

The Old Settler

words by Francis Henry

music: traditional, "Old Rosin the Bow"

In the April 11, 1877 edition of the Washington Standard, the following note appears:

The demand for the new song written by Mr. Henry, "The Old Settler", has been so general that we publish it in this issue of the Standard. Its first public rendition was at a recent entertainment given by the Choral Society, where it was received with enthusiastic applause.

The song mentioned, written by Francis Henry of Pierce County around 1874, has become the most popular folk song in Washington.

The musical score is written on a single staff in 6/8 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written in a cursive hand below the notes. Chord symbols are placed above the staff at various points: F, Dm, F, Bb, F, C7, F, Bb, F, C7, F, Bb, F, C7, F.

I'd trav-eled all o-ver the coun-try, Pros-
pect-ing and dig-ging for gold, I'd tun-neled, hy-draul-icked and
cradled, And I had been fre-quent-ly sold, And
I had been fre-quent-ly sold, And I had been fre-quent-ly
sold, I'd tun-neled, hy-draul-icked and
cra-dled, And I had been fre-quent-ly sold.

Where one had made riches by mining, perceiving that hundreds grew poor,
I made up my mind to try farming, the only pursuit that is sure.

So, rolling my grub in my blankets, I left all my tools on the ground,
And started one morning to shank it, for a country they call Puget Sound.

Arriving flat broke in mid-winter, I found it enveloped in fog,
And covered all over with timber, as thick as the hair on a dog.

As I looked on the prospect so gloomy, the tears trickled over my face;
For I felt that my travels had brought me, to the edge of the jumping off place.

I took up a claim in the forest, and sat myself down to hard toil.
For two years I chopped and I labored, but I never got down to the soil.

I tried to get out of the country, but poverty forced me to stay,
Until I became an old settler, then nothing could drive me away.

And now that I'm used to the climate, I think that if man ever found,
A spot to live easy and happy, that Eden is on Puget Sound.

No longer the slave of ambition, I laugh at the world and its shams,
As I think of my pleasant condition, surrounded by acres of clams.

In Reminiscences of Washington Territory, by Charles Prosch
(Seattle, 1904), the author prints a sequel to the "Old Settler",
which Mr. Henry wrote some 20 years after the original. Seems
that protest songs were just as popular in Washington's early
days as they are now - and the themes sound quite familiar!

Some say that this country's improving, and boast of its commerce and trade;
But measured by social enjoyment, I find it has sadly decayed.

In the pioneer days on the Sound, when people had little to wear,
And subsisted on clams the year 'round, we'd hearty good fellowship here.

The thoughtful, industrious old settler, was so fond of obliging a friend,
That if any one wanted his tools, he'd always quit working to lend.

At our gatherings for pastoral pleasure, dance, picnic, or social knock-down,
One man was as good as another, no kind of distinction was shown.

But now, when I go to a party, the people around me seem froze;
They dare not be social and hearty, for fear they may soil their store clothes.

Not only our friendly relations, are dropped for the worship of gold,
But the solid back bone of the country, is recklessly bartered and sold.

They're slashing and selling our timber, not taking the slightest concern,
For what we shall do in the future, without any stovewood to burn.

They're wasting the natural resources, our bountiful waters contain;
They're canning our clams and our oysters, and shipping them off for more gain.

And even the climate is changing, for only some ten years ago,
Strawberries got ripe in December, whilst now it brings four feet of snow.