

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Pretty Saro (4)

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I came to this country in seventeen-forty-nine,
I saw many a true love, but I never saw mine.
I looked all around me and found I was alone.
And me a poor stranger, and a long way from home.

Down in some lonesome valley, down in some lonesome place,
Where the wild birds do whistle their notes to increase,
I think of pretty Saro whose waist is so neat,
And I know of no better pastime than to be with my sweet.

I wish I were a poet and could write a fine hand,
I would send my love a letter that she could understand.
And I'd send it by a messenger where the waters do flow
And think of pretty Saro wherever I go.

Notice the 1800's date in the second version and how the folk process converted "waist is so neat" to "ways air so complete" or vice versa.

Dorothy Scarborough in "A Song CAtcher in Southern Mountains, American Folk Songs of British Ancestry" (Columbia University press, 1937) includes two versions that she collected in 1930. One was from the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia, the other was collected in the Asheville, North Carolina area near the Smoky Mountains. She has a somewhat different take on the origins of the song as indicated by the book title and the

following passage from the book:

"Mrs. Stikeleather also sang it (i.e Pretty Saro) into my Dictaphone and contributed it to this collection. She told me that while the date 'eighteen-forty-nine' is used in some of the versions of the song, 'seventeen-forty-nine' is more probably correct, as that year witnessed considerable immigration to North Carolina from Ireland and Scotland, and this old English song was no doubt adapted to its new setting at that time"

This is an interesting anecdote, and plausible too, but can't be considered strong evidence because there is no connection made to the purported English predecessor. Later Scarborough says that and a song assembled in the USA by recent English-speaking immigrants. Here is the text she collected in NC

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