



# Songs & Ballads



## SONGS & BALLADS



This song comes from the singing of **Mr. T. Jeff Stockton** at Flag Pond, Tennessee, on September 6, 1916, and was collected by **Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles**.

### "Young Edmund in the Lowlands Low"

Monday, March 24, 2008

*"Miss Em'ly was a maid so fair,  
She loved her driver boy.  
He drove the mail some gold to gain,  
Way down in the lowlands low."*

This is a Tennessee/North Carolina version of an old and very popular English "**broadside**" ballad. **Malcolm Douglas** has posted this thorough and helpful discussion at the Mudcat with regard to this ballad. Click **HERE** for an example of an original broadsheet ballad.

Young Emily falls in love with a "driver boy" who delivers mail in order to make some money. She invites him to stay

at her father's public house by the river. But she warns him that he must not let her parents know that he is Edmund, the driver boy, who drives in the "lowlands low", or that he has anything to do with her.

But Edmund "fell to drinking" and must have let slip that he was carrying some gold. He was put to bed good and drunk and in the night, Emily's father goes in and robs him and cuts off his head and drowns him. Or at least throws his body in the river to be washed out to sea.

She wakes up the next day and announces that she is going to marry young Edmund. Her father tells her what he has done and she curses him and says he'll be hung in the public square for murdering her "old true love".

And now, when she sees those coaches on the mountain, they remind her of young Edmund, who drove in the lowlands low. There is another very poignant verse that shows up in some versions that goes:

*"The fish that's in the ocean,  
Swims over my true love's breast  
His body's in a gentle motion,  
I pray that his soul's at rest."*

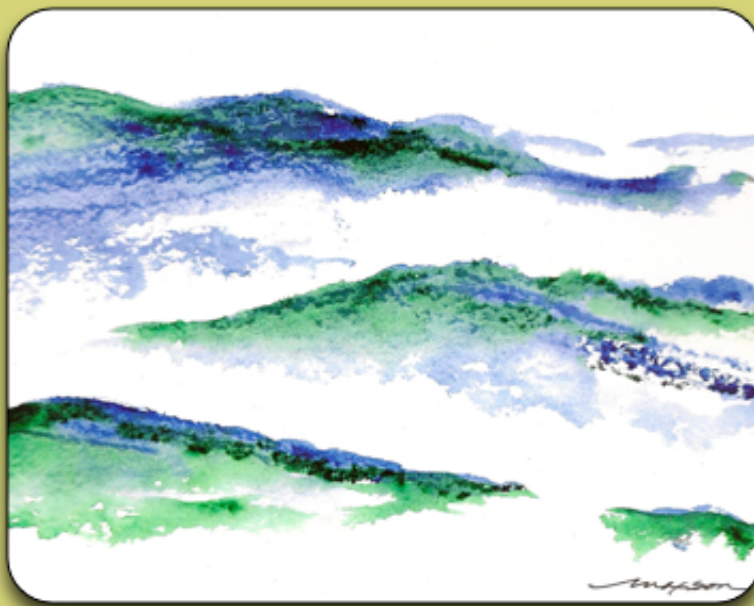
This song reminds me of the old Howardsville Turnpike that ran from the James River and the Kanawha Canal through Nelson County and crossed over the Blue Ridge at Humpback Gap to the Shenandoah Valley, and provided access to the eastern markets for these areas. In his book about Nelson County, Virginia, entitled **Under The Blue Ledge**, Oliver Pollard, Jr. says "Teams of horses, mules, or oxen pulled wagons carrying goods from the Valley to the canal and returned with items for the inland communities." (p. 73)

I can imagine young Edmund, the driver boy, hauling the mail from Waynesboro to the James on the old Howardsville,

Turnpike. And young Emily's father running his public house down beside the James River, with poor Edmund's body floating down the James and out to sea. This old road runs not far from where I used to live for a while when I first came to Virginia, and is just down the valley from my present home.

The first time I heard this song was from Sheila Adams of North Carolina. Here is her version of "**Young Emily**" as she sang it in 1976, with some explanation of it's background. And **here** she is a little later at Berea College. **Peter Gott** sings another version from Madison County, North Carolina, that he learned from Doug Wallin. And here you can hear a portion of **Betty Smith's** version from the same area. Her tune is somewhat different. These versions are all from the same general area as that of Jeff Stockton from Flag Pond, Tennessee, which is just over the border from Madison County.

For some **further discussion** of this song, see this Mudcat thread. And here is the text of a version from up in **Newfoundland**, in Canada. While here is a version from **Arkansas**. Young Edmund and Emily got around!



Here are the are the Blue Ridge Mountains, with the Rockfish Valley and the old Howardsville Turnpike crossing at Humpback Gap.

1 Comment 

povi

This one is my new favorite...I like the lilting last line, it's so very different than what I expected. Don't see many 'pubs' any more around here, but the one just newly opened can be a modern version of Emily's dad's...with nicer proprietors now, I trust. Carrying gold would be a tricky m.o., then or now.  
Thanks! Povi

**Monday, March 24, 2008 - 08:18 PM**

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