

**“Pretty Peggy” and the “Bonnie Lass”: 250 Years of Folk and Commercial Transmission  
of a British-American Folk Song**

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## I. The Phenomenon of “Peggy O”

The origins of “Pretty Peggy O” are difficult to determine. For the last 250 years, the song has been rewritten and adapted hundreds of times. In its earliest written form, it was an Irish dance tune called “Pretty Peggy of Darby.” That tune was popularized and given lyrics in a comic opera in London in the 1780s. Those lyrics were rewritten and distributed in broadsides until the origins of the tune were forgotten. Then it was a folk song. It has mostly been performed in the UK and the U.S., in different accents, dialects, modes, and meters, under different titles, and with varying rhyme schemes and verse lengths. The first known “recordings” of this song were made in isolated communities—at first by anthropologists interested in artifacts of thriving “folk” communities, and later by musicologists hoping to preserve the vestiges of a quickly disappearing culture of oral transmission. In the early 1960s, folk revivals on both continents created a commercial market for folk songs, and the variants of “Peggy” that these folklorists collected became popular source material for folk artists.

Commercial recording fundamentally changed the history of this song. It solidified its general plotline: a military captain (usually Irish) falls in love with a girl (from Fyvie or Derby), asks her to come away with him, is rejected, and dies of heartbreak. And it put different kinds of restrictions on the possibilities for musical variation. Namely, as the song became popular, what had for centuries been a relatively uniform tune performed in a relatively uniform style but with very different lyrics suddenly exploded into a small, but distinctive number of stylistic categories.

One of the first artists to record the song in a commercial setting under its American name “Pretty Peggy O” was a young Bob Dylan on his 1962 eponymous debut album. Like many before him, Dylan altered the song’s text: his version ends with the captain “riding down to Texas with the rodeo” before he dies to be “buried somewheres in Lou’siana-ho.” But Dylan also adds harmonica, fast-paced guitar backing, and a Texas drawl. A year before Dylan’s album came out, American folksinger Paul Clayton released a military march version of “Pretty Peggy-

O” that featured snare drum, fife, banjo, and a full backing chorus. The year before that, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger’s 1960 Folkways album *Popular Scottish Songs* had a version of “The Bonnie Lass of Fyvie” that featured Ewan MacColl solemnly reciting lyrics in a Scottish brogue against fingerpicked guitar.

In just a few years, a song that had been mostly transmitted by sheet music or orally was suddenly subjected to the much more rapid effects of commercial transmission. Certain variants of “Peggy” were more sought after by folklorists, and the variants that they collected became the versions that folk artists would record. Individual commercial artists introduced musical variation, which was permanently recorded and widely distributed. Versions of the song after this transition are much more varied in melody, rhythm, instrumentation, and genre than those recorded in the supposedly isolated communities where they were first heard. In this paper, I will consider the products of all eras of “Peggy” - 137 different versions in a myriad of different media - to better understand this folk song’s interaction with various historical commercial markets.

## II. History of Folklore Studies

The term “folklore” was coined in 1846, but people had been documenting the history of European folk music and those who perform it for over 100 years before that.<sup>1</sup> *A Collection of Old Ballads* (1723-1725) was a popular three-volume anthology published in England that scholars recognize to be the first collection of historical ballads.<sup>2</sup> It consisted of songs drawn from broadsides, and though there are collections of broadsides that predate this anthology, *Old Ballads* was the first work to frame them as historical artifacts.<sup>3</sup>

In 1765, the pivotal anthology *Reliques of English Poetry* was published by English

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Groom, introduction to *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, by Thomas Percy (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2000), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Scholar Arthur Friedman writes in his 1961 book *The Ballad Revival* that *Old Songs* was “something of a landmark in the ballad revival because it [set] us on the road to the *Reliques*.” (pg. 146).

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000), 10.

reverend Thomas Percy.<sup>4</sup> Percy claimed to have rescued some of his source material from the floor of the house of his friend's maid, who had been using the pages as fuel for the fire. In his preface to the collection, Percy emphasizes the humble nature of the ballads, writing, "In a polished age, like the present, I am sensible that many of these reliques of antiquity will require great allowances to be made for them. Yet have they, for the most part, a pleasing simplicity, and many artless graces...and if they do not dazzle the imagination, are frequently found to interest the heart."<sup>5</sup> This is an early example of the attitude that folk scholars would take towards this music for the next several hundred years. *Reliques* was hugely popular and inspired the first folklore revivals all across Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Folk song collection was common practice before this, in a less explicit form. Music publishers in Europe published annual collections of "country dances" of Ireland, England, and Scotland as early as the 17th century. Some of these tunes became the source material for "ballad operas," a genre of popular British stage show produced and performed in the mid-1700s. These "operas" were usually comical scripts with lyrics set to "a repository of tunes in the public sphere that were transmitted orally and in print."<sup>7</sup> Because these tunes were so well-known, printed editions of the music rarely contained scores and instead just referred to the name of the tune to which they were set. This set of tunes circulated in the public sphere was large. The Oxford Ballad Operas Online project collects and organizes the words and music of British ballad operas from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their database includes lyrics set to 7,000 unique

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<sup>4</sup> In his introduction to the 1996 reissue of Percy's *Reliques*, scholar Nick Groom writes about the publication history of the work: "[It] was published by Robert and James Dodsley on St Valentine's Day 1765, in an edition of 1500 copies...By July, 1100 copies had been sold, and within the next year a pirated edition had emerged from Dublin. A second edition was published in 1767, a third in 1775, and the fourth in 1795...A host of imitations were produced - and pirated. In a word, Percy's *Reliques* was a pivotal text, marking the precise point at which early eighteenth-century Augustan Neo-Classicism became late eighteenth-century Gothic Romanticism." (2).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) (London: Dent, 1910), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Groom, 2.

<sup>7</sup> "Ballad Operas Online," *Oxford Digital Libraries*, accessed October 2016, <http://www.odl.ox.ac.uk/balladoperas/>.

tunes between 1728 and 1760.<sup>8</sup>

These tunes were also regularly turned into “broadsides” with the addition of different words. According to ballad historian Alfred Friedman, broadsides were “the work of hack rimers who aspired to the graces of sophisticated poetry,” and they were published most lucratively in London, where they were “sold at bookstalls or hawked about the streets by ballad-singers.”<sup>9</sup> Broadside lyrics, like ballad opera lyrics, were often written without accompanying melody except for the name of a tune to which they could be sung. This shared knowledge of a body of popular music allowed tune directions to be as vague as “To a Pleasant New Play-House Tune” or “To a New Northern Tune,” and by the beginning of the eighteenth century, most broadsides gave no direction about melody at all.<sup>10</sup> And importantly, broadsides were popular. Many of these broadside ballads turned (back) into folk songs as they were learned, performed, and passed down orally. In his 1957 book *American Balladry from British Broadsides*, author George Laws identifies 290 ballads derived from British broadsides and songsters.<sup>11</sup>

A sense of folk music as the truest, most authentic representation of a national identity was rigorously codified in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the publishing of the first rigorous academic work of folk scholarship in Germany. Johann Gottfried von Herder’s 1778 *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (“Voices of People in Songs”) was popular all across Europe. It sparked an interest in folk song as a reflection of “nature’s poesy” and in folk song collection as a means to understanding national identity.<sup>12</sup> This was the first of a two-volume set of German folk songs collected by von Herder. He was concerned with the relationship between folk music and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Friedman, *The Ballad Revival* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Claude Mitchell Simpson, *The British Broadside Ballad and Its Music* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), xi-xii.

<sup>11</sup> George Laws, *American Balladry from British Broadsides* (Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, 1957).

<sup>12</sup> John R. Gold and George Revill, “Gathering the Voices of the People? Cecil Sharp, Cultural Hybridity, and the Folk Music of Appalachia,” *GeoJournal* 65, no. 1 (2006): 57. doi:10.1007/s10708-006-0007-z

national identity, and his understanding of the *Volksgeist*, the “folk spirit,” was the foundation upon which folk song collection all across Europe was built. He characterized folk song as a “natural and unconscious expression” and “the folk” as the people in a country most “wild,” “lacking social organization,” and closest to nature.<sup>13</sup>

Von Herder’s book foreshadowed the approach that scholars would take to folk song collection for the next century and a half in two ways. First, his understanding of folk song as an authorless entity untouchable by the musical and stylistic contributions of those who performed it was the understanding that characterized later folk song collectors’ processes throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Second, the characterization of “the folk” as members of isolated communities - wild, untainted by the outside world, “non-educated”<sup>14</sup> and thus closest to “nature’s poesy” - became the standard romanticization of all folk singers, regardless of background.

Sir Edward Burnett Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* was published in 1871, largely influenced by Charles Darwin’s 1859 *On the Origin of Species*. Tylor applied Darwin’s theory of evolution to folk song histories to develop a theory of cultural “survivals.” This was the notion of folk songs as natural, authorless remnants - the cultural “survivals” - of a more “primitive” era, and it laid the groundwork for the scientific gathering of folk song variants that became popular over the next several decades.

Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, folklore studies and folk song collection became a prominent research area in both the UK and the U.S., characterized by this evolutionary understanding of folk. Cecil Sharp, a prominent proponent of Tylor’s theory, was a British folklorist and one of the earliest folk song collectors in both England and the Southern Appalachians. In 1907 (after four years of folk song collecting around England), Sharp published *English Folk-Song, Some Conclusions*. “The main thesis of this book is the evolutionary origin of

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<sup>13</sup> Gold and Revill, 56.

<sup>14</sup> Cecil Sharp, *English Folk-Song, Some Conclusions* (London: Simpkin & Co., 1907), 3.

the folk-song,” he writes in his introduction. “[Folk music] is not the composition of the individual...but a communal and racial product, the expression, in musical idiom, of aims and ideals that are primarily national in character.” Sharp emphasized folk music’s “national character and its fitness to serve a national purpose.”<sup>15</sup>

Sharp’s work is a product of the first folk revival in the UK, motivated by the need for preservation of the traditional *English* songs and dances of an earlier time. These were captured in the oral traditions of what Sharp called the “remnants of the peasantry.”<sup>16</sup> Sharp worried about the growing influence of German music in England, so his underlying inspiration was the creation of a nationalistic musical style. Folk song - as an evolutionary product fossilized in the minds of a nation’s uncorrupted and “non-educated”<sup>17</sup> citizens - was the perfect material.

