

## Two Related Canadian Songs

John Leeder

On first leafing through Phil Thomas's book *Songs of the Pacific Northwest* (edited by Jon Bartlett), I was struck by the song "My Name 'Tis Vernon Fetterly", particularly its beginning, "My name 'tis Vernon Fetterly, I was born in Huntsville town", since I once lived in Huntsville, Ontario, and have distant relatives surnamed Fetterly in the area. It's possible that Vernon was a relative!

Looking further at the lyrics, I realized that the song has similarities to the song "Muskoka", which Edith Fowke learned from Tom Brandon. Huntsville is one of the largest towns in the District of Muskoka.

According to Phil's book, Vernon Fetterly arrived in the Okanagan in 1907 (not 1862, as the song says). He worked in Harry Robb's sawmill in Penticton, later had a blacksmith shop, and finally ranched near Okanagan Falls. He was presumably familiar with the song "Muskoka", as the plotline and much of the

wording is similar or even identical. The song likely was intended for an audience familiar with "Muskoka" or similar versions, which may account for the "1862" – "1884" parallel.

As a young man, Tom Brandon worked on Great Lakes boats in the summer and in lumber camps in the winter, usually as a sawyer. In later years he worked for the C.P.R. in Toronto, finally in Peterborough. I had the privilege of seeing him perform at the Mariposa Folk Festival; he also performed in 1961 at International Folk Music Council's conference in Quebec and at several other folk festivals.

Both of these songs are part of the song family known in the U.S.A. as "State of Arkansas". Versions (some under different titles) have been recorded by Bob Dylan, The Weavers, Kelly Harrell, John Cohen and the Almanac Singers, to name a few, and parodied by Pete Seeger.

### My Name 'Tis Vernon Fetterly

#### My Name 'Tis Vernon Fetterly

Traditional

The musical score is written on four staves in 6/8 time. The melody is simple and folk-like, with a mix of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words hyphenated across lines. The score ends with a double bar line on the fourth staff.

My name is Ver-non Fet-ter-ly, I was born in Hunts-ville town. For  
sev-en long years or long-er I've trav-elled this wide world round. I ram-bled to the  
west, my boys, And bit-ter times I saw, But I nev-er knew what hard times was till  
Brit-ish Col-um-bi-a.

My name 'tis Vernon Fetterly,  
I was born in Huntsville town;  
For seven long years or longer,  
I've travelled this wide world round;  
I rambled to the west, my boys,  
And bitter times I saw,  
But I never knew what hard times was,  
Till British Columbia.

In eighteen hundred and sixty-two,  
In the merry month of June,  
I landed in British Columbia,  
On a Saturday afternoon;  
Up stepped a long-legged skeleton,  
His name was Harry Robb;  
He invited me to his hotel, the best,  
In British Columbia.

I rose from bed next morning,  
To look around the place;  
Before I wandered very far,  
Harry stared me in the face,  
Said he'd give me board and lodging,  
If in his mill I'd saw;  
He said I'd ne'er regret the day,  
I hit British Columbia.

Well, I took the job with Harry Robb;  
I'll ne'er forget his frame;  
He stood six-foot-seven in his shoes,  
As lean as any crane;  
His hair hung down in rat-tails,  
He had a lantern jaw,  
A specimen of the men you see.  
In British Columbia.

He fed me on corn dodgers,  
Just as hard as any rock;  
Till my teeth began to loosen,  
And my knees began to knock;  
You should have seen the look of me,  
I could hide behind a straw;  
You bet I regretted the day I came,  
To British Columbia.

I've little flesh upon my bones,  
Just enough to shiver;  
Before the ice has froze me in,  
I'm going down the river.  
If ever I see your land again,  
I'll hand to you my paw,  
But it will be through a telescope,  
That I see British Columbia.

As sung by Vernon Fetterly to Phil Thomas, printed in *Songs of the Pacific Northwest*, 2006, Hancock House Publishers.

## Muskoka

Transcription by Evelyn Osborne

## Muskoka

Traditional

$\text{♩} = 100$

My name is Pad - dy Shan - non I was born in Buf - fa - lo town, For

5 se - ven long ye - ars or bet - ter I have ram - bled this coun - try round; It's

9 up and down the coun - try boys and bet - ter times I saw, I

13 ne - ver knew what hard - ship was 'till I struck Mus - ko - ka.

My name is Paddy Shannon, I was born in Buffalo town;  
For seven long years or better I have rambled this country round;  
It's up and down the country, boys, and better times I saw;  
I never knew what hardship was till I struck Muskoka.

In eighteen hundred and eighty-four, in the early part of June,  
I landed in Muskoka on a Wednesday afternoon;  
I met a lug down on the steet with a long and lantern jaw,  
Inviting me to his hotel, the best in Muskoka.

I rose from bed next morning, for to catch the early train;  
Says he, "Young man, you'd better stay; I've rivers for to drain;  
I'll give you fifty cents a day, your washing, board and all,  
And I'll bet you'll be a different guy when you leave Muskoka."

Well, I hired with the ugly lug, McClusky was his name;  
Six foot seven all in his shoes, as lean as any crane;  
His hair fell down in rat-tails along his lantern jaw;  
A specimen of all the guys you'll find round Muskoka.

He fed me on corn dodgers just as hard as any rock,  
Me teeth began to loosen and me knees began to knock;  
You should have seen the look of me, I could hide behind a straw;  
You bet I was a different guy when I left Muskoka.

'Twas on a cold November morning I decided for to spill;  
I shook the shoes right off my feet in the cold November chill;  
I walked into the first saloon and asked for whisky raw,  
And I got drunk as a son-of-a-gun when I left Muskoka.

From the singing of Tom Brandon, *The Rambling Irishman*, Folk Legacy Records FSC-10 (re-released on cassette by CSTM's Mail Order Service).



Canadian Society  
for Traditional Music

---

Société canadienne pour  
les traditions musicales