

FRANK WARNER

FOR ALL THE GOOD PEOPLE

When Frank Warner picks up his homemade banjo and throws back his head and lets go, you hear people of the frontier singing. These oldtimers who were busy letting daylight into the swamplands of America didn't sing with sweet refinement or grace; they sang out of their hearts and lives. That's the way Frank sings.

-- Alan Lomax

I consider Frank Warner perhaps the best singer of folk songs in America.

-- Carl Sandburg

From Boone we took the road past Vilas and Valle Crucis and wound up and up. The road from there was just two ruts with boulders and deep holes... it took forty-five minutes, in low gear, to go five miles. But it was a glorious day and the mountains were breathtakingly beautiful...At last we could see the Hicks' house down in a little cove ... and then Nathan coming to meet us ... and we went down into the house, where Mrs. Hicks said "I couldn't hardly think you'd really come. "...

...from A. W. 's 1938 notebook

Frank Warner

Born and raised in the South, in the natural habitat of spirituals, ballads, and work songs, Frank Warner learned songs almost by osmosis. He began his conscious interest in traditional music when he was a student at Duke University under Dr. Frank C. Brown, the noted North Carolina collector. After we were married in New York we began collecting songs, during our vacations, in out-of-the-way places along the Eastern Seaboard, North and South. We collected friends, too, who have been a part of our lives these many years. Some of them are to be seen here, along with the cover picture of the wooden banjo made by Nathan Hicks of Beech Mountain, N.C. Since Nathan made the banjo in 1939, it has collected more 250 signatures of people well known and not so well known in the fields of folklore and American history. Many of the people who shared their songs had close links to America's frontier days. You could hear it in the way they sang. Frank's singing reflects their different styles, accents, and traditions.

Frank Warner was past president of the New York Folklore Society, a member of the board of the Newport Folk Foundation, and vice president of the Country Dance and Song Society of America..He sang and lectured for hundreds of audiences in the United States and in England. . He once had a featured part in a Hollywood movie, *Run of the Arrow*. He's the author of *Folk Songs of the Eastern Seaboard, from a Collector's Notebook*, published by Southern Press, Mason, Georgia, and *Traditional American Folk Songs*, published by the Syracuse University Press.

Jeff and Gerret Warner

From an early age Jeff and Gerret accompanied us on song-collecting trips. Though their part in this recording is in singing choruses and in instrumental accompaniments, they both are deeply involved in folk music on their own, and have recorded on their own.

BUFFALO GALS

In the heyday of America's Minstrel Shows -- Honey Boy Evans, Dan Emmet, E. P. Christy, Al G. Fields, and the like -- this rollicking song was a frequent opener, setting the mood and encouraging the audience to sing along. The name of the town would be changed to fit each locality as the group crossed the country -- *Cooperstown Gals*, *Charleston Gals*, *New Orleans Gals*. Minstrel shows were first at their height in the 1840's, but they were popular and important for many years thereafter, even beyond the first quarter of the present century.

Professional minstrel shows are said to have started in Buffalo, New York. Perhaps that is why the song usually is known by that name.

THE CUMBERLAND AND THE MERRIMAC

On March 8, 1862, in Hampton Roads (Chesapeake Bay) the Confederate warship *Merrimac* (a northern ship captured, rebuilt as an ironclad, and renamed the *Virginia*) arrived off Newport News to meet a Federal squadron consisting of the *Cumberland*, the *Congress*, and the *St. Lawrence* (sailing ships), and the steam frigates *Minnesota* and *Roanoke*. The Union ships carried some 200 guns and more than 2200 men. Forty minutes after the *Merrimac* began her attack, the *Cumberland* sank. There were sixty casualties on the Southern side, and four hundred on the Union side.

It was a crushing defeat for the Union. But the very next day, March 9, the *Monitor* -- the Union ironclad sometimes called "a cheesebox on a raft" arrived from New York and fought the *Merrimac* to a draw. Confederate ironclads were never again a threat to the Union blockade.

We learned this song from John (Yankee John) Galusha of Minerva, New York. He was born in 1859 and had two older brothers who served in the Union army. One brother was severely wounded at the battle of Cold Harbor. Their father went to Washington and brought the young soldier home "on the cars" (the railroad train), carrying him in his arms when changing trains, and taking him in a wagon from North Creek to Thurman, where they lived. The brother died four months later. The Civil War was very real to Yankee John. We think this is an important and moving song of that war. Yankee John sang another song about this same battle, *The Cumberland's Crew*, which is more widely known. This song has been found on broadsides but so far as we know only two other times in oral tradition -- once by Helen Creighton in Nova Scotia (known there as Maggie Mac) and once by Frank C. Brown at Nag's Head, N.C. Neither of these versions is clear or complete. Yankee John sang this with great depth of feeling.

