

Story of Harry Bale

As sung by
Henry Humphrey
08-27-1940 Hancock, WI

The Story of Harry Bale

Come all kind friends and par-ents, my broth-ers, one and all. At -
ten-tion pay to what I say! T'will make your blood run cold. 'Twas
of the poor un - for-tun-ate boy who's known both far and near. His
par-ents reared him ten-der-ly, not ma - ny miles from here.

Verse 1.

Come all kind friends and parents,
My brothers, one and all.
Attention, pay, to what I say!
T' will make your blood run cold.
'Twas of the poor unfortunate boy
Who's known both far and near.
His parents reared him tenderly,
Not many miles from here.

Verse 2.

In the county of Arcrago,
In the township of Lake Peer,
There stands a little shingle mill,
It was run about one year.
'Twas there this horrible deed was done,
Caused many to weep and wail.
'Twas there this young man lost his life,
His name was Harry Bale.

Verse 3.

His occupation seemed to be
A head sawyer in the mill.
He followed it successfully
Two years, two months, until
The time had come for him to go,
And leave a world of care.
We know not when our doom may come,
All our bad deeds to share.

Verse 4.

On the twenty-second of April,
In the year of Seventy-Nine,
He went to the mill as usual;
No harm did he design.
In lowering of the pig-bar
Which set the carriage in gear,
He got throwed out upon the saw,
And wounded him severe.

Verse 5.

It cut him thru' the shoulder blade,
And half-way down the back.
He was then throwed out upon the floor
With the carriage as it came back.
He started for the shanty,
His strength was failing fast;
He says, "Oh, boys, I'm wounded,
And I fear it is my last."

Verse 7.

No father did young Harry have
To weep beside his bed,
No kind and loving mother,
To soothe his aching head.
He lingered all a day and night,
Until death relieved his pain.
Hushed is his voice forever more;
He never will speak again.

Verse 6.

His brother being sent for,
Likewise his sister too,
A doctor came and dressed the wound,
But, alas, it was too true.
'Twas all in vain, there is no hopes,
He soon must pass away.

Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by Peters, p. 222, and HST.

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Sung by Henry Humphries [sic], age 75, Hancock, 1940.

Beck gives the circumstances of the composition of the Story of Harry Bale. In April, 1879, a nineteen year old sawyer named Harry Bahel (Bail, Bale) was killed, as described in the song. The shingle mill was in Arcadia township, Lapeer County, Michigan.

Editor's notes:

Gardner and Chickering claim that "most of the men who ever worked in lumber camps or mills in Michigan know of this accident and song even if they cannot sing it" (Gardner and Chickering 278). Their informant, Mr. John B. Redhead, claimed he "was working for a Mr. Newton in another mill, about three miles away" when the tragedy occurred. They describe Redhead's account:

Harry Bail was injured about ten o'clock in the morning and died about three in the afternoon of the same day. His account of the accident tallies very nearly with other details of the Michigan texts. Mr. Redhead said there were three Bail brothers, Charles, Martin, and Harry, who were all very intelligent and witty, and the song was written by Charles, who was "an extreme wit and was always the life of a party" (Gardner and Chickering 278).

Alternate titles/Related Songs: “Harry Bale,” “Harry Bail,” “Harry Dale.”

Sources:

Gardner, Emelyn Elizabeth, and Geraldine Jencks Chickering, collectors and editors. *Ballads and Songs of Southern Michigan*. Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1967. Reprinted from original, c 1939.

“Harry Dale.” From the Digital Tradition Mirror. <<http://sniff.numachi.com/~rickheit/dtrad/pages/tiHAR YBALE.html>> [accessed 06/02/05] text only. Citation: From *Ballads and Songs*, Belden; Collected from Pauline Pfeiffer.

Lomax, John A., collector. *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*. 1916. New edition with additions. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1922.

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.

K.G.