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The Blackwater Side

Bill Cramp

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Song: "The Blackwater Side"

Singer: Bill Cramp

Town: Oakland, ME

NA 66.3 CD 104 Track 8

Collected By: Sandy Ives

Date: March 22, 1966

Roud: 312

Laws: O1

"The Blackwater Side" is one of many songs that came to Maine from the British Tradition. It is, as Bill Cramp called it, a "long love song." This ballad is one in a series of songs that consist of "true lovers' discussions," but none are any more good humored than "The Blackwater Side." The basic plot is the recounting of an overheard conversation in which a young man pleads with a girl to marry him only to be turned down because the girl thinks she is too poor to be his bride. He insists repeatedly that he loves her, but warns her that he will not propose again and in fact has another woman who wants to marry him. The girl asks for her mother's permission and the two are eventually married. There are other songs with this same name, but they are easily distinguished by a sinister plot twist in which the young man sleeps with the girl then says he cannot marry her because she was so easily seduced. The recorded version is sung slightly different than the written lyrics because Bill Cramp sang this song for Sandy Ives over a year after the version that was transcribed for "Folksongs from Maine." The changes are minor, only consisting of a word here and there, but they do help demonstrate how a song can change over time, even as sung by one person.

1.

You lovers of this nation of high and low station,
I pray give attention and listen to me;
It's of a couple I overheard talking,
As I went a walking some friends for to see.
It happened to be on a clear summer's morning
As I was roving the fields so wide,
By the rays of bright Venus the hilltops were dawning,
Surrounding the banks of the Blackwater Side.

2.

He said, "Ay fair maid, we have long enough tarried,
We're both fit for wedlock 'tis plainly you see,
So if you're inclined in wedlock to join,
Come say yea or nay, you must answer me now.
No hesitating, but come without waiting,
In band of wedlock we soon will be tied;
I'll support you through life as my dear loving wife,
You're the lonely sweet maid of the Blackwater Side."

3.

"Young man," she did say, "the truth I've discovered,

I mean to live single a while longer yet;
My clothing is bare and I've nothing to spare,
And to be your bride, I am sure I'm not fit.
My father's in Inder, he's gone there for riches,
And with my old other I mean to reside;
I'll here take my lot in this lone little cot
On the lonely sweet banks of the Blackwater Side."

4.

He says, "If you do, you might happen to rue,
There's another in view that won't me deny,
But if labor's in vain I'll not ask you again,
I'm not soft for coaxing as you will rely.
But I give you the proper accept of my offer,
In the band of wedlock we soon shall be tied,
I'll support you through life as my dear loving wife,
You're the lonely sweet maid of the Blackwater Side."

5.

"Fair maid," he did say, "I don't mean to delay,
I'll marry you straightaway with the blooming and fair;
At the age of sixteen and she's handsome and clean,
And as for her fortune I'm sure I don't care.
And as for her clothing, that never will grieve me,
With her I will roam the fields so wide;
But it's you I admire, so grant my desire,
'Tis you I require from the Blackwater Side."

6.

This maid she arose, to her mother she goes,
A-tellin' her mother the story, you see,
She gave her consent, and away those two went,
And went an got joined in wedlock and sweet unity,
May their fortune increase, may their troubles grow less,
And in all sorts of pleasure may they always reside,
The truth I am telling and you'll find their dwelling,
On the lovely sweet banks of the Blackwater Side.

Source: Ives, Edward D., ed. "Folksongs from Maine," *Northeast Folklore*, VII (1965), 78-80.