SWEET BETSY FROM PIKE

In 1849 John A. Stone set out from Pike County, Missouri, for California to look for gold-- along with thousands of other forty-niners. He didn't find it in the ground, but he found another way to wealth and fame. Calling himself "Old Put," he assembled a quartet, named them *The Sierra Nevada Rangers*, and went with them to gold camp after gold camp supplying entertainment the miners craved.

In 1858, in San Francisco, he published *Put's Golden Songster*, naming himself as the author of its contents, though he no doubt acquired some of the songs from other sources during his travels. Sweet Betsy is one of the songs in the book. It has spread across the country, picking up and losing verses here and there. Frank sings here a version we have put together our favorite verses in a style reminiscent of a Texan he heard sing it years ago.

This is the classic saga about the hardships of the westward trek, told with the wry humor of these hardbitten pioneers. This is one of the many uses made of the British tune "Villikens and His Dinah."

SPRINGFIELD MOUNTAIN

Malcolm Laws, in *his Native American Balladry*, says that *Springfield Mountain* "may be the oldest of native ballads now current to have originated with the folk." He says also that it is one of the two colonial ballads (the other is *Brave Wolfe*) to have survived in oral tradition.

The song tells the story of a farmer's son who was bitten by a rattlesnake while mowing his father's field and died as a result. It happened in Wilbraham, Mass., formerly known as Springfield Mountain, in the year 1761. The name Myrick appears in many versions, and Phillips Barry, who made a thorough study of the ballad, states (in Bulletin 12 of the Folk Song Society of the Northeast) that there is documentation of the death of one Timothy Myrick of Wilbraham, formerly Springfield Mountain, in 1761. However, the name Curtis is used in other versions, and the name Merrill is used in a version collected in Vermont by Helen Hartness Flanders. Yankee John Galusha who gave us this song (along with three others on this album) sang "Lieutenant Cushman." Interestingly, we once met a native of Wilbraham who told us that Cushman was one of the oldest family names in the region.

The ballad has spread across the entire country, but is found usually in the comic form it acquired -- after rattlesnakes became less of a problem. Yankee John sang this version to us with dignity and feeling and a sense of tragedy. We feel it must have been close to the way it was originally sung.

DOODLE DANDY

This all-too-short marching song with its distinctive American flavor belongs at the close of the Revolution -- 1783.

Roy Walworth, an official of the New York Central Railroad, gave this song to Frank as they were having lunch one day in the Commodore Hotel. He said that the songs he had heard Frank sing reminded him of his boyhood in upstate New York near Watertown ... that his father sang songs like that on cold winter mornings while building a fire in the stove. His father's name was Fayette Walworth, and this is one of his songs. He told Roy that it was sung by the American troops as they marched down the Hudson from Washington's headquarters in Newburgh to take over New York City as the British left and set sail for England. (An amusing anecdote has come down from that period. Some say that the British, as they left, ran the Union Jack to the top of the flagpole -- and then greased the pole.)

We haven't found the song anywhere else, though we once met someone in upstate New York who said she remembered her great uncle -- named Clopsodde -- had sung it.

THE DYING BRITISH SERGEANT

Yankee John Galusha, when he sang us this song on our first visit to him in Minerva, N.Y., in the Adirondacks in 1939, said "The first time I ever heard that, Will Munn sang it on the bank of Newcomb Lake fifty years ago." Yankee John's grandfather fought the British in the War of 1812. To him, American history was a personal thing.

This British sergeant who received his "deathly wound" was one of those brave Englishmen, perhaps, who sympathized with the American fight for freedom in spite of his own loyalty to the Crown. In listening to Yankee John we felt the tingle up the spine that comes with remembered emotion that rings true.

So far as we know, this is the only complete version of this song found in oral tradition. Helen Hartness Flanders, in *The New Green Mountain Songster*, prints four lines of the song, with a different tune, collected from a Mrs. Lawrence in Montpelier, Vermont. She adds a full text of the words from "a Vermont journal as taken from 'an old manuscript.'" The other known versions are on old broadsides or ballad prints.

PAUL JONES

On the Outer Banks of North Carolina, a little south of Kitty Hawk and not far north of Cape Hatteras, we learned this song from Mr. C.K. Tillett in the town of Wanchese on Roanoke Island. On that part of the coast live a group of people known as bankers, because they live on the sand banks. A couple of generations ago, they were completely isolated from the world by the Albemarle, Currituck, and Pamlico Sounds which separate their strip of land from the mainland. Tink Tillett knew fishing (it was his trade) and the sea and its ways. He also knew many a fine song which he had learned as a young man from people whose memories stretched back to the 1840's, so he sang his songs with the pioneer flavor which is so interesting and, now, so rare.

