

(I've Been Spending Six Long Months in) Fond du Lac Jail

As sung by
Charles Robinson

07-20-1941 Marion, WI

Verse

In the morn-ing you re - cieve a dry loaf of bread, as
3
hard as a stone and as hea - vy as lead. It's thrown from the cei - ling down
6
in - to your cell, like com - ing from hea - ven popped down in - to hell. There's

Refrain

9
hard times in Fond du Lac Jail, there's hard times I say. _____

Verse 1.

In the morning you recieve a dry loaf of bread,
As hard as a stone and as heavy as lead.
It's thrown from the ceilingdown into your cell,
Like coming from heaven popped down into hell.

Refrain

There's hard times in Fond du Lac Jail,
There's hard times I say.

Verse 2.

Your bed it is made of old rotten rugs
Get up in the morning all covered with bugs;
And the bugs will swear that unless you can bathe
Your bound to go lousy in Fond du Lac Jail.
(refrain)

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by MB, Peters, p. 184.

HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

Sung by Charles Robinson, age 76, Marion Township, Wautoma, 1941.

The Jail Song has been collected across the United States from New Jersey to Texas. The names of the jails, the lines and the melody vary. However, there is a uniform sentiment expressed "It's hard times in (Mount Holly - Lancaster [N.H.] - Cryderville - Waco - Dallas - New Orleans - Fond Du Lac etc.) jail."

Mr. Robinson said there should be about seven verses to this song. The two verses he sang are a portion of "The Cryderville Jail" collected by Lomax.

Editor's notes:

Lomax quotes Dr. S. Newton Gaines, "now a professor of physics in Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, in a letter dated 1911: "The song was composed by Sam Houston, a white desperado and horse stealer, while he was in jail in Austin, Texas, in 1880. He was sentenced to twenty-five years in Huntsville. George Winn, then a colored boy of fourteen, heard him, and the song made a deep impression. George said, when he gave the song to me, that he had not thought of it in fifteen years" (Lomax 140).

Alternate titles/related songs: "I've been spending six long months in Fond du Lac Jail," "Cryderville Jail," "Waco Jail," "Dallas Jail," "New Orleans Jail."

Sources:

The Folksong Fake Book: A Collection of over 1000 Folksongs from around the World. Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corp., 2000. "Cryderville jail."

Lomax, John A. and Alan Lomax, colls. and comps. *American Ballads and Folk Songs.* New York: Macmillan, 1934. "The Cryderville Jail."

Tillett, Beverly, ed. *Jerry Silverman's Folk song Encyclopedia.* Vol. II. New York: Chappell Music Co., 1975. "Cryderville jail."

K.G.