Wisconsin Work Songs

arr. J. Guy Stalnaker

Three Work Songs from "Folk Songs Out of Wisconsin"

I. "Pick and Shovel"
II. "The Shantyman's Life"
III. "The Jam on Gerry's Rock"

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'Pick and Shovel'

1. The pick and the shovel are all that I know. I'm workin' the dayshift away down below. A mile underground I keep pickin' all day. I work for a livin' but not for much money. Goin' down, down the mine-shaft the echo of song Wipes out fear or worry. Together we're strong.

2. The mine whistle blows and the men start to sing. There's fear in their thinkin'. They don't say anything. From Cornwall we have come to explore. Yes, we are the men with an eye for ore. We've got to find ore and plenty much more, Or we'll be hit-tin' the road; or we'll be hit-tin' the road.

3. The air-blast is liable to come any day, And when it comes blowin', it goes on its way. It snatches your breath, lays you out in your tomb. A social death, we all lie in one day. She says I'll be foreman, but that won't be so. The pick and the shovel are all that I know. Or we'll be hit-tin' the road; or we'll be hit-tin' the road.

4. To my wife I'm a hero she pieces my pay, Takes care of the children the long workin' day. Or we'll be hit-tin' the road; or we'll be hit-tin' the road.

5. The pick and the shovel are all that I know. I'm workin' the dayshift away down below. A mile underground I keep pickin' all day. I work for a livin' but not for much money. Goin' down, down the mine-shaft the echo of song Wipes out fear or worry. Together we're strong.

6. From Cornwall we have come to explore. Yes, we are the men with an eye for ore. We've got to find ore and plenty much more, Or we'll be hit-tin' the road; or we'll be hit-tin' the road.

7. From Cornwall we have come to explore. Yes, we are the men with an eye for ore. We've got to find ore and plenty much more, Or we'll be hit-tin' the road; or we'll be hit-tin' the road.

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The Shantyman's Life

1. The shantyman's life is a worrying one. Though some call it free from care. It's the ringing of the ax from morning till night. In the middle of the forest streams.
2. Then far are we from the maidens fair, On the bank of Wisconsin's streams. Where the wolves and owls with terrifying howls disturb our nightly day. When broken slumber thus we pass. The long winter nights are cold.
3. At three in the morning the early cook cries, Boys, 'tis the break of streams. Where the wolves and owls with terrifying howls disturb our nightly day. When broken slumber thus we pass. The long winter nights are cold.
4. It's in the spring when the hard ships begin, The waters are piercing and streams. Where the wolves and owls with terrifying howls disturb our nightly day. When broken slumber thus we pass. The long winter nights are cold.
5. The rapids we run, we think only fun, Devoid of all slavery and streams. Where the wolves and owls with terrifying howls disturb our nightly day. When broken slumber thus we pass. The long winter nights are cold.
6. We've ale, wine, or beer our spirits for to cheer. Whilst in the forests streams. Where the wolves and owls with terrifying howls disturb our nightly day. When broken slumber thus we pass. The long winter nights are cold.

While life in the shanties, bleak and cold, While the wintry winds do blow, As soon as the morning star does appear, To the wild woods we must go.

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The Jam on Gerry's Rock

1. Come all ye true born shan-ty boys, who - ev - er that ye be. I would have you pay at - ten - tion and lis - ten un - to me. Concerning a young shan - ty boy so tall, gen-teel, and brave. Twas on a jam on Ger - ry’s Rock he met a wat - ry grave.

2. It happened on a Sun - day morn as you shall quick - ly hear. Our logs they piled up mount - ain high, no one to keep them clear. Our boss he cried, Turn out, brave boys. Your hearts are void of fear. We’ll break that jam on Ger - ry’s Rock and for A - gons - town we’ll steer.

3. Some of them were will - ing e - nough, but o - thers they hung back. ’Twas for to work on the Sab bath they did not think ’twas right. But six of our brave Ca - na - dian boys did vol - un - teer to go And break the jam on Ger - ry’s Rock with their fore - man, young Mon - roe.

4. They had not rolled off ma - ny logs when the boss to them did say, I’d have you be on your guard, brave boys. That jam will soon give way. But scarce the warn - ing had he spoke when the jam did break and go And it carried a - way these six brave youths and their fore - man, young Mon - roe.

5. When the rest of the shan - ty boys these sad tid - ings came to hear, To have you pay at - ten - tion all the rest of you shan - ty boys, for your dead com - rade pray. One of these a head - less bo - dy found, to their sad grief and woe, Lay cut and man - gled on the beach, the head of young Mon - roe.

6. They bur - ied him quite de - cent - ly, being on the sev' nth of May. Come to work on the Sab bath they did not think ’twas right. But scarce the warn - ing had he spoke when the jam did break and go And it carved a - way these six brave youths and their fore - man, young Mon - roe.

When the rest of the shan - ty boys these sad tid - ings came to hear, To have you pay at - ten - tion all the rest of you shan - ty boys, for your dead com - rade pray. One of these a head - less bo - dy found, to their sad grief and woe, Lay cut and man - gled on the beach, the head of young Mon - roe.
The folksongs arranged here are taken from *Folks Songs out of Wisconsin: An Illustrated Compendium of Words and Music*, Edited by Harry B. Peters (no longer in print, used by permission). The present collection is one of two of arrangements by the composer from this source, the other, also on Choral Public Domain Library, is of Christmas themed folksongs and is titled *A Wisconsin Christmas*. The settings here are straight-forward and uncomplicated.

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The Introduction says in part:

... a book of Wisconsin folks songs which [Helene Stratman-Thomas] had collected and recorded throughout the state during the 1940's ... To a large selection of her melodies [the editor Harry B. Peters] added some folks songs collected by Fritz Rickaby in the 1920's and by Asher Treat and Sidney Robertson in the 1930's.

When these collectors crisscrossed Wisconsin to record the folk songs which appear in this book, they were in search of songs that had entertained the early inhabitants of the state--songs which transmitted familiar legends and stories, songs which expressed moods, life styles, and varied aspects of culture.

... they sought to preserve those songs and bits of folklore that were threatened with extinction by growing commercialism and exposure to radio, recording, and publication. The musical content of the songs they collected is simple, uncomplicated in form and harmony, normally utilizing short, repeated stanzas, sometimes with an inserted refrain.

... the lyrics of these songs exhibit great thematic variety. They relate those stories of real and imaged people; they deal with work and play, with marriage and politics, disasters and frolics. They touch on all the larger human themes: Love, Betrayal, Revenge, War, Death.