Sharp had several decades of scientifically-minded folklore research to support his goal. The American Folklore Society was founded in 1888.<sup>18</sup> Also in America, Harvard professor Francis James Child published his five-volume set *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* between 1882 and 1898.<sup>19</sup> The ballads in this set, often called the Child Ballads, were over a thousand ballads assembled from paper sources from all across the Southern Appalachians, England, and Scotland (Child did no actual “fieldwork” himself). Child assigned numbers to 305 groups of these ballad variants that he believed to be derived from the same source ballads, and “Child ballads” are referred to by these numbers to this day.

The growing interest in song collection quickly warranted the establishment of more organized folklore societies on both continents. Sharp founded the English Folk Dance and Song Society in 1911, and American state folklore societies were founded over the next few

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<sup>15</sup> Sharp, *English Folk-Song, Some Conclusions*, x.

<sup>16</sup> Gold and Revill, 58.

<sup>17</sup> Sharp (1907) draws a distinction between “un-educated” and “non-educated”: “The former are the half or partially educated, *i.e.* the illiterate. Whereas the non-educated, or ‘the common people’, are the unlettered, whose faculties have undergone no formal training whatsoever, and who have never been brought into close enough contact with educated persons to be influenced by them.” (3).

<sup>18</sup> Gold and Revill, 59.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

years: North Carolina in 1912, Kentucky in 1912, Virginia in 1913, and West Virginia in 1915.<sup>20</sup> Sharp made four collection trips to the U.S. between 1916 and 1918. He was initially excited at finding people who were “just English of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.”<sup>21</sup> But this delight was ultimately followed by disappointment at the increasingly evident cultural heterogeneity exhibited in folk song variants collected across the Southern Appalachians. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century wore on, collectors like Sharp were forced to acknowledge the existence of other forms of music in existence in the U.S.

Sharp was not alone in his initial ignorance of cultural hybridity and the variety of musical tradition in the United States. Most collectors in America focused on the Southern Appalachian region and centered their song-collecting efforts on melodies and lyrics that could be traced back to an earlier British counterpart. This was due to Child’s widespread influence. His anthology had become the textbook for folk song collectors in America, and *his* definition of American folk song - that is, ballads of British origin – became the canonical definition into the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> Genres of music ignored almost entirely by most folk song collectors included African American spirituals and cowboy songs. Though several collectors were interested in music outside of this genre, their challenges to the British- and Child-centric definition of American folk music were isolated and short-lived.<sup>23</sup>

In 1956, folklorists Richard Chase and Joshua Tolford published *American Folk Tales and Songs*, a collection of songs and stories, plus an “Amateur Collector’s Guide.” In their introduction, they champion the power of English-American folklore at uniting all people, by revealing the “traditions we all share without always being conscious of it . . . predominantly English but with delightful overlappings from other cultures and lores.”<sup>24</sup> Ironically, for this was

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<sup>20</sup> Gold and Revill, 59.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>23</sup> For more information about the work of early folk song collectors interested in African American and western cowboy music, see Benjamin Filene’s *Public Memory & American Roots Music*, pgs. 27-34.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Chase and Joshua Tolford, *American Folk Tales and Songs* (Mineola, New York: Courier

published a few years before the peak of the folk revival in the U.S., Chase and Tolford assert, “There can be no commercialization, no standardization, no mechanization of [folk songs]. They elude every sort of ‘modern sophistication.’ They are always ‘shy.’”<sup>25</sup> They rely heavily on Sharp’s and Child’s conceptions of folk music, song collection, and the traits of the real, authentic folk singer, who “sings ‘unthoughtedly,’ [sic.] without self-consciousness. He makes his points without overdoing. He never shows his tonsils!”<sup>26</sup> This wasn’t an isolated opinion. In his 1957 book *American Balladry From British Broadsides*, folk scholar George Malcolm Laws unequivocally states what he sees as the characteristics of musical performance “among the folk.” “The singer tends to suppress his own personality and to let the ballad speak for itself,” he writes. “The concert style of singing, which emphasizes the personality, the technical skill, and frequently the acting ability of the singer, is foreign to the true folk singer.”<sup>27</sup>

Musicologist Simon Frith writes, “The American folk revival was based on a contradiction. The ‘spontaneous folk creations’ it celebrated were the result of musical judgements made by outsiders, by urban performers.”<sup>28</sup> As we now know, these “outsiders” and “urban performers” were prone to romanticize “the folk,” obsess over the authentic, and define American folk music as only those songs which had some parallel British variant. It was in this environment that folk singers - like Bob Dylan, Ewan MacColl, and Paul Clayton - were working when they made their recordings of “Pretty Peggy-O”.

### III. “Peggy”: A History from Transcriptions

The earliest printed version of a melody resembling “Pretty Peggy” is from *Twenty Four Country Dances for the Year 1782*. This was a booklet published in London by Thomas Skillern, with written melodies and dance instructions for twenty-four tunes “as they are Performed at Court

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Corporation, 1956), 18.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>27</sup> Laws, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Simon Frith, “‘The Magic That Can Set You Free’: The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community,” *Popular Music* 1 (1981): 161.

Almacks Bath Pantheon and all Public Assemblies.” A tune called “Pretty Peggy of Darby O” is on page 3. It is in 2/4 time, in AABB form, in D Major.

The next printed version appeared two years later, in a 1784 comic opera titled *Two to One*. *Two to One* was written by Englishman George Colman with music by Samuel Arnold, and it was performed at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in London. A score “for the Voice, Harpsichord, and Violin” was published on July 5, 1784, which included “Air V,” sung by the character Mr. Davies. The lyrics to “Air V” do not actually mention a “Peggy” or the town of “Derby,” but the score is labelled in the upper right hand corner with the title “Peggy of Derby O,” presumably to indicate the name of the tune to which it is sung. Its tempo marking is *Vivace*, and—although Arnold transposed it to C major, put it in 4/4 time, and added some slurs and fermatas—its melody is otherwise note-for-note identical to Skillern’s “Pretty Peggy of Darby O.” The most notable difference between the two versions is in the form: while Arnold’s version includes the repeat signs that would make this an AABB melody, his lyrics do not actually follow an AABB form. Rather, they match the melody and rhyme scheme of most later versions of “Peggy.” Arnold puts the earliest written lyrics to this tune (Figure 1).

Both of these printed versions acknowledge that they are not the beginning of this tune’s existence. They seem to suggest that the earliest versions of “Pretty Peggy of Darby O” – before the song was ever written down – were more upbeat. Lyrics with versions of this title showed up in song collections published in England and Scotland through the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some of these collections identify it as the song from *Two to One*, and others identify it as a traditional Irish tune. The former type tends to refer to it by the title “Dandy-O” and only contain lyrics. The latter type uses some variant of the title “Pretty Peggy of Darby” and only contains melody.<sup>29</sup>

Around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the song began to appear in stage shows in the style of ballad operas of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 2). One of these shows - William Dimond’s *The*

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<sup>29</sup> For details of all of these sources, see Appendix I: List of Early Printed Versions.

*There is a chambermaid lives in the South,  
So tight, so light, so neat, so gay, so handy-o!  
Her breath is like the rose, and the pretty little mouth  
Of pretty little Tippet is the dandy-o!*

*Never could I clasp the waste of Sukey, Sal, or Peg,  
Their arms so red, their ugly legs so bandy-o!  
But slim and taper is the waist; the neat and pretty leg  
Of pretty little Tippet is the dandy-o!*

*Tippet of the South, if she gives me but a smile,  
Cheers the cockles of my skipping heart, like brandy-o!  
Each part, each limb, each look, would any one beguile;  
But take her altogether, she's the dandy-o!*

**FIGURE 1: Lyrics to “Air V,” sung to the tune of “Peggy of Derby O,” from Skillern’s 1784 opera *Two to One*.**

*Foundling of the Forest* - opened in both London and New York City on the same night in November 1809, and was subsequently performed in Philadelphia and Boston multiple times between 1809 and 1815. Scripts and scores from this time credit “George Colman, Esq.” (writer of *Two to One*) for the tune to which a song called “The Landlady of France” is set. Lyrics for both tunes include a rhyme on “andy-O.” In other words, “The Landlady of France” seems to be a good candidate for contrafact of “Peggy.”

I can find no record of any variant of any song by any of its earlier titles in America before the November 1809 premier of *Foundling*. Thus, it seems that the first popular version of the melody to “Peggy” that Americans knew was with the lyrics from “A Landlady of France” (see Appendix IV, page 4). From this point in time, the song follows several different trajectories. America, England, Ireland, and Scotland all saw the publishing of variants of the *Foundling* tune (i.e. “Peggy”) under various titles at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### America: “Landlady of France” and Naval Ballads

After “Landlady of France” became a popular melody in America, the song circulated in dozens of songsters and broadsides before 1820. In some of these cases, the song retained its *Foundling* title “Landlady of France,” but it was also at least as frequently rewritten with topical

| England  | America   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>1784:</b> George Colman's show <i>Two to One</i> opens in London with music by Dr. Samuel Arnold. In July of 1785, Arnold publishes a musical score with tune direction for "Air V" to "Pretty Peggy of Darby."</p> <p><b>c.1791-92:</b> The script and lyrics for a play called <i>The Festival of Momus</i> are published in London. They include lyrics (but no melody) for a song called "The Dandy-O," to be sung by actor Joseph Shepherd Munden.</p> <p><b>1809:</b> William Dimond's play <i>The Foundling of the Forest</i> opens simultaneously in New York and at the Theatre Royal in London (the same theater as <i>Two to One!</i>). It includes a song called "The Landlady of France," written by William Dimond with music by Michael Kelly. In a footnote to the lyrics, this script states that "the author is indebted to the pen of George Colman, Esq." (i.e. the writer of <i>Two to One</i>).<sup>30</sup></p> | <p><b>1809:</b> William Dimond's <i>The Foundling of the Forest</i> opens simultaneously at the Theatre Royal in London and in New York in November 1809.<sup>31</sup> A copy of the script and lyrics is printed in New York in November 1809, with the same note of indebtedness to George Colman.<sup>32</sup></p> <p><b>c.1810:</b> <i>The Favorite Songs in the Comic Opera of The Foundling of the Forest</i> is published in Philadelphia, including music and text for "The Landlady of France." The play is performed in Philadelphia in February of this year.<sup>33</sup></p> <p><b>1809-1815:</b> <i>The Foundling of the Forest</i> is performed in Boston multiple times.<sup>34</sup></p> |

**FIGURE 2: Timeline of "Peggy" in stage shows, 1784-1815.**

lyrics about the War of 1812.<sup>35</sup> A song called "The Constitution and the Guerriere," about two ships that fought in a battle on August 19, 1812, appeared in two early 19th century American broadsides to the tune of "A Landlady of France." These broadside lyrics were then reprinted in various American war-themed songsters through the 1830s.<sup>36</sup> Another rewriting of the song was about the June 1, 1813 battle between the American *Chesapeake* and British *Shannon* in the

<sup>30</sup> William Dimond, *The Foundling of the Forest: A Play in Three Acts*. (London, 1809), 40-41. (see Appendix IV, pg. 3)

<sup>31</sup> Julie Miller, *Abandoned: Foundlings in Nineteenth-century New York City*. NYU Press (2008), 24.

