

3-10-1962

Canaday-I-O

Robert French

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Song: "Canaday-I-O"
Singer: Robert French
Town: Franklin, ME
NA 331 CD 5 Track 11
Collector: Sister Poulin
Date: March 10, 1962
Roud: 640
Laws: C17

The major recurring theme in these folksongs from Maine and Maritime Canada is the flow of cultural products and people within the area of New Hampshire, Maine, and eastern Canada. But while this cultural and demographic exchange helped define the region, it did not mean there was no rivalry or animosity between states, provinces, or nations. Within the woods song-making tradition was a subset of satirical songs that ranged from poking fun at individuals and places to utterly scandalizing them, and this was very much alive in the northeastern United States and eastern Canada. In some labor traditions, this type of song served as a form of protest, but among lumbermen this was not usually the case. What purpose did they serve? Some scholars suggest they served as a means of control over bosses, preventing them from being hard-driving skinflints. The argument suggests that as a boss, if someone "songed" you, then other men would know not to go to work for you and business would collapse. Yet, so many satirical songs were written that if this were the case, then no one would have been able to find men willing to work in the woods. It was more likely that this was primarily a way of blowing off steam after a hard day, week, or winter in the woods.

"**Canaday-I-O**" is thus an interesting case in point, as it takes this latter point to its extreme. The song did not merely mock an individual or a single lumber outfit; rather, it attacked the entire Canadian lumbering industry. Scholars generally attribute the song to Ephraim Braley, a Maine woodsman, and point to 1854 as its probable date of origin. Of course, Canada was not yet an independent nation, and the song cites "Three Rivers" (or, Trois-Rivieres, Quebec) as the launching point for the woods crew, thus the song may be more specifically criticizing Quebec alone and not all of Canada. "Canaday-I-O" was based on an English sea song called "Canada-I-O," and ultimately an even older love song called "Caledonia." From Maine, the song carried westward, morphing into complaints about woods work in Pennsylvania and Michigan, and eventually a gripe song about skinning buffalo called "The Buffalo Skinners," which was found in Texas. In this song, a "preacher of the gospel" convinces some Mainers to travel to Quebec for a winter. This was not, however, a man of the cloth recruiting lumbermen. According to Fannie Hardy Eckstorm, this was a slang term for an agent who hired men to work in the woods. The version of the song heard here is slightly shorter than versions collected elsewhere, such as the one printed in Eckstorm and Smyth's *Minstrelsy of Maine*. These forgotten verses do not change the story; they just make the winter in Canada seem slightly less disastrous.

1.

Come all ye jolly lumbermen, and listen to my song,
But do not get discouraged, the length it is not long,
Concerning of some lumbermen, who did agree to go
And spend one pleasant winter up in Canaday-I-O.

2.

It happened late one season in the fall of fifty-three,
That a preacher of the gospel one morning came to me;
Says he: "My jolly fellow, how would you like to go
And spend one pleasant winter up in Canaday-I-O?"

3.

To him I quickly made reply, and unto him did say:
"In going out to Canaday depends upon the pay.
If you will pay good wages, my passage to and fro,
Then I think I'll go along with you to Canaday-I-O."

4.

"Yes, we will pay good wages, and will pay your passage out,
Provided you sign papers that you will stay the route;
But if you do get homesick, and swear that home you'll go,
We never can your passage pay from Canaday-I-O."

5.

It was by his gift of flattery he enlisted quite a train,
Some twenty-five or thirty, both well and able men;
We had a pleasant journey o'er the road we had to go
'Til we landed at Three Rivers, up in Canaday-I-O.

6.

But there our joys were ended, and our sorrows did begin;
Fields, Phillips, and Norcross they then came marching in;
They scattered us all directions, some where I do not know,
Among those jabbering Frenchmen up in Canaday-I-O.

7.

After we had suffered there some eight or ten long weeks
We arrived at headquarters, up among the lakes;
We thought we'd find a paradise, at least they told us so,
God grant there may be no worse a hell than Canaday-I-O!

8.

To describe what we have suffered here is beyond the art of man,
But to give a fair description I will do the best I can;
Our food the dogs would snarl at, our beds were on the snow,
We suffered worse than murderers up in Canaday-I-O.

9.

But now our lumbering is over and we are returning home,
To greet our wives and sweethearts and never more to roam,
To greet our friends and neighbors; we tell them not to go
To that gosh darn forsaken place called Canaday-I-O.

Sources: For "Canaday-I-O" see Eckstorm, Fannie Hardy and Mary Winslow Smyth. *Minstrelsy of Maine: Folk-Songs and Ballads of the Woods and the Coast*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927, 21-25; Gray, Ronald Palmer. *Songs and Ballads of the Maine Lumberjacks with Other Songs from Maine*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924, 37-40; Linscott, Eloise Hubbard. *Folk Songs of Old New England*. New York: MacMillan Co., 1939, 181-83; Fowke, Edith. *Lumbering Songs from the Northern Woods*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970, 28-29; & Fowke, Edith Fulton and Richard Johnston. *Folk Songs of Canada*. Waterloo, Ontario: Waterloo Music Company, 1954, 68-69. For "Canada-I-O" see Leach, MacEdward. *Folk Ballads and Songs of the Lower Labrador Coast*. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1965, 230-31; Huntington, E. G. *Sam Henry's Songs of the People*. Revised, with additions and indexes by Lani Herrmann. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990, 333-34. Also see Laws, G. Malcolm. *Native American Balladry*. Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, 1964, 155 (C17); & discussion in Ives, Edward D. *Larry Gorman: The Man Who Made the Songs*. Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane Editions, 1993, 170, 181.

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