too, and links the song to other tunes and songs of Ireland: "The Star of Munster", "The Star of Kilkenny", and "The Star of County Down." And of course, it also links it to another mysterious song of Newfoundland, "The Blooming Bright Star of Belle Isle."

8. The rhyme patterns. Internal rhymes are one of the repeated mechanical tropes of Walker's poetry. They add a level of textural craft to a text that already scans well, and has appropriate line-ending rhymes. "I'll search in vain through France and Spain." "Fanny's Harbour Bawn," has "when to my surprise, a pair I spied." And "I pray be gone, all from the bawn..." Similar internal rhyme structures are in other songs of his.

9. The tune. The song has been published with no less than three tunes. We might assume one of these was indicated by the author. Or, as Neil Rosenberg has suggested, we might see three tunes as evidence of a broadside source.<sup>20</sup> Texts on paper, circulating without tunes, find themselves being applied to whatever tune is compliant. I have not been able to track down an Irish source of any of the three tunes. That is not to say there are no predecessors, but only that I have searched sources like Francis O'Neill's *1001 Gems – Dance Tunes of Ireland* to no avail.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, there is something about each of these tunes that to my untrained musical ear sounds "very Irish." Mark Walker chose, for at least one of his songs' tune, an Irish fiddle tune otherwise unknown in Newfoundland – "Tatter Jack Walsh" is his source for "Tickle Cove Pond." The choice of an obscure Irish tune, if not evidence, is suggestive of a pattern of Walker work. But then, we don't know there was an Irish source. Of course, Irish music was in the air in Newfoundland in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> Almost as much in that century as in the following one, Newfoundlanders saw local culture as rooted in Irish culture. The common tune for this song today is first documented on a McNulty Family record in about 1948.<sup>23</sup> The other two tunes reliably pre-date the McNultys by ten or twenty years.<sup>24</sup> The late date – 1948 – of the tune we hear universally today might suggest that the McNultys came up with it. But oral history has it that the local performer Bidy O'Toole was singing the tune in 1940 on the radio.<sup>25</sup>

All three tunes of "The Star of Logy Bay" are fairly simple. The most commonly sung, contemporary one, has a basic structure of four four-bar lines. It follows an A-B-B-A structure, but the line three is modified from line two by a simple inversion of the tag. The B line mirrors the A line, but is placed about a third above it. The tune begins therefore quite low, swinging up especially in the B lines, and back down to the tonic ending. It's not very complicated, but is certainly very distinctive. The first of the other tunes was collected on the Newfoundland Railway by Elisabeth Greenleaf in 1929, from May O'Dea, a well-placed citizen and music teacher of St. John's.<sup>26</sup> Although its fourth line mirrors closely the first line of the common tune and, although the remainder of her tune is similar to the common tune, it is quite different, certainly enough to be called a separate tune. Both tunes have a greater-than-average range – two tones greater than an octave.<sup>27</sup> Most Newfoundland songs of greater range than that (an extreme example is "Let Me Fish off Cape St. Mary's" with over an octave and a half) are 20<sup>th</sup> century tunes. The third tune is an unexplained one that Gerald Doyle included in his 1940 (second) edition of his widely distributed songster.<sup>28</sup> Its range is likewise a couple of notes more than an octave (A to C#). In melodic complexity, it lies somewhere between the other two. All three are similar in melodic shape and may indeed have sprung from a single tune.

10. The story. A father standing in the way of true love is a commonplace in English folk song and tale.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, it turns up infrequently in Newfoundland native ballads. They tend to be more public stories, rather than private laments.<sup>30</sup> But Walker did write one song with almost exactly this same story. "Down By Jim Long's Stage" is about a young man kept by his girlfriend's father from seeing her until he shows his intentions and prospects are good. In "The Star of Logy Bay" the story has no such happy resolution: the singer has no hope of ever seeing his girl again. Walker may have written two songs based on the same idea. On the other hand: that Walker had written one song that was so similar to "The Star of Logy Bay" – and sung to the tune that is most commonly sung for it! – might have brought about a misunderstanding-cum-wishful-thought within the community of family and neighbours. If we consider that so many Newfoundland songs do have competing claims by descendants of would-be authors, we can see that there is a traditional pattern of claim, based in honouring dead parents and grandparents. Folksongs have to have been written by someone, and why not Grandad? The claim by

the Kellys may represent more the traditional pattern of claim than the actual history of the song.