<sup>32</sup> David Longworth, *The English and American Stage, Vol. XXXI* (New York City, 1810), 40. (see Appendix IV, pg. 4)

<sup>33</sup> Otto Albrecht, "Opera in Philadelphia, 1800-1830," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 32, no. 3 (1979), 511.

<sup>34</sup> "Landlady of France, together with the Bottle of Rum, and Morgiana," *Isaiah Thomas Broadside Ballads Project*, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.americanantiquarian.org/thomasballads/items/show>.

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>36</sup> John Harrington Cox, *Folk-Songs of the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 257.



**FIGURE 3: “Pretty Peggy of Darby O,” music and dance instructions from Thomas Skillern’s *Twenty Four Country Dances for the Year 1782*.<sup>37</sup>**

Boston harbor. Laws’ *American Balladry from British Broadsides* (1957) includes lyrics to three versions of this ballad, “The Chesapeake and the Shannon,” set to three different tunes. The first version matches the rhyme scheme of “Landlady” and also appeared in contemporary New England broadsides and war-themed songsters.<sup>38</sup>

In America, all three versions of the song had lyrics that follow an ABCB rhyme scheme, and all three retain the “andy-O” rhyme in the second and fourth lines of all their verses. This rhyme can be traced back to the *Two to One* lyrics from 1784 and seems to have been an ineradicable feature of this song. Also interesting is the rhyming in the A and C lines of the War of 1812 American rewrites: both these versions have internal rhyme schemes on these lines (*told/bold*, *match/tach*, *bold/told*, and *port/sport*.) (See Appendix IV, pages 5-6 for lyrics to these versions.) Another theme in the American versions is their lack of any notated melody. Thus far in the history from transcriptions, we’ve seen exactly two versions of the song with

<sup>37</sup> Image from the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

<sup>38</sup> Laws, 138-139.

accompanying musical notation, both from the 1780s. Except for key and time signature, these two versions were identical. The earlier of these was from Thomas Skillern's *Twenty Four Country Dances for the Year 1782* (Figure 3).

Skillern's melody has a straight, undotted rhythm (except for the second to last measure of each half). As mentioned above, it is in AABB form. Most importantly, while it clearly fits the lyrics to "Dandy-O" from *Two to One*, it's a little more awkward to make the lyrics to "Landlady of France" or either of the American naval ballads fit this melody. Since the lyrics to these latter three all line up with each other much more nicely, it's possible that they are all based on a slightly different melody than that in Skillern and *Two to One*. Most likely, that melody is the one that was used in *Foundling of the Forest*, and will never be known to us.

#### England: Early Lyrics for "Pretty Peggy"

From the early nineteenth century, this tune appeared in songsters and broadsides printed in England. *Tegg's Comic Song Book* from 1818 includes a song set to the tune of "The Dandy O"<sup>39</sup> (the title usually given to the *Two to One* version). Before that, English broadsides printed the first lyrics to a song titled "Pretty Peg of Derby." A song with this title appears in at least three different London Broadsides from the early 19th century: one published by John Pitts, one by John Catnach, and two others from unknown publishers (Appendix I). All of them are undated, which will prove to be an unfortunate obstacle in tracing the history of this song. The Pitts and Catnach ballads can be assumed to be from any time between 1802 and 1870,<sup>40</sup> and they are probably from closer to 1830, based on lyric similarities between them and other printed versions from that time (to be discussed below).

The lyrics of these London broadside versions are nearly identical.<sup>41</sup> The later verses

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Tegg, *Tegg's Comic Song Book*, (London, 1818).

<sup>40</sup> Bruce Olson, "Pretty Peggy of Derby, O," *Roots of Folk: Old English, Scots, and Irish Songs and Tunes*, accessed October 2016. <http://www.csufresno.edu/folklore/Olson/SONGTX11.HTM#PEGDRBY>

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix IV, pages 7-9 for full lyrics to all the London broadside versions.

show more lyrical variation than the earlier verses (“mammy think” in Pitts vs. “mamma say” in Catnach, “lay in bed” in Pitts vs. “lie in bed” in Catnach), but the differences are trivial, and these obviously come from the same source. Here, the consistency of rhyme scheme exhibited in the American versions is only partially maintained. The British verses sometimes follow an ABCB rhyme scheme, but the second verses in both are AABA, and the third and fourth verses are AABC. They’ve also lost the strict “andy-O” rhyme on the B lines, though where the verse is ABCB, the B lines still rhyme on a line-final “O.” Also, all the verses which are *not* in ABCB form exhibit internal rhyme schemes on their third lines:

- *Oh come down stairs and comb back your hair*
- *What will your mammy think when she hears you are sick.*
- *For I will make him stand with hat in his hand,*

And the final ABCB verse also has an internal rhyme on the third line:

- *His name was captain Wade he died for a maid,*

More than any other early printed versions, these London broadsides most closely resemble the lyrics of modern versions of both “Pretty Peggy” and “The Bonnie Lass of Fyvie.”

#### Ireland - “Eveleen’s Bower” and Thomas Moore

Still, before any printed versions of “The Bonnie Lass of Fyvie” appeared, a song called “Eveleen’s Bower” became popular in Ireland and Scotland. “Eveleen’s Bower” first appears in the second volume of Thomas Moore’s *Irish Melodies* (c.1807). This was a collection of Moore’s lyrics set to traditional Irish tunes, published in 10 volumes between 1803 and 1834. This tune’s words are written by Moore and arranged for piano and voice by John Stevenson.<sup>42</sup> Moore indicated that his song was set to an “Air - Unknown,” but a footnote in an 1852 edition (the year of Moore’s death) says “Our claim to this Air has been disputed: but they who are best acquainted with national melodies, pronounce it to be Irish. It is generally known by the name of

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<sup>42</sup> “Eveleen’s Bower,” *The Traditional Tune Archive*, accessed October 2016.  
[http://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Eveleen's\\_Bower](http://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Eveleen's_Bower)

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff is labeled "Pretty Peggy of Darby" (Skillern) and the bottom staff is labeled "Eveleen's Bower" (Moore). Both are in 4/4 time and F Major. The top staff starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The bottom staff starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The top staff has a measure number '5' above the first measure. Both staves end with a double bar line and repeat dots.

**EXAMPLE 1: The melodies of “Pretty Peggy of Darby” and “Eveleen’s Bower.”** “Pretty Peggy of Darby” from Skillern’s *Twenty Four Country Dances for the Year 1782*, on top; “Eveleen’s Bower” taken from Moore’s *Irish Melodies* (1807), below. Both melodies were transposed to F Major and Skillern’s was put in 4/4 (instead of 2/4).

“The pretty Girl of Derby, O.”<sup>43</sup>

Though they do differ in their final cadences – “Peggy” has a more modally-inflected D-F cadence compared to the more tonal C-F of “Eveleen” - the melodic contour of “Eveleen’s Bower” as Moore/Stevenson have written it is nearly indistinguishable to that of Skillern and *Two to One* (Example 1). If Moore truly was unaware of the title of the air to which he was setting his lyrics, he must not have learned it from one of the common printed sources discussed above. This would provide further evidence that the tune was known to some degree in Ireland before it was a printed melody. Moore’s *Irish Melodies* was reprinted at least half a dozen times - in Boston, Dublin, Glasgow, and London - well after his death and into the early 20th century. “Eveleen’s Bower” also appears in multiple sheet music collections in the mid-1800’s, usually without lyrics (Appendix IV, pages 11-12).

### Scotland and the “Bonny Lass”

The examples thus far have covered every possible title for this melody except for the one that

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Moore and John Stevenson, *Moore’s Irish Melodies, with Symphonies and Accompaniments by Sir John Stevenson* (Boston, 1852), 46.

endured through the 1960s to the present day: “The Bonnie Lass of Fyvie.” The earliest version of a song by that name comes from an 1876 songbook published by William Christie, *Traditional Ballad Airs*. It contains vocal harmonies and piano accompaniment for a tune called “The Bonny Lass O’ Fyvie.” The score provides this history of the song: “The Ballad is given from the recitation of a native of Monquhitter, with some alterations from a native of Banffshire, who knows many of the traditional Ballad Airs and Ballads sung in the three north-eastern Counties of Scotland. He was of opinion that the Ballad was composed after a company of Dragoons had escorted the O’Connors to Fort-George, who had been engaged in the Irish rebellion in 1798...The Ballad and Air are still known in different forms in the Counties of Aberdeen and Banff.”

If this background is correct, it would appear that this song’s history in Scotland was similar to its history in America: the tune existed first, then was rewritten with words about a topical military event. The only earlier versions of this song collected in Scotland are an 1828 version of “The Bonny Lass O’ Fyvie” collected by Peter Buchan and a version from Thomas Lyle’s 1827 *Ancient Ballads And Songs, Chiefly From Tradition, Manuscripts, And Scarce Works*. The latter contains six verses of a song called “Pretty Peggy of Derby.” This tune, Lyle claims, was a “once popular piece, whose air has been adapted to songs without number, and latterly, by Moor [*sic*], for his ‘Eveleen’s Bower’.”<sup>44</sup> From these three sources, we can confidently assume that a tune like “Peggy” was known in Northern Scotland by the names “Pretty Peggy” and “Bonnie Lass” in the early nineteenth century. The obvious next question is how this tune came to Scotland.

