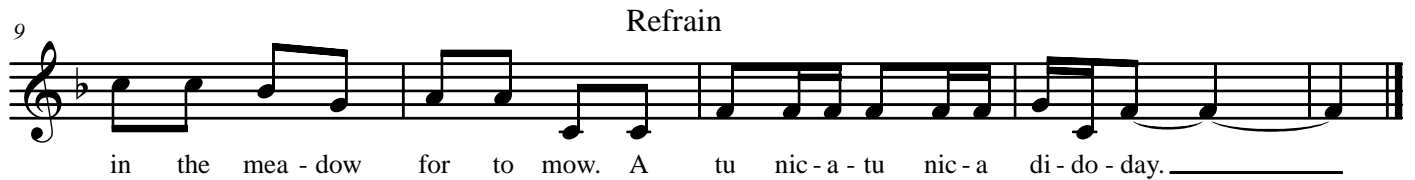


Young Johnny

As sung by
Winifred Bundy

Originally in Db
04-29-1941 Madison, WI



Verse 1.

One day young Johnny, he did go
Down in the meadow for to mow.

Refrain

Atu nicatu nicadidoday

Verse 2.

He scarce had mowed twice round the field
Before a serpent hit his heel.
(refrain)

Verse 3.

He threw his scythe upon the ground,
And shut his eyes and looked around.
(refrain)

Verse 4.

He took that serpent in his hand,
And went back home to Sally Plan.
(refrain)

Verse 5.

"Oh Sally dear and do you see,
This pesky serpent has bitten me."
(refrain)

Verse 6.

"Oh Johnny dear, why did you go
Down in that meadow for to mow?"
(refrain)

Verse 7.

"Oh Sally dear, you know, you know;
'Twas father's hay I had to mow."
(refrain)

Verse 8.

Now all young men a warning tale;
And don't get bit by rattle snake.
(refrain)

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by MB, Peters, p. 207.

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

(Springfield Mountain)

Sung by Winifred Bundy, age ____, Madison, 1941.

Miss Bundy learned "Young Johnny" when she was a small girl from a neighbor woman, Harriet Hunt Winslow. Had Mrs. Winslow been living in 1941, she would have been well over a hundred years old, and, as Miss Bundy said, "That dates the song somewhat!" Miss Bundy was not aware that she was singing a version of the famous American ballad, "Springfield Mountain."

The tragedy which occasioned composing of the song occurred in 1761 at Wilbraham, Massachusetts. The exact form of the record is given by Chauncey E. Peck, "The History of Wilbraham," page 79: "Timothy Mirrick, the son of LT. Thomas and Mary Mirrick, was bit by a ratel snake on August the 7, 1761, and died within about two or three ours, he being 22 years two months and three days old and vary near the point of marridg." [all spelling sic]

The tragicomic character of Miss Bundy's version is far removed from the seriousness of the original song. This change in character is indicative of the transformation through which a folk song may pass as it is handed down by oral traditions.

In 1840 the song appeared in print as "The Pesky Sarpent: A Pathetic Ballad."

Editor's notes:

Linscott states: "This is the first known native American ballad. It is founded on fact, and the date of the event was 1761. ... The grave of Tommy Blake, victim of the 'pesky sarpent' may be seen today in Vermont" (Linscott 285). Gardner and Chickering write that Cox claims, in contrast, this story comes from a tragedy in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, in 1761 (Gardner and Chickering 120). Flanders notes "enormous popularity, both as a stage song and as a folk song" (Flanders et al 161). The versions of this song are very different from one another: some tell the story quite solemnly, while versions such as Bundy's include nonsense syllables and a cheery tune.

Alternate titles/related songs: "Springfield Mountain," "Springfield," "The Pesky Sarpent," "The Pesky Sarpent," "The Black Sarpent," "Oh Johnnie Dear."

Sources:

- Cox, John Harrington. *Folk-songs of the South*, collected under the auspices of the West Virginia Folk-lore Society. New York: Dover Publications, 1967.
- Flanders, Helen Hartness, Elizabeth Flanders Ballard, George Brown, and Phillips Barry, colls., trans., and eds. *The New Green Mountain Songster: Traditional Folk Songs of Vermont*. New Haven: Yale University Press; London: H. Milford: Oxford University Press, 1939. "Springfield mountain" is a different tune.
- The Folksong Fake Book: A Collection of over 1000 Folksongs from around the World*. Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2000. "Springfield mountain," not very similar.
- Gardner, Emelyn Elizabeth, and Geraldine Jencks Chickering, colls. and eds. *Ballads and Songs of Southern Michigan*. Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1967. Reprinted from original, c1939. "Springfield mountain."
- Laws, George Malcolm. *Native American Balladry; A Descriptive Study and a Bibliographical Syllabus*. Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1950.
- Linscott, Eloise Hubbard, coll. and ed. *Folk Songs of Old New England*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1939. "Springfield Mountain or The Black Serpent." This tune is more similar than most of the other versions, but not as similar as Gardner and Chickering's.
- Lomax, John A. and Alan Lomax, colls. and comps. *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. New York: Macmillan, 1934. "Springfield."
- Pound, Louise. *American ballads and songs*. C. Scribner's sons, c1922. "Springfield."
- Tillett, Beverly, ed. *Jerry Silverman's Folk song Encyclopedia*. Vol. II. New York: Chappell Music Company, 1975. "Springfield mountain" text has some similarities, tune different.

K.G.