

1962

The Dungarvon Whooper

Billy Price

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Recommended Citation

Price, Billy. 1962. "The Dungarvon Whooper." NA62.5, CD65.11. Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History, Raymond H. Fogler Special Collections Department, University of Maine.

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Recommended citation: Price, Billy. 1962. "The Dungarvon Whooper." NA62.5, CD65.11. Maine Folklife Center, University of Maine.

Song: "The Dungarvon Whooper"

Singer: Billy Price

Town: Miramichi, NB

NA 62.5 CD 65 Track 11

Collector: Sandy Ives

Date: August 1962

Roud: 9199

The Dungarvon Whooper is arguably the most famous ghost in New Brunswick (the Burning Ship of Northumberland Strait is also widely known in eastern Canada, but multiple provinces can claim it as "their ghost"). The Whooper originated in central New Brunswick in the nineteenth century, but has no "official" origin story. Instead there are many explanations of what the Whooper is, as it appears alternately as an unseen spirit, a real person, or some animal (usually resembling a puma). The closest thing to an official story that exists is described in a poem written by Michael Whelan in the early twentieth century. This story tells of cook in a New Brunswick lumbercamp who is murdered and robbed. The camp searched the woods for their missing comrade and buried him near the river. After the murder, the cook's ghost makes itself known with a whooping (also described elsewhere as a howling, screeching, or wailing) noise at night. In Whelan's poem, a priest eventually settles the restless spirit of the cook, but in many versions similar efforts are made in vain. The Whooper is also the subject of a wide array of stories which often have nothing to do with this cook story. In the other most common version of the story, the Whooper is the ghost of a man who died in a logging accident after an act of blasphemy (which is also a common woods tale that has nothing to do with the Whooper). Stories of the Whooper were not limited to New Brunswick alone, and they were told throughout the woods of Maine and the other Maritime provinces.

The song performed here was, according to the singer, Billy Price, written by his grandfather, Abraham Munn (pronounced "Moon"). According to Louise Manny, the song was popular in the Miramichi region because it included many local characters in the story. It does not tell the origin story, and the Whooper is not even the main focus of the song. But the ghost makes an important appearance while the protagonist and his crew are attempting to make their way to the Dungarvon River (where the Whooper originated and got its name) on a fishing expedition. The men have to battle the Whooper through the night, and eventually triumph as day breaks and the Whooper is forced to retreat. The description of the creature is limited, but it is clearly powerful (it scares away all the other animals of the forest, even those that have no business being in Canada). The only physical characteristic noted is the Whooper's tail, suggesting it is some sort of wildcat as in many versions of the story. More notably, the song is not really an attempt at horror; it contains elements of gothic horror, but is ultimately a humorous spoof of the ghost story. The Whooper made similar appearances in other woods songs, such as "John Thompson's Hill," where it was part of a comical warning against working with a certain lumber outfit. In the present song, the Whooper is just one of many obstacles the men face in getting to the river. In the end, the trip is foiled by the lies of the poacher who had already cleaned out the stream.

1.

Oh, the fishermen are comin' to Charles Green's and so it's said,
They are going to Dungarvon you must go one day ahead;
And Bruce will go along with you with his wagon and his team,

For to haul the boat and luggage through to the Dungarvon Stream.

2.

It was early the next morning, just at the dawn of day,
We launched our boats, our paddles drew, we soon got underway
To go as far as Porter's Cove, 'bout nine miles down the stream,
Where Bruce agreed to meet us with his wagon and his team.

3.

According to agreement, bold Alex met us there.
We loaded up our wagon; for the road we did prepare.
We bound our stuff on carefully to the best of our skill,
For we knew there'd be hard hauling going up Bill Porter's Hill.

4.

We worked our way up Porter's Hill and got on level ground.
I'm sure that were ten miles or more you could see all around.
You could see the city of Boiestown with its steeple built so high,
The theater on the portage all with the naked eye.

5.

The night we reached Dungarvon the stream was very low;
The horses they were weary and we could no further go;
We built a fire large and high to camp there for the night,
But the Dungarvon Whooper was the terror of the night.

6.

There was beasts of all description; the bear and kangaroo;
The wildcat, wolf, and Indian devil; the moose and caribou;
The wolverine and porcupine; the skunk (they don't smell right).
But the Dungarvon Whooper was the terror of the night.

7.

For when this monster he came forth, the rest did disappear,
And believe me, my good people, it did banish all our fear;
It left us but the one to fight, and we felt very sure
That we could beat any Whooper that was on Dungarvon shore.

8.

We fought like valiant heroes until the dawn of day,
And when he saw that he was beat he was forced to run away.
As he was going to leave us he gave one long last wail,
And I saw him knock down little trees by the wagging of his tail.

9.

It was the next morning early, just at the break of day,
Poor Scott was taken with the cramps, those words I heard him say,
"My side and back and arms does ache, my arms and legs are sore."

Some thought he strained his muscles in the fight the night before.

10.

Now come all you salmon poachers who hide along the shore,
Keep one eye always open and look out for Robert Orr,
For if you don't you may repent, and that will be quite soon,
He'll capture you and your canoe like he done Tommy Munn.

11.

Now when we reached the settlement the news was no surprise,
To see that we were so deceived by Tom's infernal lies;
He told us that the stream was full of salmon, grilt [sic], and trout,
But he never said with net and spear he went up and fished them out.

12.

So now my song is ended and I wish no man no ill,
And I hope next year we all appear and gather at Burnt Hill,
And may the flies be very few and scarce around the place,
But not so bad as when Tom had to put shoe black on his face.

Sources: Manny, Louise, and James Reginald Wilson. *Songs of Miramichi*. Fredericton: Brunswick Press, 1970, 78-85. Also see: NA 15, NA 43, NA 78, NA 107, NA 108, NA 138, NA 164, NA 214, NA 260, NA 271, NA 272, NA 294, NA 331, NA 294, NA 331, NA 350, NA 383, NA 385 for variants of the Dungarvon Whooper story from New Brunswick and Maine.

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