Of the three sources mentioned above, only Christie’s includes sheet music. A side-by-side comparison of Christie’s and Skillern’s melodies normalized for time and key signature can be seen below in Image 5. The melody in Christie’s transcription is nearly unrecognizable as the melody to “Eveleen’s Bower” or “Pretty Peggy of Darby” from Skillern’s *Country Dances*. This is

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Lyle, *Ancient Ballads and Songs* (London, 1827), 162-163.

partly due to the fact that Christie's melody is in a minor key. It also has a heavily dotted rhythm and its tempo is indicated as "Slowly and smoothly." This is unprecedented in printed versions of "Peggy" thus far. Though Christie harmonized his melody and adorned it with grace notes and rallentandos, he claims to have transcribed the basic melody from two oral sources - "a native of Monquhitter, with some alterations from a native of Banffshire." He also writes that this piece was arranged "from two sets, - one sung by his paternal grandmother to "The bonny Lass o' Fyvie," - the other sung to "Barbara Allan" by his maternal grandmother,"<sup>45</sup> so these are presumably the two native Scots. This still doesn't explain the exceptional melody: it would be tempting to explain it as a result of this being a combination of two ballads, but the melody doesn't resemble "Barbara Allen" at all, and it is still vaguely recognizable as a slower, minor version of, for example, Skillern's "Peggy."

The lyrics provide another possible connection between this and earlier versions of the song of this unusual version. The lyrics from the Pitts London broadside (c.1802-1870), Thomas Lyle's book (1827), and William Christie's score (1876), we display a few notable similarities.<sup>46</sup> All three of these versions include the arrival of the Irish Dragoons, a plea to Peggy to come down stairs, some form of the question "What would your mammy think?", Peggy claiming she'll never be a soldier's wife, and some relative of the captain begging him to move on and there are plenty of bonnie lasses elsewhere. These are the verses that make up the general plotline of the later commercial folk recordings. Christie's version includes far more verses than either of the others, but its wording of common verses is much closer to the broadside than to Lyle's. A reasonable conclusion would be that the lyrics came to Scotland via broadside, extra verses were added (including the opening "Green grow the birks..." verse that becomes standard in later versions), and the lyrics were put to a slower, sadder tune than the original (though one that still resembled the older tune to some degree). Unfortunately, without knowing a more

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<sup>45</sup> William Christie, *Traditional Ballad Airs* (Edinburgh, 1876), 276.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix IV, pages 16-17 for the full side-by-side comparison of these three sources.



**EXAMPLE 2: The melodies of Moore’s “Eveleen’s Bower” (1807) and Christie’s “The bonny Lass o’ Fyvie” (1876).** Both versions have been transposed to F (major and minor, respectively).

precise date for the broadside, it’s impossible to assert this transmission path; but regardless, the interaction between the broadside and the Scottish lyrics at some point in this song’s history is clearly evident.

#### IV. “Peggy” in Field Recordings

The Scottish printed versions of this song are interesting for another reason: they are the earliest “field recordings” of “Peggy” or “Bonnie Lass” as a folk song. Both Lyle and Christie make reference to the fact that their versions were transcribed from oral sources and that the authorship is unknown. Lyle’s version was “collated with a copy taken down from recitation, we never having seen the original Ballad in print.” Christie’s was taken “from recitation” by his grandparents.

The end of the nineteenth century was the beginning of folklore studies as an academic discipline; and by the turn of the twentieth century, folklorists inspired by Child were out “in the field” gathering the “cultural survivals” of an earlier era. The source material from this time period comes from their field recordings. Because they were interested in both lyrics and music of folk song, their sources offer much more detailed insight into the musical evolution of “Peggy.” Over the first half of the twentieth century, the melody and lyrics of “Peggy” solidified

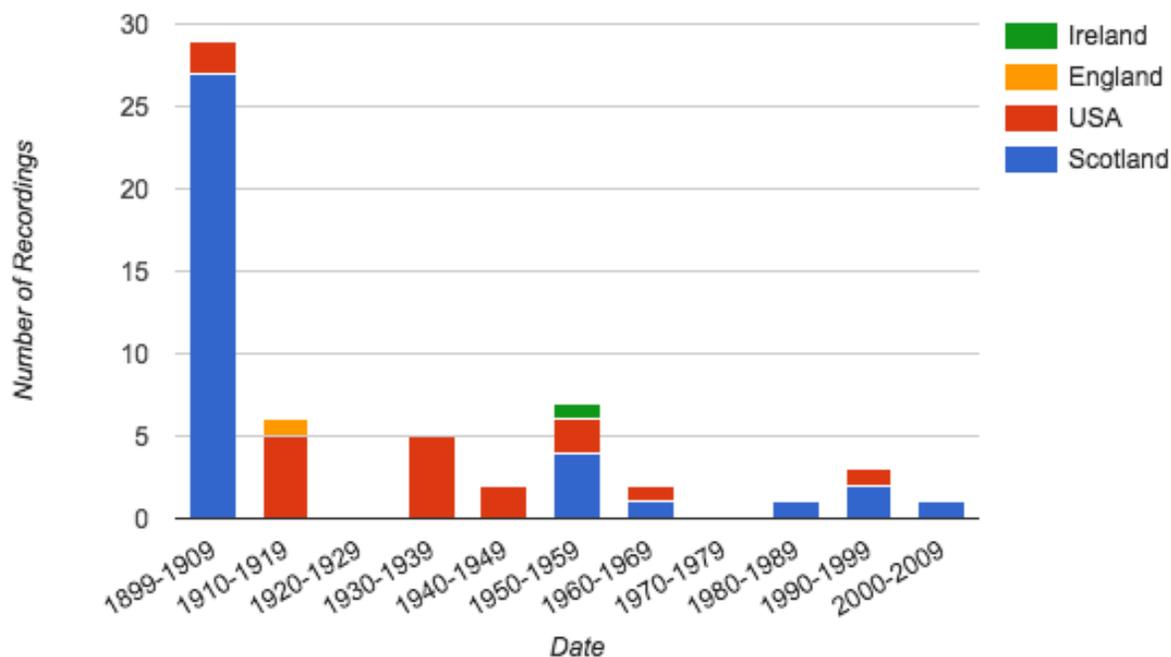
into three distinct versions of the song. The general trend was *away* from complete rewriting of the lyrics and *towards* more small-scale, regional melodic and harmonic variation. In this section, I will illustrate as objectively as possible of the state of “Peggy” in the world from 1900-1960.

### Sources and Methodology

The definition of “field recording” is somewhat slippery. I define field recording as any audio recording *or* paper transcription that was created with the intention of documentation, from an oral source who learned the song in the oral tradition. I have record of fifty-six such field recordings of “Peggy” since 1899. Like their printed cousins, the titles used in these sources often vary, appearing as “Pretty Peggy O,” “The Bonnie Lass Of Fyvie,” “The Maid of Fife,” “Pretty Peg of Derby,” and “Fennario.” The quantity of field recordings peaked in the beginning of the twentieth century, and has steadily declined to the present day. (Figure 4).

Most of the recordings of this song were made in Scotland (thirty-six variants), followed by the U.S. (eighteen variants). Sixty-four percent were made before 1920. Twenty-four of the Scottish versions come from a pair of folklorists, Gavin Greig and James Bruce Duncan, who collected folk songs between 1902 and the beginning of World War I. The majority of their collection of “Peggy” variants was published in the first volume of the *Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection* in 1981. The U.S. versions come from a wider variety of collectors - fourteen people collected the eighteen versions. Cecil Sharp collected four of the U.S. variants but none of the British ones. Of the fifty-six sources, thirty-nine have music - either notated melody or in the form of an audio recording. It is these thirty-nine sources which I will discuss in this section.

Of the fifty-six transcriptions, forty come from book sources (this includes all the Greig-Duncan transcriptions), two from folklore journals, three from manuscript collections, ten from audio recordings, and one from a graduate thesis. The vast majority of these sources were



**FIGURE 4: Field Recordings of “Peggy” by Location Over Time.<sup>47</sup>**

located via the Roud Folksong Database on the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library website,<sup>48</sup> and the rest were cited within other sources. In this section, I will refer to songs by their “source number.” This is a name that I assigned to each variant for easier reference. Source numbers are of the form “000\_Name,” where the numeral is a number from 000 to 061 assigned to each variant in the order that I found them, and the name is the name of the performer of the variant, or where not available, the name of the collector or publisher. More detailed information about every source can be found in Appendix II.

For audio field recordings, I did all of the melodic, rhythmic, and lyrical transcriptions from the recording. I notated rhythms accurate to the sixteenth note and mostly avoided any dialectal or pronunciation-specific spellings with a few exceptions, including *o’* for “of”, *doon* for “down”, *howe* for “whole,” *yer* for “your”, and *toon* for “town.” These spellings appeared in many other transcriptions (not my own), and were true enough to the sound and different enough from the standard to warrant notating. Lyrics and melodies for all field records can be seen in

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix II for a year-by-year breakdown of individual sources.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.vwml.org/rouddnumber/545>.

Appendix V.

I found that melodic contour charts were an effective way to compare variants. I used several tools to build the charts. I put all the tunes into MusicXML (.xml) format, and used MIT's music21, a Python "toolkit for computer-aided musicology,"<sup>49</sup> to extract information about key, mode, ambitus, pitch class counts, and time signature; the contour charts were generated using a modification of cjwit's contourviz code<sup>50</sup> which uses music21 and D3.js to create an interactive contour graph for online use. The interactive graph can be viewed online at <http://www.carolineglazer.com/>.

The primary goal of this section is objectivity. Objectivity is nearly impossible when dealing with sources as subjective as field recordings. There are opportunities for human error in every aspect of their creation: transcriptionists could ignore details of rhythm or make different decisions about notating a slightly longer phrases in 4/4 or 5/4; and traditional key signatures assigned to a capella melodies sung outside of that tradition can be a poor representation of what's actually going on. The way I have chosen to counter the effects of human bias inherent in these sources is to work with a big dataset and assume consistent and accurate methodology for all of them. In the remainder of this section, I will walk through the decisions I made to reach broader, factual conclusions about "Peggy" in the first half of the twentieth century. I have made my process transparent to allow others to disagree with the conclusions I've reached.

