

Dying Wisconsin Soldier

As sung by
Noble B. Brown
11-17-1946 Millsville, WI

The Dying Wisconsin Soldier

Oh, the sun was sink-ing in the west and fil-ter'd lin-g'ring rays Through the
branch-es of the for-est, where a dy-ing sol-dier lay. 'Neath the shade of a pal-met-to, in those
south-ern sul-try skies, Far from his own be-lov-ed home, they laid him down to die. Oh, his

The image shows a musical score for the song 'The Dying Wisconsin Soldier'. It consists of three staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff begins with the lyrics 'Oh, the sun was sink-ing in the west and fil-ter'd lin-g'ring rays Through the'. The second staff continues with 'branch-es of the for-est, where a dy-ing sol-dier lay. 'Neath the shade of a pal-met-to, in those'. The third staff concludes with 'south-ern sul-try skies, Far from his own be-lov-ed home, they laid him down to die. Oh, his'. The music ends with a double bar line.

Verse 1.

Oh, the sun was sinking in the west, and filtered ling'ring rays
Through the branches of the forest, where a dying soldier lay.
'Neath the shade of a palmetto, 'neath the southern sultry skies,
Far from his loved Wisconsin home, they laid him down to die.

Verse 2.

Oh, his comrades gathered around him, his comrades in the fight,
A tear rolled down each manly cheek as he bade them all good-night.
One loved-one and companion was kneeling at his side.
He sought to stop the life-blood's flow, but alas, in vain he tried.

Verse 3.

Oh, his heart was filled with anguish when he found it was in vain,
And down this loved companion's cheeks the tears, they fell like rain.
Then spoke the soldier bravely, "Harry, weep no more for me.
I'm crossing that dark river beyond where all are free.

Verse 4.

"Now comrades, gather 'round me and hear these words I say.
I am going to tell a story ere my spirits pass away.
'Way back in old Wisconsin, in that little Northern state,
There is one who for my coming with a saddened heart doth wait.

Verse 5.

“She’s a fair young girl, my sister, my blessing and my pride;
She has been my maid since child-hood; I have had no one beside.
Now comrades, I am dying; I ne’er shall see her more.
She will vainly wait my coming at the little cottage door.

Verse 6.

“When our country was in danger and called for volunteers,
She threw her arms about my neck, and bursting into tears,
Said, ‘Go, my dearest brother, drive the traitors from our shores.
Your sister needs your presence, but your country needs you more.’”

Verse 7.

“Now comrades, gather closer and hear my dying prayer:
Who will be to her a brother, shield her with a father’s care?”
Then spoke soldiers bravely, as one voice it seemed to fall,
“We will be to her a brother, protect her one and all.”

Verse 8.

Then one sweet smile of gladness o’er the soldier’s face then fled;
One quick convulsive shudder, and the soldier boy lay dead.
‘Neath the shade of a palmetto they laid him down to rest,
With his knapsack for his pillow, and a musket on his breast.

Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by Peters, p. 225, and HST.

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Version A sung by William J. Morgan, age 76, Berlin, 1946.

Version B sung by Noble B. Brown, age 61, Millsville, 1946

Both singers learned “The Dying Wisconsin Soldier” in central Wisconsin. Mr. Morgan said that he learned the song over fifty years ago from a nephew, Charlie Dibble, who was only a few years younger than Mr. Morgan. Mr. Brown, who was quite overcome emotionally as he finished singing the song, remarked, “That song is supposed to have been composed by a Wisconsin Civil War soldier. I learned it from my mother. She learned it from her father. He was a veteran of the Civil War and was in both Libby and Andersonville prisons.”

Although the melodies of the two singers differ, one melody was probably derived from the other or both were derived from some parent melody. In both melodies pathos and nostalgia are found in the downward melodic leap of a sixth followed by the upward leap of a fourth. These leaps, together with the outline of the major triad, lead me to surmise that whoever composed the melody had the sound of “Taps” ringing in his ears.

Except for a few variable lines, "The Dying Ranger," sung by the Texas cowboys, and "The Dying Wisconsin Soldier" are the same song. The ranger dies "Far away from his home in Texas." The sister is left alone "Way back in northwest Texas, that good old lone star state." In his lecture, "The Romance of the Cow Country," Dr. Edward Everett Dale referred to "The Dying Ranger." When I asked his opinion as to which version, the Texas or the Wisconsin, was the original, he commented that he did not know but thought that "some Wisconsin soldiers made up the song and the Texas boys learned it from them."

[Full quotation from Mr. Brown]: "I learned it from the lips of my own dear mother in childhood, at Neilsville, Clark County, Wis., in the 1890's. I believe she learned it from her father, who served in a company of Wisconsin infantry during the Civil War. He was wounded, taken prisoner, survived life in both Andersonville and Libby prisons."

Alternate titles/related songs: "The Dying Cowboy," "The Dying Soldier."

Sources:

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K.G.