

Shanty Boy and the Farmer

As recited by
Charles Mills
07-20-1941 Marion, WI

Verse 1.

As I walked out one evening just as the sun went down
I strolled along quite leisurely until I came to Trenton town.
It was there I heard two maids discoursing as I slowly passed them by
One said she loved a farmer's son, the other a shanty boy.

Verse 2.

The one that loved the farmer's son these words I heard her say,
The reason that she loved him was at home with her he'd stay.
He'd stay at home in the winter, to the woods he would not go
And when the spring it did set in, his land he'd plow and sow.

Verse 3.

"All for to plow and sow your lands," I heard the other say,
"If your crops would prove a failure, your debts you couldn't pay.
If your crops would prove a failure, the grain market being low,
Ofttimes the sheriff sells your grain to pay the debts you owe."

Verse 4.

"The paying of our little debts, I'm not in the least alarmed,
For what is the use of being in debt when your living on a good farm?
You raise your bread right on your land, don't work through storms of rain,
Your shanty boy works hard each day, his family to maintain."

Verse 5.

"I shall dearly love my shanty boy when he goes up at fall.
He's rugged, stout and healthy and fit to stand the squall.
With pleasure I'll receive him in the spring when he comes down
And his money, with me, he'll spend quite free, while your farmer's son has none."

Verse 6.

"Oh how you praise your shanty-boy who to the woods must go,
Your shanty boy is ordered out before daylight to work through every squall.
Whilst my farmer's son to stay at home and with me he will comply
And tell to me sweet tales of love as the stormy winds blow by."

Verse 7.

"I care not for the soft talk that the farmer's sons do say,
For most of them they are so green that the cows would eat for hay.
How quickly it is noticed whenever they come to town
The little boys all gather about saying, 'Mossy, are you down.'"

Verse 8.

“Now all you’ve said of your shanty boy, I hope you’ll pardon me
And from that ignorant farmer’s son I soon will be free.
And if ever I make another change to a shanty boy I’ll go,
I’ll leave the farmer broken-hearted, his land to plow and sow.

Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcription by Peters, p. 88.

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Charles Mills, age 80, Town of Marion, Wautoma County.

The performer knows many songs but unfortunately cannot carry a tune. The others have been taken on the typewriter (Bawdy).