### *Describing "Peggy": 1900-1960*

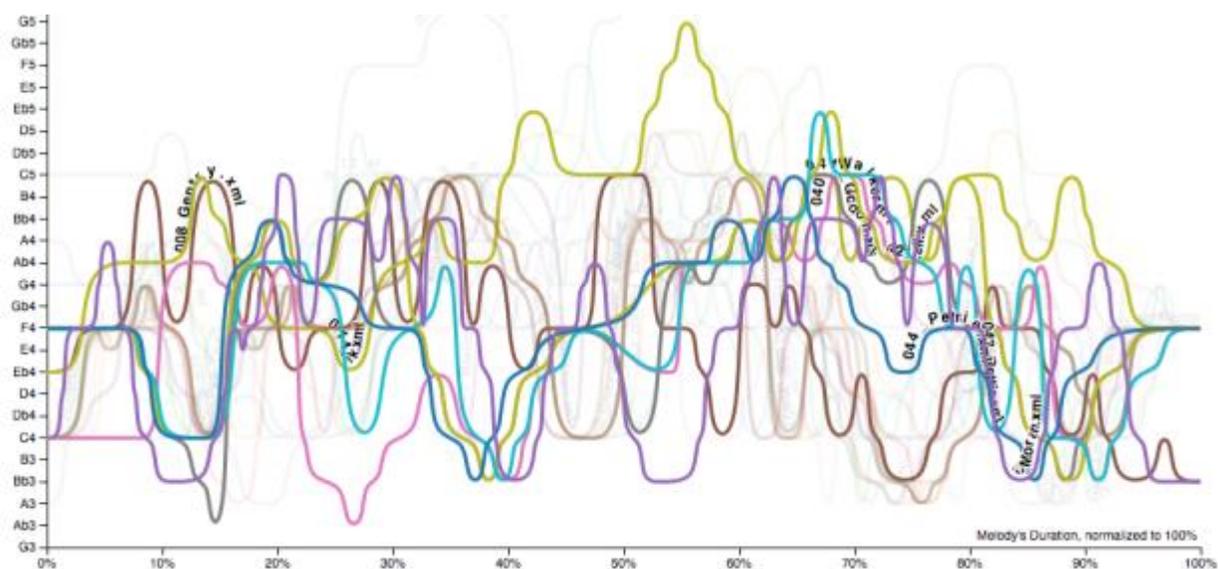
Thirty-nine "Peggy" variants have music. Twenty-six of those are Scottish, twelve are American, and one is Irish. Before talking about melodic and harmonic variation in "Peggy," I would like to identify and describe a generic "Peggy" that best represents the most common form of the tune. There are several ways of grouping all thirty-nine variants, starting with mode.

There are eight minor versions of the song. Five minor versions are Scottish, two are

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<sup>49</sup> <http://web.mit.edu/music21/>

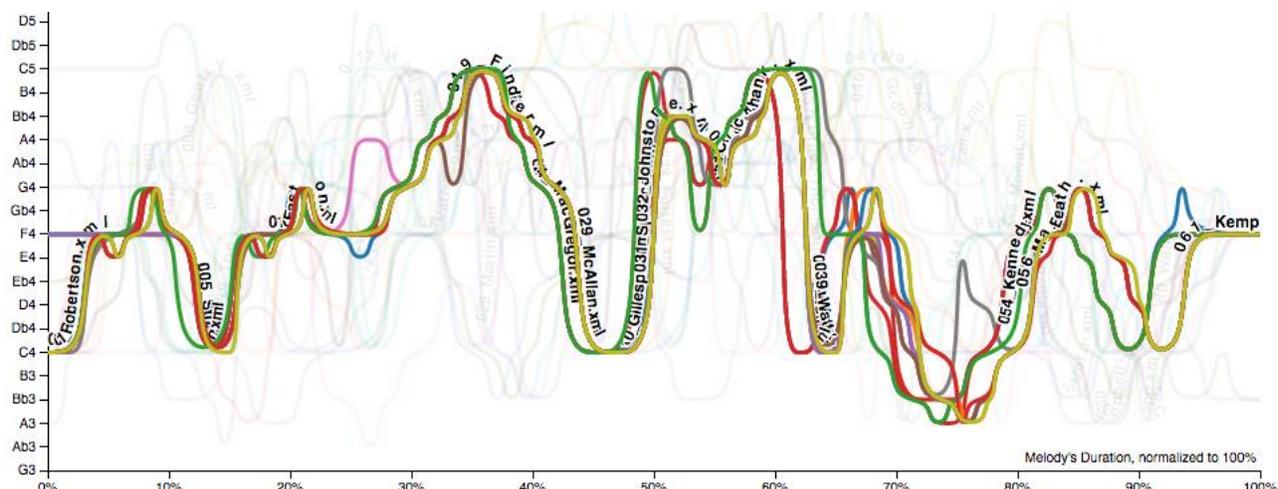
<sup>50</sup> <https://github.com/carolineglazer/contourviz>



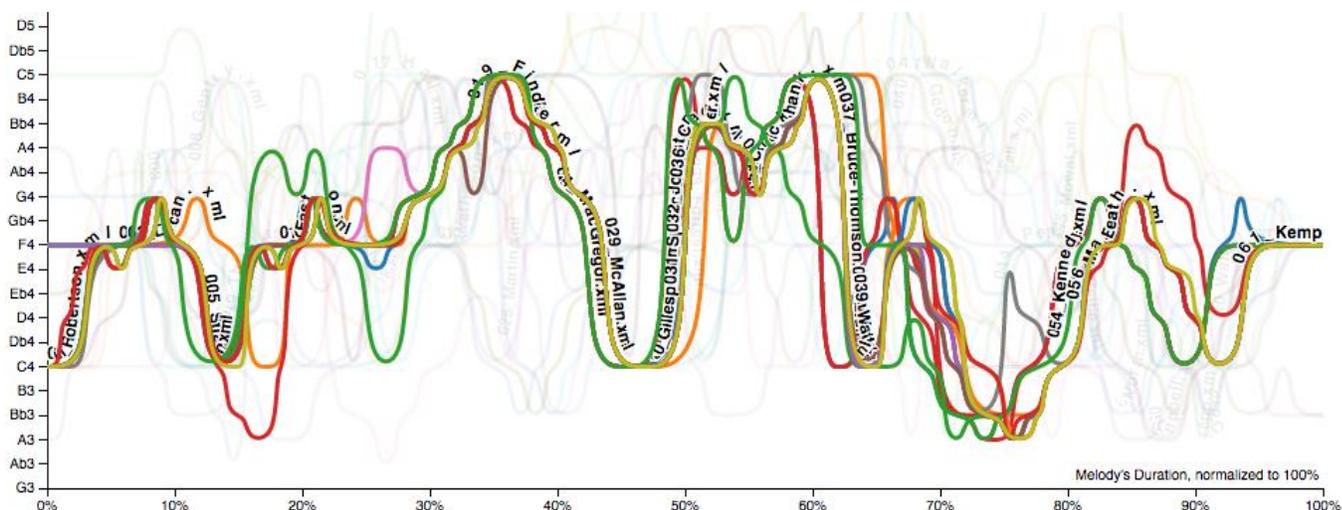
**FIGURE 5: Melodic contours of the eight minor variants of “Peggy.”** Melodies are normalized for key and duration. This includes variants: 008\_Gentry, 014\_Brink, 040\_Walker, 041\_Gordon, 042\_Lyall, 043\_Rettie, 044\_Petrie, and 057\_Moran. For this and all following figures, you can view the details for all highlighted variants by going to Appendix II and sorting by “Fig. 7.”

American, and one is Irish. In terms of melodic contour, they have no obvious relationship (Figure 5). They start and end on different pitches, jump to different octaves, and – in the case of 057\_Moran – start out in a major mode before switching into the parallel minor.

There is a much clearer relationship between the melodic contours of all the major “Peggy” variants. First, there is an obvious “most common” contour shared by sixteen variants of “Peggy” (Figure 6), and three more variants follow this contour only slightly less strictly (Figure 7). All of these versions start either on tonic or on a pickup a fifth below tonic, and all end on tonic. That means that nineteen variants out of thirty-nine - or a little under 49% - are nearly identical in contour. Because the minor variants are so clearly unrelated to each other, they are incomparable with the major variants, meaning that nineteen out of thirty-one - or just over 61% - of all major variants of “Peggy” are roughly identical. Of these nineteen variants, eighteen are Scottish and one is American. They range in date from 1901 to 2004. They are all eight bars long and in 4/4 time. But this is not satisfactorily concrete. To better define the generic “Peggy”



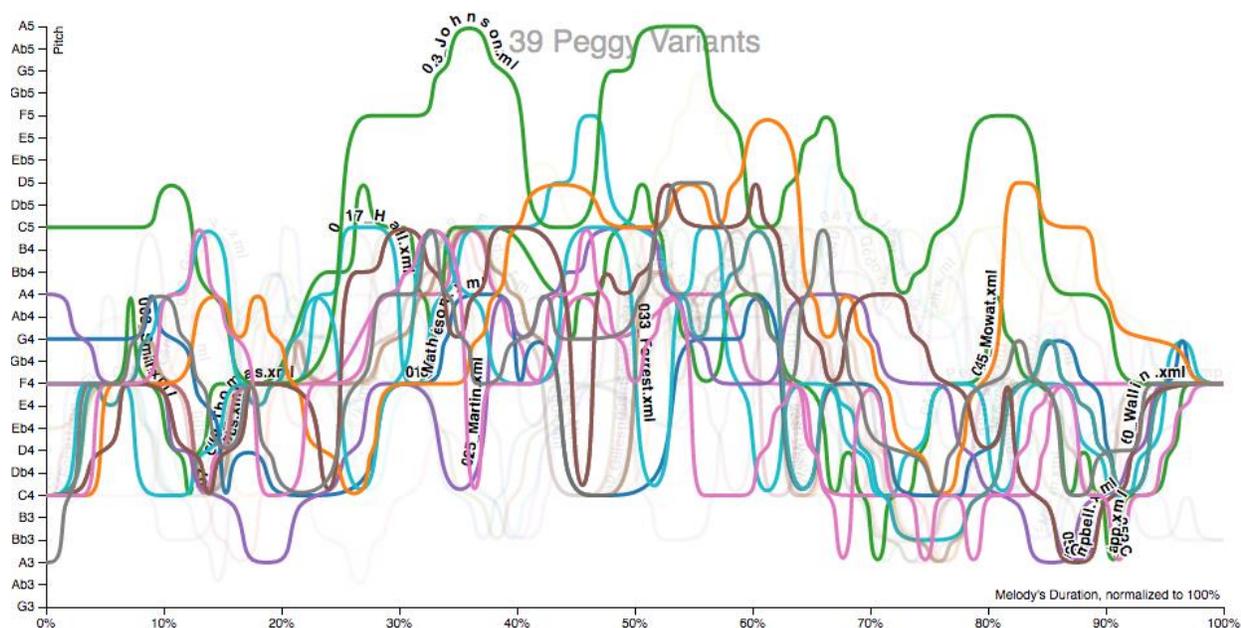
**FIGURE 6: “Most common” melodic contour of the “Peggy” melody.** This includes sixteen variants: 001\_Robertson, 005\_Strachan, 010\_Easton, 019\_Findlater, 024\_MacGregor, 029\_McAllan, 030\_Gillespie, 031\_Spencer, 032\_Johnstone, 034\_Davidson, 035\_Cruickshank, 038\_Walker, 039\_Watt, 054\_Kennedy, 056\_MacBeath, and 061\_Kemp.



