

Jam on Gerry's Rock

(The Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection does not include a transcription of Dan Grant's version of this song.)

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions of Emery De Noyer's version of this song by Peters, p. 92, and HST

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

This well-known lumberjack song has been collected in the timber states from Maine to Oregon. It is difficult to designate the place of the origin of the song by place names, as the singer is very likely to change such names to suit himself. Perhaps, since Michigan lumberjacks knew a "Gerry's Rock" on the Muskegon River and since many versions speak of the "maid from Saginaw town," Michigan may lay the best claim to the origin of the song.

The name of the hero, young Monroe, does not change in the versions, and Clara seems to be the favorite name of the girl in the story. Rickaby collected this song in Wisconsin in 1923 at Gordon from G. M. Hankins, and at Eau Claire from C. D. Donaldson and from Miss Glennie Todd, who sang from a book of manuscript made about 1890.

Version A

Sung by Emery De Noyer, age 63, Rhinelander, 1941.

As a boy Mr. de Noyer learned The Jam on Gerry's Rock from hearing the older lumberjacks sing it. For most of his life, Mr. de Noyer, who suffered the loss of his sight and an arm in an accident, went from camp to camp in northern Wisconsin, especially on Sundays, to sing for the entertainment of the lumberjacks. As they listened, some one of the lumberjacks would pass around a cap for a collection for the singer.

Version B sung by Dan Grant, age c. 74, Bryant, 1940.

Mr. Grant said, "This disaster occurred in Michigan and is remembered by most of the older lumberjacks in Wisconsin."

Version C sung by Bert Taplin, age 84, Wautoma, 1941.

Incomplete version. Bert probably suffers from stage fright, besides it has been many years (30) since he has sung these songs. Lumberjack since age of 14 – 50+. Began as "swamper" ended as foreman.

Version D sung by Adolph Williams, age 61, Hayward, 1946.

Editor's notes:

This song was found in Scotland in the early 1900s, but probably came from the western United States (Flanders et al 45). The text was first published in *Maine Sportsman*, January 1904; the tune with variations was first published by Rickaby (Flanders et al 45). Other authors disagree with Stratman-Thomas on the Michigan origins of this song. Linscott's informant "has never questioned its Maine parentage. He says that Gerry's Rocks (Gerrish) are up above The Forks,

Maine, and that the tragedy is marked on a rock and tree on the Kennebec River” (Linscott 217). Gardner and Chickering agree: “According to Eckstorm and Smyth, pp. 176-198, this ballad originated in Maine and was founded on fact. Gerry’s Rock was on the West Branch of the Penobscot River” (Gardner and Chickering 270). Linscott claims that “Saginaw” might be “Saguenay,” “a famous river and location of an Indian settlement” (Linscott 217).

Alternate titles/related songs: “Gerry’s Rocks,” “Geary’s Rock,” “The Foreman Monroe.”

Sources:

Doerflinger, William Main, collector. *Shantymen and Shantyboys: Songs of the Sailor and Lumberman*. New York: Macmillan, 1951. Two versions – one has similar tune, the other similar words

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. different tune

Fowke, Edith *Lumbering Songs from the Northern Woods*. Transcriptions by Norman Cazden. Published for the American Folklore Society. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970.

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.

Linscott, Eloise Hubbard, collector and editor. *Folk Songs of Old New England*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1939.

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. “Gerry’s Rocks,” “Geary’s Rock” or “The Foreman Monroe”

Sandburg, Carl. *American Songbag*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927. very similar, words and tune. Sandburg’s is in 6/8, HST in 4/4.

K.G.