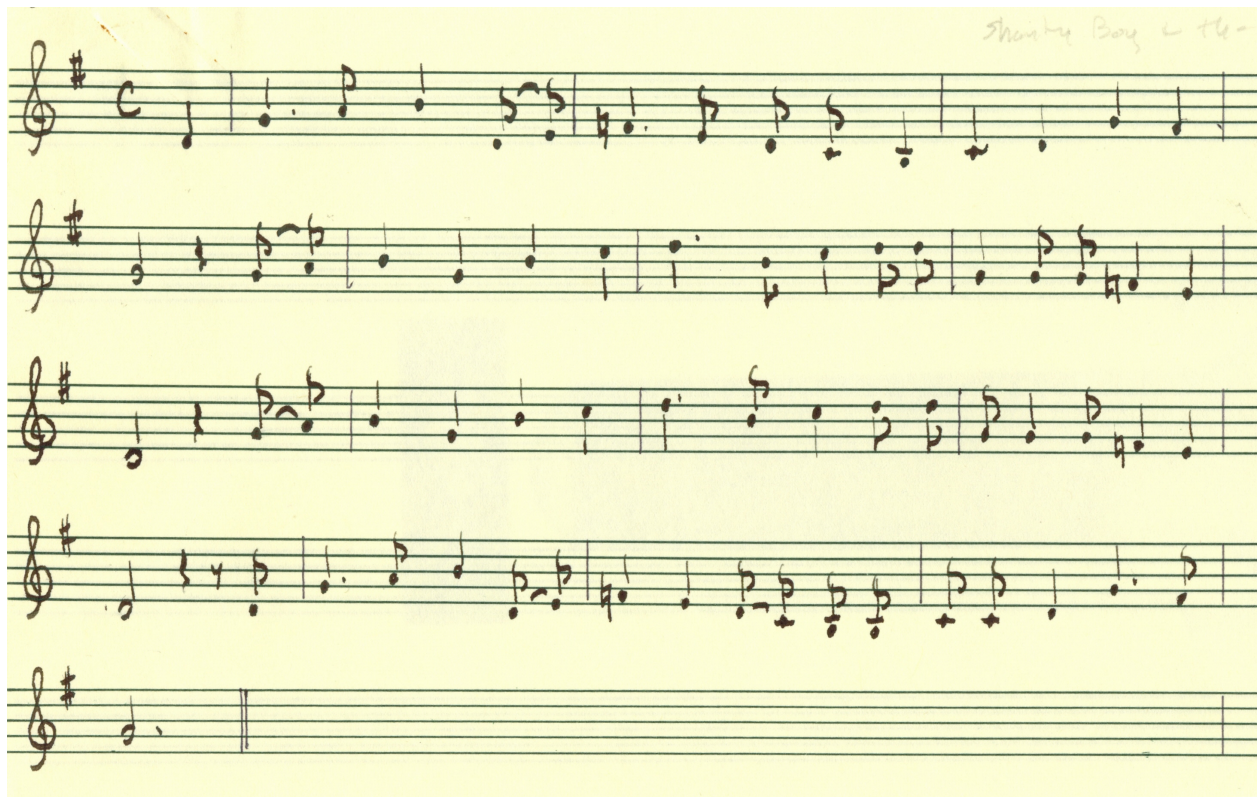
(Trenton Town) (The Mossback)

Recited by Charles Mills, age 80, Town of Marion, Waushara County, 1941.

Rivalry between the shanty boy and the farmer’s son ran high. The shanty boy often returned after the long winter in the woods, to find that he had lost his girl to the farmer boy who had stayed at home in comparative comfort.

Rickaby points out that this shanty ballad may have been patterned after an old English song, I Love my Sailor Boy, in which the merits of the sailor boy and the farmer are compared. In Rickaby’s manuscript there is a version with melody, collected in 1923 from Fred Bainter of Ladysmith who learned it from a Scotchman down at Kendall in 1890.

(To editor: Mr. Bainter is deceased. Since we collected no melody for this song, I would like to include the Bainter version from the Rickaby manuscript. Rickaby did not include this version in his published volume, Ballads of the Shanty-boy, Harvard Press. The original manuscripts are on file at Pomona College. The Photostat copies in Mills Memorial Library at Music Hall were given by Mrs. Lillian Rickaby Dykstra. I do not know who has the legal rights to the manuscript.) [see transcription below]



Editor's notes:

Flanders et al write that this song was probably originally from the West because the word "shanty" is more common to the West than the Northeast. It was first printed in *Scribner's Magazine* (June 1893), by Arthur Hill (Flanders et al 169).

Alternate titles: "The Shanty-Boy and the Farmer's Song," "The Farmer and the Shanty Boy," "Trenton Town," "The Mossback."

Sources:

Flanders, Helen Hartness, Elizabeth Flanders Ballard, George Brown, and Phillips Barry, collectors, transcribers, and editors. *The New Green Mountain Songster: Traditional Folk Songs of Vermont*. New Haven: Yale University Press; London: H. Milford: Oxford University Press, 1939. "The Farmer and the Shanty Boy"

Gardner, Emelyn Elizabeth, and Geraldine Jencks Chickering, collectors and editors. *Ballads and Songs of Southern Michigan*. Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1967. Reprinted from original, c1939. "The Mossback"

Peters, Harry B., ed. *Folk Songs out of Wisconsin: An Illustrated Compendium of Words and Music*. Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977.

Rickaby, Franz, collector and editor. *Ballads and Songs of the Shanty-boy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926. "The Shanty-Boy and the Farmer's son"

K.G.