**Figure 7: Melodic contour of the generic “Peggy” melody.** This includes nineteen variants: all those from Figure 3, plus 002\_Duncan, 036\_Calder, and 037\_Bruce-Thomas.

melody, I will eventually turn to musical notation for these versions. But first, I want to address the remaining twelve major variants (Figure 8) that don't fit this “generic” contour highlighted in Figure 7.

These variants display a wide and unpredictable range of melodic contours. Some of the distinguishing features of these more disparate variants are obvious: meter and verse length. Three variants are of unusual verse length: two are ten measures long, one is only six. Three



**FIGURE 8: Melodic contours of the remaining twelve major variants of “Peggy”** This includes all major variants that don’t resemble the generic melody identified in Fig. 9: 003\_Smith, 007\_Combs, 009\_Thomas, 017\_Hall, 018\_Mathieson, 023\_Johnson, 025\_Martin, 033\_Forrest, 045\_Mowat, 058\_Campbell, 059\_Clapp, and 060\_Wallin

more variants are in unusual (for this group) or mixed meters: two start out in 3/4 then shift to 4/4, and one is in 6/8. To understand the defining differences of the other six disparate variants, I will switch to musical notation. This view will let us see some concrete musical features that define and distinguish the generic “Peggy” from the more disparate “Peggy” variants. In Example 2, I compare the most *visually* distinct variant of “Peggy” (023\_Johnson, the green contour in Table 5 that goes much higher than the rest) alongside a generic “Peggy” (032\_Johnstone).

Both of these versions are eight bar, 4/4 melodies. The first most obvious difference is the starting octave. 023\_Johnson starts on a C5 but still ends in the same octave as the generic version. The two melodies differ in rhythm and contour for the first three measures. In Box A, however, the lines come together - albeit in different octaves - and look much more alike through the end of the verse. In Box B, these two variants differ in one of the more dramatic ways that “Peggy” variants can differ: they end the third line of the verse on different harmonies.

023\_Johnson: non-generic

032\_Johnstone: generic

5

A

B

C

**EXAMPLE 2:** One of the most distinct melodies (023\_Johnson) compared with the generic melody (032\_Johnstone).

The generic “Peggy” lands on a B-flat, implying the IV chord. 023\_Johnson, on the other hand, lands on C, implying either I or V (but probably I). By Box C, in both versions, the harmony is back to I for a final authentic V-I cadence.

All of the variants identified in Figure 4 as “generic” have this same cadence in the sixth measure (i.e. at the end of the third line of the verse). This will become one of the defining features of generic “Peggy.” But first, recall that eighteen of the nineteen generic “Peggy” variants are Scottish. That’s eighteen out of twenty-six *total* Scottish variants with music. Thus, it seems appropriate to group these as the “Generic Scottish” variants. The Generic Scottish “Peggy” has four defining musical features:

- 1) Measure 2 echoes the motif in the first measure
- 2) Measures 3-4 land on a V chord, going up to C5 (i.e. high fifth above tonic) in m. 3 then implying the V in m. 4 with G down to C4.
- 3) Measure 6 (i.e. the third phrase) ends on a plagal half cadence (I to IV)
- 4) Measure 8 moves *up* to F4 (i.e. tonic), rather than staying in place or moving down

Finally, I want to suggest a set of features shared by the majority of the un-generic, major variants. To review, there are twelve of these, and nine of those are American. Of those nine

American variants, six variants - and all the variants that are 8 bars long - share the following two features that I claim will define the “Generic American” variants:

1) The motif in bars 1-2 is sequenced at a higher pitch in bars 3-4. The reason this feature doesn’t show up as a melodic similarity in the melodic contour chart is because the interval between the two phrases differs across variants: sometimes it’s a third above, sometimes a fourth, and sometimes a sixth.

2) The cadence in bar 6, at the end of the third line of the verse, is to a V or I harmony. Three of the variants in this group land on an A, implying a cadence to the I; the other three variants land on a C, implying a cadence to the V or the I.

Two more of the un-generic major variants have the first feature above, but not the second. Obviously, these features are not generalizable to all of the un-generic variants. However, eight of the twelve total American variants of this song with music have at least the first of these two features; and six of the twelve have both of them. This suggests that the seemingly disparate un-generic “Peggy” variants are not as random as they appear, and that the two features above are the distinguishing characteristics of a Generic American group of “Peggy” variants.

Four major groups have emerged: Generic Scottish, Generic American, Minor, and Miscellaneous (Table 4). Since a key difference between Generic Scottish and Generic American versions is, essentially, a difference between opening phrases, it feels important to acknowledge the possibility that these are simply two different songs. In fact, all but one Generic American variant is called some version of “Pretty Peggy (O)”<sup>51</sup> and all but one Generic Scottish variant has a title that looks something like “Bonnie [Bonny] Lass of [O’] Fyvie.”<sup>52</sup> However, the titles of the remaining variants – the Minor and Miscellaneous variants – go by the same set of titles but with no correlation to melodic grouping, so this theory falls apart slightly. I’ll return once more to the question of whether these are actually two separate songs, but it is

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<sup>51</sup> The exception is 023\_Johnson, titled “Troops Are Marching to loway.”

<sup>52</sup> The exception is 018\_Mathieson, titled “Bonnie Barbara”

| Group            | Quantity Scottish | Quantity American | Quantity Other | Total |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------|
| Generic Scottish | 18                | 1                 | 0              | 19    |
| Generic American | 0                 | 7                 | 0              | 7     |
| Minor            | 5                 | 2                 | 1              | 8     |
| Miscellaneous    | 3                 | 2                 | 0              | 5     |
|                  |                   |                   |                | 39    |

**TABLE 4: Groupings for all 39 “Peggy” variants that have accompanying musical notation.**

always a difficult question to answer definitively. Regardless, in the second half of the 20th century, versions of the song (and especially commercial recordings) are much more likely to fall into the grouping of either Generic American or Generic Scottish. In these cases, song title becomes a very reliable indicator of melodic group.

## **V. The Beginnings of Commercial Folk: 1940-1960**

The similarities between all these variants would not have been surprising to folk song collectors of the 19th and early 20th centuries, who regularly marveled at the accuracy of oral transmission. In 1840, folklorist Edward Bunting wrote in his book *Ancient Music of Ireland*, “A strain of music once impressed upon the popular ear, never varies.”<sup>53</sup> A few years later, Scottish poet and scholar William Motherwell noted “how excellently well tradition serves as a substitute for more efficient and less mutable channels of communicating the things of past ages to posterity.”<sup>54</sup> Cecil Sharp was still amazed 60 years later at “the memories of the unlettered [which are] far more retentive and trustworthy than those of cultivated people.”<sup>55</sup> These observations about the quality of oral transmission and its uncanny ability to preserve melodies

<sup>53</sup> Edward Bunting, *Ancient Music of Ireland* (Dublin, 1840), 1-2.

<sup>54</sup> William Motherwell, *Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern* (Boston, 1846), 3-4.

<sup>55</sup> Sharp, 17.

over hundreds years may very well be true. However, folklorists like Bunting, Motherwell, and Sharp really wanted to see patterns over time, and this affected not only the way that they heard and transcribed music, but the songs that they chose to transcribe in the first place. This is not to say that “real” folk music disappeared when academic folklorists came into existence, but its presentation to the public should not be assumed to be complete. When later commercial artists wanted to record a “traditional folk song” they were choosing from amongst an already cherry-picked data set.

Interest in making commercial recordings of traditional music began near-simultaneously with folk revivals in the UK and the U.S. The beginning of the Scottish Folk Revival can be pretty precisely dated to the first People’s Festival Ceilidh in Edinburgh in August 1951, organized by Scottish poet Hamish Henderson in response to the official Edinburgh Festival of art music and culture. The purpose of the People’s Festival was “to initiate action designed to bring the Edinburgh Festival closer to the people, to serve the cause of international understanding and goodwill.”<sup>56</sup> The festival featured many Scottish traditional singers, performing unaccompanied vocal ballads in the traditional style. For most of the general public, this festival was their first introduction to traditional Scottish music. Singers who would become huge names in the world of Scottish traditional music performed, including John Strachan singing “The Bonny Lass O Fyvie.” The field recordings of “Peggy” from the 1950s include two singers who made their public debut at this People’s Festival: Jimmy MacBeath and Jeannie Robertson.<sup>57</sup>

After the first People’s Festival, Henderson continued to make his own recordings of traditional Scottish singers. One of these recordings - of Willie Mathieson singing a tune called “Bonnie Barbara” - is unique in several ways. I list this version in the “Miscellaneous” melodic group because, though it sequences the melody from bars 1-2 in bars 3-4, that pattern is

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<sup>56</sup> Ewan McVicar, liner notes for *1951 Edinburgh People's Festival Ceilidh*. Rounder Records, Rounder CD 1786. 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Heather Sparling, "1951 Edinburgh People's Festival Ceilidh/Gaelic Songs of Scotland: Women at Work in the Western Isles." *Journal of American Folklore* 122, no. 483 (Winter 2009): 83-85.

repeated a whole step *down*. It exhibits the same plagal half cadence in measure six, but its backwards sequencing makes it distinct enough to be considered unique. This version also switches to the Generic Scottish melody in the second verse: Mathieson starts the “Why should I come down when I’m locked up in a room” verse with the same melodic phrase repeated in bars 1 and 2. Unfortunately, the recording is cut off after the second line of this verse, but at this point, Henderson and Mathieson address the question of delineation between different songs:

**Hamish Henderson:** The tune of that song is more or less the same as “The Bonnie Lass of Fyvie,” but it sounds to me like a very different version of it.