In conclusion, I don't know whether Mark Walker wrote "The Star of Logy Bay" but I am more sympathetic to the claim than I was when I first heard it. A songwriter usually wants his songs to be sung as widely as possible. If the song is Walker's, perhaps it was an attempt on his part to write more universalized songs, to hit the city market. That it is "situated" in St John's might point in this direction. This would parallel Michael Taft's discovery that John Burke sent songs to the United States to try and break into the Tin Pan Alley market.<sup>31</sup> But the evidence, such as it is, piles up on both sides. The best evidence we can hope for – "direct evidence" – will be negative: if a text turns up that predates Walker, or that clearly shows it is not his. In other words, it is harder to prove the claim than to disprove it. But the "direct" evidence remains hidden. Until it shows up, the file is still open.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Walker and his best-known song, see my article, "Taking Apart 'Tickle Cove Pond,'" in the forthcoming issue of the *Journal of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music*.

<sup>2</sup> H. Paul Mercer, *Newfoundland Songs and Ballads in Print, 1846 - 1974: A Title and First-Line Index*, Bibliographical and Special Series, no. 6 (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Folklore and Language Publications, 1979), p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Taft, *A Regional Discography of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1904 - 1972* (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Folklore and Language Archive, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> I have not broken this down into categories of performers – for example, Taft notes whether the performer is a local act or not.

<sup>5</sup> Elaine King, of Colinet, aged ten, singing and playing the accordion for Wilf Wareham, 25 September 1974 (MUNFLA 79-54, C3986A).

<sup>6</sup> I. Sheldon Posen who, with Michael Taft, was interviewing Emile Benoit at the time; MUNFLA C1429/73-45.

<sup>7</sup> The group consists of an unidentified woman and her friends at St. Brendan's Island, recorded 29 July or 4 August 1972 by Tina Broderick, MUNFLA C1329/72-238. The unidentified child (in Grade Six at the time, about eleven years old) was recorded by Jesse Fudge at Stephenville, 15 December 1969 (MUNFLA C753/70-37).

<sup>8</sup> The remaining field recordings are of John Crane of Pine's Cove, recorded by Melvin Firestone, MUNFLA C129/64-17; Stan Molloy, St Shott's, recorded by Herbert Halpert, MUNFLA C531/68-43; Brian Delahunty of Calvert ("sing[ing] from the book," probably the Doyle songbook), recorded by Marjorie Stoker, MUNFLA C372/67-24 [not C374 as in the STI]. John

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Crane, of Pine's Cove, sings a second song to that same tune later in the same session.

<sup>9</sup> George Casey, Neil V. Rosenberg and Wilfred W. Wareham, "Repertoire Categorization and Performer-Audience Relationships: Some Newfoundland Folksong Examples," *Ethnomusicology* 16 (1972), 397-403.

<sup>10</sup> On the spa at Logy Bay, see for instance Gavin Will's "Logy Bay - Middle Cove - Outer Cove," in J. R. Smallwood, *et al. Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, III (St. John's: NBP, 1991), pp. 361-362.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, my colleague Neil Rosenberg mentioned this to me in spring 2002 as being an interpretation he had heard. The McNulty Family's recording of the song is arranged to suggest this reading, too (Copley 9-289?, probably 1948).

<sup>12</sup> Mark Kelly, Mark Walker's grandson was born 1924 in Sweet Bay, BB, where his grandfather settled as a young married man. Interview with Mark Kelly, Gander, May 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Sliabh Notes, *Along Blackwater's Banks* (audio cd OSSCD130; Cork, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> On these two songs, see my columns in *The Downhomer*, August 1998 and August 2002.

<sup>15</sup> This phrase about Walker is taken from Patrick W. Browne, *Where the Fishers Go: The Story of Labrador* (New York: Cochrane 1909), p. 308.

