



Songs & Ballads



SONGS & BALLADS



"Pretty Peggy O"

Friday, March 21, 2008

This version of "**Pretty Peggy O**" comes from the **Cecil Sharp Collection** and is a collation of two different examples that have been collected in Kentucky in 1908, and 1917.



Maud Karpeles & Cecil Sharp in Berea, KY

{photo from Mike Yates' article}

*"As we marched down to Fernario,
As we marched down to Fernario,
Our Captain fell in love with a lady like a dove,
And they called her Pretty Peggy O."*

My version of this song comes from the singing of **Mrs. Combs** of Knott County, Kentucky, collected by **Olive Dame Campbell** in 1908, with the following three verses added from the singing of Mrs. Eliza Pace, which was collected at Hyden, in Leslie County, Kentucky, on October 3, 1917 by Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles.



Olive Dame Campbell

*"If you will fancy me, pretty Peggy O,
If you will fancy me, such a lady you will be,
Just as grand as any other in the country O.*

*You are the man I adore, pretty William O,
You are the man I adore, but your fortune is too low,
I am afraid that my dear mother might be angry O.*

&

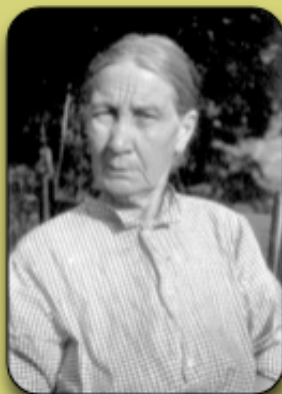
*Our captain's name is Wade, pretty Peggy O,
Our captain's name is Wade, and he died for a maid,
And was buried in the Lousiana land so low."*

This song has a long and somewhat complicated history. You can find a very detailed discussion of some of this by, I think, the late Bruce Olson [HERE](#), which comes from the Mudcat. The song seems to originate from an earlier Irish song known as "Pretty Peggy of Derby". You can see an early printing of this from the [Bodleian Library](#) collection [HERE](#).

This song has been recorded in many different variations. [HERE](#) is a portion of a recent one by Joan Baez, and [HERE](#) is the very early Bob Dylan version, and [HERE](#) is one by The Grateful Dead. My friend, Ellen Gozion, has recorded a very nice early version known as "Bonnie Barbry O" on her album "[Awake, Awake](#)".

You can find some extended discussion of a number of different version and recent interpretations on the Mudcat thread entitled "Where is Fennario?" [HERE](#). As far as I know "Fernario" and it's descendents entered into the tradition with Mrs. Combs' Kentucky version.

The reference to "Captain Wade" is found not only in Mrs.



Mrs. Eliza Pace
of Kentucky

{photo from
Mike Yate's
article}

Pace's Kentucky version, but also in one from the North Carolina collection of Frank Brown, from Thomas Smith, of Zionville, in Watauga County, which was dated May 8, 1915, with the note: "As sung by Bennett Smith, who learned it as early as 1860. Civil War song."

[HERE](#) is an interesting note from the Mudcat discussion with regard to the reference about the "Captain" being buried in Louisiana. It has been suggested that the Captain may have contracted a bad case of STD from "pretty Peggy O" and that is why he died down in Louisiana, and why there is a note of vengeance in the verse about "burning the city and destroying the ladies in the area-o." This only

underscores the irony about "Peggy's" mother and her possible anger about a relation of her daughter with a soldier! But what would she think when "she hears the guineas clink"?

This song was known throughout the South and in other parts of the United States. At some point, prior to the Civil War, it may have been circulated in print in its "American" version. Its widespread popularity was surely due to the way it captured the almost universal experience of the "soldier and his woman".

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