

1991

The Spring of '65

Eddie Rollins

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Song: "The Spring of '65"

Singer: Eddie Rollins

Town: Moscow, ME

NA 2233 CD 2148 Track 6

Collector: Jeff McKeen

Date: 1991

Roud: 641 (7070 is another song titled "Spring of '65")

Laws: C19

In the old days of the Maine Lumberwoods, March and April marked the end of cutting and hauling lumber for the winter. As loggers came out of the woods, either before returning for the river drives or just headed home until next winter, many made their way to cities and went on drunken sprees that became legendary. In "**The Spring of '65**," it seems we have a case of that spree starting a little early. "The Spring of '65" as heard here is more commonly called "The Backwoodsman" (also known as "The Cordwood Cutter," "The Green Mountain Boys," and a handful of other names) about a wood-hauler who gets drunk during the day, and then attends a ball for a night of dancing and more drinking. In other versions, the men who end their work day early are farmers instead of wood-haulers (see stanza 7), but the basic result is the same: drinking, dancing, and more drinking.

Some scholars and singers have suggested that the song originated in the Southern Appalachians, but the song has been collected all over North America and its exact origin is not clear. There are innumerable local variations within the song, including where the narrator originally gets drunk (here it is Old Town, which could either refer to Old Town, ME or just be the widely used place name of Old Town), the hill he rides up (which is not named in Rollins' version), and the music played by the fiddler. The year in which these events took place also varies from version to version, alternately being 1845, '55, and '65, and in some cases a year is substituted for a time such as "Last Monday morning, 'bout half past five." The version sung here by Rollins is very similar to versions collected in the Catskills. The inclusion of stanza 6, about being followed by the narrator's father, is a part of the story (and a bit of a *non sequitur*) not included in all versions of the song. Two final notes on notation in the lyrics below: stanza 5 seems to be missing one line as noted by an ellipsis, and the final words are italicized because they are spoken. This spoken ending was a common stylistic feature of woods singing known as *declamando*.

1.

I believe it was in the Springtime of 1865,
I thought myself quite lucky that I was still alive;
I harnessed up my horses, my business to pursue,
And I went to hauling cordwood like my Daddy used to do.

2.

I did not haul but one cord when I might have hauled four,
I got so drunk at Old Town that I could not work no more;
The still was being open, the liquor running free,
I no sooner emptied one glass when another filled for me.

3.

I took my bridle and my saddle, I started for the barn,
I harnessed up my horse never thinking any harm;
I harnessed up my horse and I rode away so soon,
That I scarce had time to breathe when I reached the top of the hill.

4.

There I met an old acquaintance whose I name I will not call,
She told me when and where there was going to be a ball;
I was hard to be persuaded but at last I did agree,
To go to that place where the fiddler's going to be.

5.

...
Now four of us stout fellows got on the floor to dance;
Our fiddler being willing, his arms being strong,
Gave the sounds of old Ireland for four hours long.

6.

Now my father followed after, was then I heard them say,
He must have had a torch lighter for he could not find the way;
He peaked in every window, a chance to see a light,
For his old gray locks was wet with the dews of the night.

7.

Now the morning stars are risen, boys, and we have danced enough,
It will take our last half dollar for to settle up this fuss;
We'll go home unto our plow, boys, we'll whistle and we'll sing,
For never would be caught in the drunken crew again.

8.

Now come all you old women who peddle news about,
Don't you tell on us young fellows who are mad enough without;
Come on you old men, you need not make a fuss,
For when you was young you did the same *only a damn sight worse*.

Sources: Laws, G. Malcolm, Jr. *Native American Balladry*. Revised Edition. American Folklore Society, Bibliographical and Special Series, 1. Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1964, 156 (C19); Cazden, Norman, Herbert Haufrecht, and Norman Studer, *Folk Songs of the Catskills*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982, 449-53; & Fowke, Edith. *The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973, 78-79.