<sup>16</sup> Self-correction ("Selbst-Bereichtigung") is Walter Anderson's term and I am using it in a less deterministic or superorganic way than he did. The general process of narrative change toward reanalysed meanings is best known from Axel Olrik's "Epic Laws of Folk Narrative" (in Alan Dundes' 1965 collection *The Study of Folklore* but originally published in German in 1909 as "Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung" in *Z. für Deutsches Alterum und Deutsches Literatur*). Olrik discusses this process mainly from the point of view of more free-form genres (tale in particular); more fixed-form genres, like song, are likewise but not equally susceptible to the process.

<sup>17</sup> On Devine, see my Preface to *Devine's Folk Lore of Newfoundland in Old Words, Phrases and Expressions, Their Origin and Meaning*, compiled by P.K. Devine and originally printed in 1937, but reprinted with the Preface (St. John's: MUN) in 1997. "Curst Confederation" is a term used in "The Antis of Plate Cove."

<sup>18</sup> Paul Mercer gives Murphy's dates as 1868-1931 in his MA thesis, "A Bio-Bibliography of Newfoundland Songs in Printed Sources" (MUN, 1978, p. 118). Mercer's source was Murphy's son, Michael P. Murphy, an author and amateur historian in his own right.

<sup>19</sup> This is parallel to that of some contemporary Irish popular poetry, of the nineteenth century, for example, Thomas Moore. The Gray reference is Michael Gray, "Grubbing a Moderate Jewel: In Search of the Blooming Bright Star of Belle Isle," *Canadian Folklore canadien* 8.1/2 (1986), 43-85.

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<sup>20</sup> Rosenberg's note to the song in Eric West *Catch Ahold This One...*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 56.

<sup>21</sup> Capt. Francis O'Neill. *The Dance Music of Ireland: 1001 Gems...*

<sup>22</sup> See for example William Kirwin, "The Influence of Ireland on the Printed Newfoundland Ballad," in Alison Feder and Bernice Shrank, eds., *Literature and Folk Culture: Ireland and Newfoundland* (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Folklore & Language, 1977), pp. 130-145.

<sup>23</sup> This date is an approximation based on the Copley label number: 9-259B. On the McNultys, see Pat Byrne, "Stage Irish in 'Britain's Oldest Colony': Introductory Remarks Toward an Analysis of the Influence of the McNulty Family on Newfoundland Music," *Canadian Folklore canadien* 13.1 (1991), 56-68. Byrne does not mention "The Star of Logy Bay." A copy of the recording is to be found in MUNFLA 80-193, F3523/C4891, recordings copied from the collection of Michael Cohen (Kolonel) by Neil Rosenberg.

<sup>24</sup> In 1940 Gerald S. Doyle published an unattributed tune. In 1934 Elisabeth Greenleaf published a tune she collected in 1929.

<sup>25</sup> Mrs. Bea Hickman, St. John's, pers. comm., 28 October 2002. Mrs. Hickman was born 1919 and married in 1940. At her wedding party she remembers the song being sung to the current tune. She herself started singing it around that time, imitating Biddy O'Toole's arch and nasal performance.

<sup>26</sup> Elisabeth Greenleaf, *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*, pp. 270-271. Information about May O'Dea comes from Fabian O'Dea, her son, pers. comm., 28 October 2002.

<sup>27</sup> From C to E# as transcribed by Greenleaf (*Ballads and Sea Songs*) and Eric West, *Catch Ahold This One...: Songs of Newfoundland & Labrador, Vol. 1*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (originally 1995?) (Ladle Cove: Vinland Music, 2002), pp. 46-47, 56.

<sup>28</sup> *Old-Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland* (St. John's: Doyle, 1940), p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Gerald Thomas on Frank Woods' telling of AT313 The Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight in "Early Life Crises and the Resolution of Conflict: Meaning in a Franco-Newfoundland Fairy Tale," *Newfoundland Studies* 13.2 (1997), 153-177.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, Morgiana P. Halley, "Marine Disasters in Newfoundland Folk Balladry, Including a Classificatory System for Sea Disaster Narrative," MA thesis, MUN, 1989.

<sup>31</sup> "The Bard of Prescott Street Meets Tin Pan Alley: The Vanity Press Sheet Music Publications of John Burke," *Newfoundland Studies* 6.1 (1990): 56-73.