**Willie Mathieson:** Oh, it’s another version of it, [inaudible].

**Hamish Henderson:** It’s a different song?

**Willie Mathieson:** It’s a different tune, because [inaudible].<sup>58</sup>

Mathieson is claiming here that “Bonnie Barbara” and “The Bonnie Lass of Fyvie” are actually two distinct songs. Henderson seems convinced that they are closely related versions of the same song. Mathieson’s version of the melody (with the first two bars repeated down a step) doesn’t appear in any recordings before or after this one. The title “Bonnie Barbara” is also unusual for this song. In any case, we can conclude from this that there was some awareness of the existence of multiple versions of “Peggy,” regardless of how different or overlapping they actually were. This recording is a good example of the two melodies, each of which fits better with certain verses, coexisting in the same version of the song. This kind of overlap disappears in subsequent commercial recordings of the song, as artists choose one melody or the other.

Despite the success of the 1951 Ceilidh, the Communist ties of its leadership caused the Scottish Trade Unions Congress to label it a “Communist Front” and withdraw their funding. Attendance declined until the last People’s Festival was held in 1954. Still, this festival marked the beginning of the Folk Revival in Scotland, and introduced both the general public and internationally influential folklorists to Scottish traditional music.<sup>59</sup> Two folklorists in attendance were Ewan MacColl and Alan Lomax. Their presence virtually guaranteed that *some* music from

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<sup>58</sup> 018\_Mathieson, see Appendix V: “Lyrics and Melodies of Field Recordings.”

<sup>59</sup> Sparling, 83-85.

it would eventually make its way to the United States, which was in the beginning stages of its own folk revival. In the early 1940s, the Almanac Singers - whose members included Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie - sparked a public interest in American folk music. They were the first musical group of their kind in America: they dressed casually, invited audience participation, and performed topical songs that were influenced by American folk music. By 1943, they were blacklisted and forced to disband, but they had introduced the American public to the new and exciting world of American folk music.

By the mid-1950s, artists and consumers alike were eager for new “traditional” material, and they were finding it in collections of American folk music. Harry Smith’s six-LP *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952) featured field recordings of singers from all over the Southern Appalachians, and Pete Seeger’s *Frontier Ballads* (1954) featured Seeger performing songs he’d collected from across the American West. The Weavers, an Almanac Singers offshoot group that included Seeger, re-formed in 1955 and remained active through the 1960s. They were a huge commercial success and made later folk revival classics like “On Top of Old Smoky”, “The Midnight Special”, and “Wimoweh” famous amongst the general public. The Weavers inspired influential folk groups like The Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul, and Mary. Groups like the New Lost City Ramblers, formed in 1958, were inspired by Seeger to travel out “into the field” in search of the most obscure, most “authentic” folk songs. The public was now also aware of Child’s ballad research and the link between American and British folk music, and there was a market for collections of folk music from the UK. Alan Lomax made three BBC-financed recording trips to Scotland in 1951, 1953, and 1958, and collected songs all across the UK under the guidance of Hamish Henderson.<sup>60</sup> And, all-importantly in the history of “Peggy,” Ewan MacColl released the album *Scots Folk Songs* in 1956.

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<sup>60</sup> “Scotland 1951, 1953, and 1958,” *Association for Cultural Equity*, accessed November 2016. <http://research.culturalequity.org/get-audio-ix.do?ix=session&id=SC51&idType=abbrev&sortBy=abc>

## VI. “Peggy” in Commercial Recordings

Ultimately, most commercial folk artists did not learn “Peggy” directly from field recordings, but from a very small set of recordings made by folk singers at the turn of the 1960s. By the end of the 1960s, the song had been recorded by eighteen different American folk singers. Figure 9 displays a histogram of all commercial “Peggy” recordings in the U.S. and Europe from the years 1956 to 2008.<sup>61</sup>

Ewan MacColl’s 1956 album *Scots Folk Songs* was the first exposure that many Americans had to “Peggy.” Bob Dylan listened to MacColl’s albums,<sup>62</sup> and at least three early 60s folkies explicitly cite Ewan MacColl as the source for their versions of “Peggy.” MacColl’s version of the tune, called “The Bonnie Lass O’Fyvie,” is to the Generic Scottish melody, and arranged simply with solemn lyrics recited in a heavy Scottish accent against finger-picked guitar.

The next commercial release of “Peggy” comes from the French folk group Les Compagnons de la Chanson, who recorded a song called “Peggy-O” on their 1958 EP *Les Comédiens*, entirely in French. The source for their version is unclear. Their melody is different from MacColl’s, and they’ve altered the storyline so that the Irish captain is fighting against members of Peggy’s family, he’s her cousin, and they make reference to “the Louisiana sky.” For now, where they learned the song must remain a mystery.

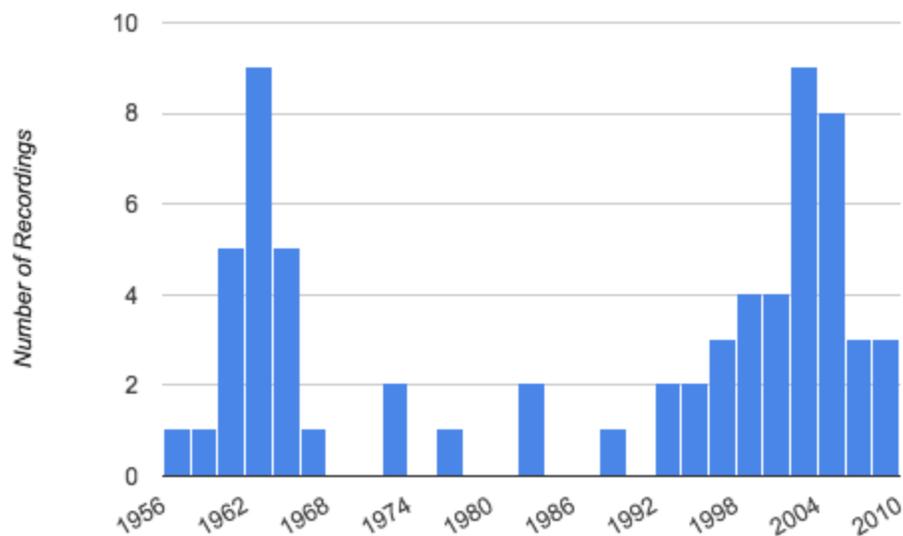
The first commercial release of “Peggy” in the U.S. is from Tossi Aaron on her 1960 debut album *Tossi Sings Folk Songs and Ballads*. When asked about this version in 2007, Bob Weir of the Grateful Dead said, “I heard folkies doing these songs this way back in the early 60’s...Sounds like Tossi Aaron could have been an early inspiration for Joan Baez.”<sup>63</sup> Weir’s

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<sup>61</sup> “Appendix III: List of Commercial Recordings” is the relevant Appendix for this section. It contains every commercial variant I have located from between 1956 and 2008, plus a few more from 2008 to present.

<sup>62</sup> Jim Miller, “Bob Dylan,” in *The Dylan Companion*, ed. Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman (London: Macmillan, 1990), 18-19.

<sup>63</sup> “Dead Songs in Depth: Topic 159: Peggy-O,” *The Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link*, accessed October 2016. <http://www.well.com/conf/deadsongs.vue/topics/159/Peggy-O-page01.html>.



**FIGURE 9: Commercial Recordings of “Peggy”: 1956-2008.**

speculation brings up a salient question about all folk revival versions of “Peggy”: Who is learning the song from whom? We can tell a little bit from liner notes, but they are often misleading. Looking at details of melody, rhythm, and lyrics is more helpful.

From 1960 onwards, the covers of “Peggy” that are released in the U.S. fall into a few different camps. First, there are folk-y versions like Tossi Aaron’s “Fennario”: female singers with clear, high voices singing against simple guitar backing or solo male singers with (usually) more driving and upbeat guitar accompaniment. These include Joan Baez, who never released the song on a studio album but sings “Fennario” on the popular 1963 *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2*. Another typical example in this genre is Sunny Schwartz, who is described in her liner notes as a “fan of Ewan McColl [sic],” but whose version - following the Generic American melody and titled “Fennario” - much more closely resembles Joan Baez’s. Typical male versions in this first style include Hoyt Axton’s version of “Peggy-O,” which is, as he introduces it in a live version from 1962, about a “beautiful blonde girl from the town of Fennario in Ireland.”<sup>64</sup> Another folk singer, Steve Camacho, introduces his 1962 performance of “Marching to Fennario”: “Here’s a

<sup>64</sup> Hoyt Axton, *The Balladeer: Recorded Live at the Troubadour*. Horizon Records, WP-1601. 1962.

song that thrills the cockles of my heart...It's called Fennario. I presume it's Irish or English."<sup>65</sup>

The inclusion of “Fennario” in the title of this song is new in the history of “Peggy,” and the origin of its entrance into the lyrics of “Peggy” is unclear and widely debated, especially by Grateful Dead enthusiasts. It is definitively not a place in Ireland or anywhere else in the world.<sup>66</sup>

Versions in this genre mostly stick to the Generic American melody, but most of them introduce minor chords – vi and iii – and swap out the I-IV cadence in m. 6 for a i-vi cadence. And all of them sequence the first two-bar phrase on a higher pitch in mm. 3-4. Finally, there’s an unprecedented trend in versions in this genre: many of the artists lengthen the first two lines of the verse by around two beats each. Joan Baez, Liz Getz, Walter Forbes, and eventually Simon and Garfunkel, do this. Gerry Armstrong, Judy Collins, Steve Camacho, and Hoyt Axton do not. Sunny Schwartz does it on the first line, but not the second. And Bob Lind, on his 1966 version of “Fennario,” switches between first and second verse lines that are three and a half, three, two and a half, and two measures long.

The second style of “Peggy” covers released in the early sixties are by male vocal groups in the vein of the Kingston Trio. Simon and Garfunkel, as mentioned above, have the same stretchy line lengths as Joan Baez, suggesting that they may have learned the tune from her. But they significantly altered the melody and added more complicated harmonies underneath than exist in any earlier versions of the song. Both The Chad Mitchell Trio and The Journeymen - two American, all-male groups in the vein of The Kingston Trio - recorded versions of the song. The Chad Mitchell Trio’s version is called “Bonny Streets of Fyve-lo,” follows the Generic Scottish melody, and is accompanied by a few guitars; The Journeymen’s is called “Fenario,” follows the Generic American melody, and is accompanied by banjo and bass. Of these three versions, Simon and Garfunkel’s is the only one that endures into the later 20th

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<sup>65</sup> Steve Camacho, *Folk and Other Songs*. Cook Records, COOK01127. 1962.