This ballad about John Paul Jones, our most renowned naval hero, was widely sung in Revolutionary days and later, as our young country was learning to be proud. It was printed on broadsides and in songsters during the first half of the 19th century. The battle commemorated by the song took place on September 23, 1779, off Flamborough Head, Yorkshire. Commodore Jones, on the *Bon Homme Richard*, with a small squadron of ships, was cruising around the British Isles when he sighted a convoy of merchant ships under the protection of the 44-gun ship *HMS Serapis*, Captain Richard Pearson, and *The Countess of Scarborough*, 20 guns. *The Bon Homme Richard* attacked the *Serapis* single handed and won the battle by grappling and boarding her, even though the *Richard* sank.

Samuel Eliot Morison, in his *John Paul Jones-- A Sailor's Biography* (Little Brown & Co., Boston, 1959), says:

Ballads of which Paul Jones is the hero were composed and printed in England. The first that can be dated is a broadsheet printed at Pockington, Yorkshire, not far from the scene of the battle, before the end of 1779. The ballad must have been composed by an American sympathizer, and it bears marks of the author's having talked with...the men who got away in a boat immediately after the battle. The first edition (is) in the Firth Collection at the Bodleian Library.

Capt. Pearson was knighted for his part in this battle which the British lost--probably because the convoy was saved. There is a plaque honoring him in Westminster Abby.

There are a few interesting evidences of the folk process in this version. Pearson, the British captain, has become "Pierce", and the vessels "laid in the store" were, of course, laden with store.

BLACK-EYED SUSIE

This is a favorite tune among banjo pickers and fiddlers -- North and South, black and white -- and it is great for dancing.

This is one of the one hundred and nineteen songs we collected from Frank Proffitt of Watauga County, North Carolina, between 1938 when we made our first trip to the Carolina mountains and 1965 when Frank died. It was Frank Proffitt, on that first trip, who sang us *Hang Down Your Head, Tom Dooley*, which eventually brought him wide attention.

SWEET WILLIE

This is our favorite ballad from the Southern Appalachians. It was sung by Frank Proffitt's aunt, Mrs. Nancy Prather, of Ashe County, North Carolina -- a fine singer who knew many songs.

Known in scholarly circles as *The Douglas Tragedy* (Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*), and as *Earl Brand* (Child No. 7), the ballad in the mountains is called simply *Sweet Willie*. It is very ancient, going back to Scandinavian Legend and the Nordic bards, to the Danish *Riborg and Guldberg*, mentioned in Child.

Scott claimed to have identified the ruins of a castle in southern Scotland as the site of the tragedy. He says: "There are the remains of a very ancient tower ... in a wild and solitary glen, upon a torrent named Douglas burn which joins the Yarrow after passing a craggy rock called the Douglas crag . . ."

Greig reported finding the ballad in Scotland and it is in *Ord's Bothy Songs*, but it has been found much more frequently on this side of the Atlantic -- in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Maine, and in at least eight southern states (see Brown, Vol. II).

As in most old ballads, the opening puts the hearer into the middle of the action -- as if a play were opening with the third act. The listener's imagination supplies the setting and the background -- one source of the ballad's mystery and charm.

It is not clear in this mountain version, but the crisis in the story occurs when the lady cries out the name of her lover, imploring him to slack his hand for "your wounds are deep and sore," and also "father I can have no more." There was an ancient superstition, explained clearly in the Scandinavian legends, that calling a warrior by name in the midst of the fighting would cause his death. Whether it caused Sweet Willie's death in this instance we do not know, but die he did. American versions of ancient England and Scottish ballads invariably have lost the original supernatural element.

Frank Proffitt had a theory that the old, violent, tragic ballads shaped people and life in the mountains and that many mountain tragedies and family feuds were a result of their influence.

AWAY IDAHO

Easterners hoped to find gold in other places than California. In this song Idaho is the goal at the end of the rainbow. Once there, all troubles will be over.

Our good friend, the late Deac Martin of Cleveland, Ohio (author and compiler of a great book about popular songs and barbershop ballads, called *Deac Martin's Musical Americana*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), gave us this song in 1952. He learned it from his mother, Mary Virginia Gooch (Martin) who lived in Missouri and whose people came by way of Kentucky from Gooch's Landing in Virginia, near Jamestown.

