

## THE BANKS OF THE LITTLE EAU PLEINE (Allen)

By W.N. (Billy) Allen a.k.a. "Shan T. Boy". During the 1870's Mr. Allen worked at timber surveying and sang his songs in lumber camps he visited in the course of his duties. This is one of his most famous; many versions have been collected from oral tradition. The Little Eau Pleine is a tributary of the Wisconsin River

One evening last June as I rambled  
The green woods and valleys along,  
The mosquito's notes were melodious,  
And so was the whip-poor-will's song.  
The frogs in the marshes were croaking,  
The tree toads were whistling for rain,  
And partridges round me were drumming,  
On the banks of the Little Eau Pleine.

The sun in the west was declining  
And tingeing the treetops with red.  
My wandering feet bore me onward,  
Not caring whither they led.  
I happened to see a young school-marm.  
She mourned in a sorrowful strain,  
She mourned for a jolly young raftsman  
On the banks of the Little Eau Pleine.

Saying, "Alas, my dear Johnny has left me.  
I'm afraid I shall see him no more.  
He's down on the lower Wisconsin,  
He's pulling a fifty-foot oar.  
He went off on a fleet with Ross Gamble  
And has left me in sorrow and pain;  
And 'tis over two months since he started  
From the banks of the Little Eau Pleine

I stepped up beside this young school-marm  
And thus unto her I did say,  
"Why is it you're mourning so sadly?  
All nature is smiling and gay?"  
She said, "It is for a young raftsman  
For whom I so sadly complain.  
He has left me alone here to wander  
On the banks of the Little Eau Pleine."

Will you please tell me what kind of clothing  
Your jolly young raftsman did wear?  
For I also belong to the river,  
Perhaps I have seen him somewhere.  
If to me you will plainly describe him,  
And tell me your young raftsman's name,  
Perhaps I can tell you the reason  
He's not back to the Little Eau Pleine."

"His pants were made out of two meal-sacks,  
With a patch a foot square on each knee.  
His shirt and his jacket were dyed with  
The bark of a butternut tree.  
He wore a large open-faced ticker  
With almost a yard of steel chain,  
When he went away with Ross Gamble  
From the banks of the Little Eau Pleine.

"He wore a red sash round his middle  
With an end hanging down on each side.  
His shoes, number ten, were of cowhide  
With heels about four inches wide.  
His name it was Honest John Murphy,  
And on it there ne'er was a stain,  
And he was as jolly a raftsman  
As was e'er on the Little Eau Pleine.

My curses attend you, Wisconsin!  
May your rapids and falls cease to roar.  
May every tow-head and sand-bar  
Be as dry as a log schoolhouse floor.  
May the willows upon all your islands  
Lie down like a field of ripe grain,  
For taking my jolly young raftsman  
Away from the Little Eau Pleine.

"My curses light on you, Ross Gamble,  
For taking my Johnny away.  
I hope that the ague will seize you,  
And shake you down into the clay.  
May your lumber go down to the bottom,  
Never rise to the surface again.  
You had no business taking John Murphy  
Away from the Little Eau Pleine."

"Now I will desert my vocation,  
I'll not teach district school any more.  
I will go to some place where I'll never  
Hear the squeak of a fifty-foot-oar.  
I will go to some far foreign country,  
To England, to France, or to Spain;  
But I'll never forget Johnny Murphy  
Nor the banks of the Little Eau Pleine."

I use the words from Franz Rickaby's **Ballads and Songs of the Shanty-Boy**, and the tune of a version collected in New Brunswick. Mary LaMarca suggests Mr. Allen may have based his song on "The Plains of Waterloo". Several versions of "The Plains of Waterloo" can be found in Greenleaf & Mansfield's **Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland**.

From Judy Cook's CD "Far From The Lowlands"

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