<sup>66</sup> I’ll address this issue no further, except to direct the curious reader to this long and ultimately inconclusive discussion “Where’s Fennario?” on the Mudcat forum:  
<http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=17022>

century.

Finally, a third style of Scottish- or Irish-sounding cover of “Peggy” is released in the 1960s. These are all defined by their use of the Generic Scottish melody, some variant of the title “Bonnie Lass O’Fyvie,” and march timing. The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem are the earliest example of a group in this genre. They were an Irish folk group that moved to New York and became hugely popular in the folk revival. (Their appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show wearing classic Irish Aran sweaters famously caused sales of Aran sweaters in the U.S. to go up 700%.<sup>67</sup>) Their version, called “The Maid of Fife-E-O” was done as a vocal quartet with multiple guitars accompanying. It was possibly the inspiration for American folk singer Paul Clayton’s 1961 version of “Pretty Peggy-O” that follows the Generic Scottish melody and accompanies it with snare drum, whistling, bass, and piano. Finally, the Glenfolk Four, an Irish group consisting of three men and one woman, “first heard [the song] sung by Ewan MacColl” and released a version of “The Maid of Fife-O” in 1964. Their version also features snare and bass, and adds a guitar.

The distinction between these latter two styles is a little blurry. The vocal group recordings often verge on sounding like marches, but their instrumentation keeps them from really embodying that style. And the Scottish-style march versions are often sung by male vocal groups. This ambiguity of genre eventually disappears in the later twentieth century, and probably stems from this common theme in 1960s recordings of self-conscious “folkiness,” or the aim of authentic interpretation of a traditional ballad. There are a few exceptions, of course. Bob Dylan is the usual suspect for first and best known outlier. He does an upbeat version of the song, still an eight-bar form, but with fast, driving guitar, harmonica breaks, and a country twang. He also changes the lyrics: he adds a verse about the captain going down to Texas with the rodeo; and his melody sequences the same one-bar phrase three times (set, in the first

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<sup>67</sup> Liam Clancy, *The Mountain of the Women: Memoirs of an Irish Troubadour* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 279–280.

verse, to “as we marched down”) at higher and higher pitches. This form of the lyrics and melody is only repeated in one commercial recording that I can find: a 1998 “Peggy-O” from folk singer Jim Gaudet, who is almost certainly covering Dylan.

Perhaps the version of “Peggy” that is most responsible for the song’s enduring popularity in the U.S. is that by the Grateful Dead. Though they never released it on a studio album, they performed it live 265 times between 1973 and 1995. It includes the “lady like a dove” line mentioned above in Dylan’s version. This line - “our captain fell in love, with a lady like a dove” – is a purely American contribution to the lyrics. It shows up in seven field recordings (Appendix IV, pg. 18), but only ones recorded in the U.S. It also appears in several sixties folk revival recordings that pre-date the Grateful Dead, including Joan Baez’.

The version that the Grateful Dead performed changed very little over 22 years. They use the Generic American melody in that their version sequences the motif of mm.1-2 in mm.3-4, but their version is most understandable as a cover of Joan Baez. It stretches the first two lines of the verse, like Baez did, and it is always performed as a slow ballad, with minor chords and a i-vi cadence at the end of the third line. In the liner notes to a 2003 cover of “Pretty Peggy-O” by Ed Littlefield, Jr., Glenn Howard (founder of the American Musical Heritage Foundation) writes, “Years ago I asked Jerry Garcia about the Dead’s source, and he told me he did it because of the Joan Baez’ [*sic*] version. He said he’d heard other versions and was also familiar with the variant “The Bonnie Lass O’ Fyvie” by Ewan MacColl from *Scots Folk Songs* (Riverside 12-609), and *Popular Scottish Songs* with Peggy Seeger, (Folkways FW 8757), and Jean Redpath’s take on her rare first album, *Skipping Barefoot Through The Heather* (Prestige International 13041)”<sup>68</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Grateful Dead’s “Peggy” is the blending together of a vast collection of “Peggy” recordings, and it reflects this both in its musical characteristics and in its lyrics. The Grateful Dead’s performance of “Peggy” is also notable

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<sup>68</sup> Ed Littlefield, Jr, “Ed’s Extra Liner Notes,” *Sage Arts*, accessed November 2016. <http://www.sagearts.com/ed.html>.

because commercial recording of the song slowed rapidly after the 1960s. From 1970 to 1990, only six commercial versions were released: three more traditional, Scottish versions in the UK in the seventies and three folk versions in the US in the eighties. This all changed in the 1990s.

In 1992, two commercial albums were released in the UK. They both had versions of “The Bonnie Lass of Fyvie,” but they could not have been more different. The first, *New Tricks* by Old Blind Dogs is an upbeat, folk rock version of the song, with guitar, fiddle, bass, slappy percussion, and a gong. The second, *Andy Stewart’s Scotland* by Andy Stewart features snare drum and accordion, with bass and a percussive shaker. Andy Stewart sings the song as a march in a heavy Scottish accent, until the last two verses, in which he dramatically slows down to sing with sparse piano accompaniment before speeding up for a fully-instrumented finale.

These two versions are representative of the versions that were released through the 1990s and 2000s. Over these two decades, thirty-eight new versions were released. Seven of them are in the Scottish military march style of Andy Stewart, on albums of “traditional Scottish” music. Twenty-six of them were either in a sparse, acoustic, folk arrangement or an electric folk rock genre, with lots of synths, drum kits, and heavy reverb. And five versions are in a modern country style - with twangy vocals, electric guitars, and harmonica or mandolin.

I have no explanation for *why* this sudden explosion of commercial interest in “Peggy” occurred when it did. It may have been tied to the death of Jerry Garcia in 1995: most of the twenty-six folk arrangements of the song from these decades could be argued to be inspired by the Grateful Dead version. As to the country and Scottish versions, my best explanation is that artists in the nineties, as in the sixties, knew that this was a old song and wanted to perform it as such. It was thus recorded in the different ways that people know to make songs “traditional”: as a folky and mournful ballad, as a Scottish military march, or as a modern country song with electric guitars and drum set. Not one of these versions attained commercial success.

Finally, where the unifying theme of the sixties folk revival versions of “Peggy” was their self-conscious folkiness, the unifying theme of the nineties “Peggys” is their definitive

membership to one of three genres. This is an unsurprising result of commercialization, that new releases of “Peggy” must be clearly delineable into one type or another. The ambiguous origins of lyrics and melody – and ambiguity of origin - that stuck with “Peggy” for its first 200 years no longer exists.

## VII. Conclusion

In this paper, I have played the role of folk song collector. In the vein of Francis James Child or Cecil Sharp, I sought out and compared every version of “Peggy” that I could find; but I had many advantages that they did not. Modern technology let me quickly do the tasks that would have taken them hours: transcribing key signatures, counting pitch classes, querying 137 versions of the lyrics for specific phrases, and building a bird’s-eye view of the melodic contours for thirty-nine field recordings. These tools allowed me to look at the same variants they had access to (plus a few more recent ones) with fresh and, I think, more objective eyes. I also expanded the set of relevant “Peggy” variants to include those produced for a commercial market, both recordings from the sixties onwards and also the earliest printed scores, broadsides, and songsters. This expanded dataset has given me perspective on the impact that printers, publishers, lyricists, orchestrators, and – most significantly – folklorists have had on “Peggy” over the last 250 years.

At no point in the history of “Peggy,” did anyone think they were performing the only version. Starting in 1780, the song was always being *adapted* from somewhere old for some new purpose. It was adapted from a dance tune for an opera, from an opera for play, from a play for a broadside, then from a broadside back into a folk tune. These were the earliest kinds of commercial processes to which “Peggy” was subject. At some point during these first hundred years of written transmission, it split into several versions - I’ve called them the Generic Scottish, Generic American, and Minor versions - but others might call them different songs - “Pretty Peggy” and “The Bonnie Lass O’ Fyvie.” When and where to draw the “new song” line in

a collection of ever so slightly different variants is an impossible question that folklorists have struggled to answer since the turn of the twentieth century.

Performers of “Peggy” have always had opinions on this question. Willie Mathieson, recorded by Hamish Henderson in 1952, made a distinction between “Bonnie Barbara” and “Bonnie Lass,” and used two different melodies for verses within the same song. William Christie, in his 1876 arrangement of “The bonny Lass O’ Fyvie,” based his melody off of two completely different songs: “The bonny Lass O’ Fyvie” and “Barbara Allen.” And the earliest written variants of “Peggy” were new lyrics set to the same melody and given an entirely new title. This style of songwriting created seemingly distinct songs like “The Constitution and the Guerriere,” “A Landlady of France,” and “Eveleen’s Bower,” whose link to the same source tune was quickly forgotten or never known by the public audiences. These pre-nineteenth century written variants were the earliest form of commercialization to which “Peggy” was subject. For those who saw them, they undid any kind of lyrical or melodic variation that had evolved from oral transmission of “Peggy.” For the first century of its life as a written song, “Peggy” slipped in and out of folk and commercial realms.

The history of “Peggy” was irreversibly altered by the 1960’s Folk Revival. Though both printed sources and commercial recordings interrupt the folk process, commercial recordings have a much more impactful and lasting effect than, say, a broadside with new lyrics to the same tune. A commercial record has a much broader reach than a London broadside or an Edinburgh songbook. Commercial recordings also obey different rules of innovation than broadsides: they don’t completely rewrite the words, change the verse length and meter, or meld the tune with another melody. The ways that they *do* innovate – adding harmonies, changing instrumentation, and, occasionally, stretching out a phrase – tend to affect the perceived genre of the song more than the song itself. The lyrics that go with any seminal recording in a given genre tend to stick for future versions of “Peggy” made in that genre.

“Peggy” is not fundamentally different during the commercial and noncommercial periods

in its history. What changes is what and how much variation we're exposed to, and this is never *really* up to us. Folklorists decide which field recordings to write down and which broadsides to archive, record companies decide which folk artists to record, and from this tiny subset of all the versions of "Peggy" that have ever existed, *finally*, we as listeners get to choose which versions to actually pay attention to. Still, even in commercial processes, "Peggy" participates in the folk process. Joan Baez holds on to the note at the end of a line for two beats longer than usual, Bob Dylan thinks it'll be funny for to the captain to ride down to the rodeo, Simon and Garfunkel add a complicated harmony and end up rewriting the melody. Even as certain aspects of it become fixed by popular recordings, "Peggy" is ever-changing.

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