This song, with Frank French listed as its author, was published by H.M. Higgins in Chicago in 1864. A variant (with a different theme) may be found in John and Alan Lomax's *Cowboy Songs*. In Alan Lomax's *Folk Songs of North America* there is a song called *Way Out in Arkansas* that praises the healing properties of the hot springs there. Since Idaho is farther west than Arkansas, perhaps Frank French took a known song and rewrote it to fit a new interest -- Idaho's gold

In 1958 Elektra Records published a Frank Warner album which included this song. Our good friend Holman J. (Jerry) Swinney was then Director of the Idaho Historical Society and Museum in Boise. There was an exhibition of state history just opening, and he immediately had this song put on tape and played over loudspeakers at intervals during the exhibition. As a result it became something of a state song.

THE DAYS OF FORTY-NINE

John A. Stone, who called himself "Old Put" (see notes for *Sweet Betsy from Pike*), published this song in his *Golden Songster* back in the 1850's. This, and a number of other clever gold rush and western songs, may well have been written by this hearty troubadour. The song was kept alive by communities that saw their sons strike out for the West to seek their fortunes, and then saw them come home, often, broke and broken. Old Tom Moore is an example of the returning forty-niner -- the disillusioned seeker of the elusive pot of gold. That we found this folk version of the song in New York State (as sung by Yankee John Galusha of Minerva), shows that the composer told a tale that was real to his hearers.

YOU CAN TAKE ME AWAY FROM DIXIE A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND IF YOU DON'T LIKE MY PEACHES

Getting these three songs onto this record over Frank's protests took a lot of persuasion and arm twisting by family and close friends. The songs hark back to Minstrel Shows, and are among a great assembly of songs which Frank sang back in his college days, accompanied by masterful chording on the ukelele. Since our serious involvement with the folk and music from oral tradition, Frank has sung this part of his repertoire only on demand at private parties. Songs like these have come to be known as "the flip side of Frank Warner."

But they are indeed part of America's musical history -- a history which becomes more interesting and important as minstrel shows recede into the past. Besides, they are enormous fun.

FREIGHT TRAIN BLUES

During World War II, Frank sang for the troops one day at Governor's Island in New York Harbor. Afterward a young private, Richard O. Hamilton, from West Virginia, came up to talk to us. He sang too, he said. We suggested that he come and have dinner with us some evening, since we were living then in Greenwich Village. We gave him our address and telephone number and said we'd call him soon. The next day he called us and said "When can I come?" So of course we said "tomorrow night." He came on the ferry and the subway with his guitar (uncased) over his shoulder. I fixed a fried chicken dinner, thinking I'd make him feel at home, only to find that he had had so much chicken at home that he never wanted to see it again!

We had a fine evening of singing and this is one of the songs he gave us. He may have learned it from a country record (we find that the original version of the song, written by John Lair, was published in 1935 by M.M. Cole), but he sang it his own way, with some of his own words, and that has made it one of our favorites.

We only wish we had learned more about Richard O. Hamilton and that we could know how he fared in the war.

ASHEVILLE JUNCTION

Around the turn of the century, the Southern Railroad built a line from Old Fort, North Carolina, up through the mountains to Ridgecrest, on the way to Asheville. Many tunnels had to be blasted through the rock so the railroad could wind around the mountain -- the only way to reach the top. This meant dynamiting in each case, in order to open the way. To do this, holes to hold the dynamite had to be chiseled into the rock with a steel spike and a ten-pound hammer. This was dangerous work. The spike had to be held and turned by hand between each hammer blow, and a break in the rhythm might have been fatal.

This, then, is a work song made up by the black railroad workers and used to set the rhythm of the job, to expedite, and incidentally lighten, their labors -- the rhythmic explosion of breath indicating each hammer blow.

Frank learned this song when he was working with Dr. Frank C. Brown during his undergraduate days at Duke University.

HOLD MY HAND, LORD JESUS

This gospel song, with its message of confidence and hope, was sung to us by Sue Thomas on the porch of a boarding house about fifty yards from the sea at Nag's Head, North Carolina. It was on our first song-catching trip to the Outer Banks in the late thirties. Sue lived in Elizabeth City, N.C., but she spent her summers cooking for fishermen at the beach. She became a cherished friend and gave us many fine songs, among them *He's Got the Whole World In His Hand*, which has since gone around the country and the world.

Frank sang *Hold My Hand* to close almost every program, and had for many years. It was the song most often requested by people who have heard him before.

-- Anne Warner Old Brookville, N.Y.

copyright © 2008 Collegium Sound, Inc.