

MINERVA

Songs of Irishtown, Olmstedville, Leonardsville and Minerva

1 **Irishtown Breakdown** (traditional)

I learned this tune from Cecil Butler and put his version on my first album, *Adirondack Green*. Cedar Stanistreet learned it from that recording; John Kirk learned it from Cedar; and Ed Lowman, who fiddles it here, learned it from John. That's folk music. This previously unreleased live performance was recorded on June 4, 2004 at Caffe Lena, Saratoga Springs, NY. Musicians: Dan - guitar; Ed Lowman - fiddle.

2 **When Harry Carried the Mail** (© 1984)

Written to remember my grandfather Harry Wilson, one of the first Rural Free Delivery mail carriers in northern NY, and some of his friends Jim Higgins, Cecil Butler and Bill Barnes. This version was recorded by Doug Ford at Caffe Lena on August 17, 1991 and originally released on the now out-of-print 1992 album *And Now Please Welcome . . .*

Musician: Dan - vocal

In the hills near Irishtown,
When you've gone up, down, and around,
Ask the folks there to tell you about the time
When Harry carried the mail, When Harry carried the mail.
Ask the folks there to tell you about the time
When Harry carried the mail.

Jim Higgins from Charley Hill
Could hook you with a good fishing tale.
He'd tell of the big ones that all got away
When Harry carried the mail, When Harry carried the mail.
He'd tell of the big ones that all got away
When Harry carried the mail.

Cecil Butler from up in Loch Muller,
He hunted, he trapped, and he trailed;
Called the dances and fiddled on Saturday night
When Harry carried the mail, When Harry carried the mail.
Called the dances and fiddled on Saturday night
When Harry carried the mail.

Bill Barnes from Olmstedville
Went looking one day for some ale.
He saw it made in a bathtub and lost all his thirst
When Harry carried the mail, When Harry carried the mail.
He saw it made in a bathtub and lost all his thirst
When Harry carried the mail.

Harry Wilson from Leonardsville
Carried letters through mud and hale
With horses or snowshoes or his old Model A.
That's when Harry carried the mail, When Harry carried the mail.
With horses or snowshoes or his old Model A,
That's when Harry carried the mail.

3 **Alice** (© 1989)

There are many ways we can contribute to community on a local or global level. Alice Switzer, founder and conductor of the Minerva Community Chorus, reminded the town and all of us to celebrate life by uniting our voices. This version was originally released on the 1996 album *Cloudsplitter* and was recorded by Dave Kerzner at Mason Hall Studio, Fredonia, NY in the spring of 1995. Musicians: Dan - vocal and guitar; Kent Knappenberger - harp; Peggy Lynn - harmony; chorus - Kelly Armor, Jenny and Nancy Berggren, Carmen and Dick Gilman, John Kirk, Nanette Knappenberger, Trish Miller, Mark Murphy, Kathy Queen, Hannah and Kathy Richardson, Dave Sturtevant, Steve Warner.

Let me tell you a little story about some friends I know
And a woman who brought the rest of town a gift from long ago.
Folks who used to sing for fun, alone or in harmony,
Had fallen out of the habit and now were watching TV.

When Alice came into the town it was a quiet kind of day.
Folks went about their business in the usual sort of way.
"Who'd like to sing in a chorus?" was her question to everyone.
"Sopranos, altos, tenors and bass, together we'll have some fun.

[chorus]
We can still sing along
Whether our voices are weak or they're strong.
The spirit of Alice lives on in song
And we will still sing along.

Old and young joined Alice. They formed a community choir.
They'd rehearse each week and try to reach those notes going higher and higher.
After working all day they'd practice. There was so much fun in the singing,
Even when they'd reach the end and Alice said: "Once more from the beginning."

[chorus]
Well, the music got better and better, and when they did a show
They'd all pitch in to make it work and together they would grow.
The town was proud of its chorus and moved by the spirit of song,
But the day that Alice passed away it was hard to sing along.

Now folks go about their business in the usual sort of way.
But once in a while a tune makes 'em smile and they still hear a voice say:
"Who'd like to sing in a chorus?" was her question to everyone.
"Sopranos, altos, tenors and bass, together we'll have some fun."
Who'd like to sing in a chorus? That's a question to you from me.
Sopranos, altos, tenors and bass - together in harmony.
[chorus]

4 **Brannon's Survey Crew** (© 1980)

Working with surveyor Bill Brannon produced the experience of seeing familiar land in a new light. Some of the song is fact and some is fiction - you can decide which is which. This previously unreleased live performance was recorded on May 14, 2005 at Bluseed Studios, Saranac Lake, NY. Musician: Dan - vocal and banjo.

Old Will Dicker died and his widow sold the farm.
It was just too much to keep it going.
That land was in the family for about two-hundred years,
But time had come for someone new to do the growing.

Well, a two-hundred year old boundary line's alright,
But the buyer said not good enough for him.
"That brook could've shifted and those pines don't mean a thing.
We'll start from scratch," he said, and that's when Brannon's crew came in.

[chorus]
Walking the line on Brannon's survey crew
Set up, level, get your bearing, chain and mark it true.
There's a red rocking chair waiting when the day is through.
When you're walking the line on Brannon's survey crew.

The last time I was here I was fishing in the brook.
I couldn't have been much more than twelve years old.
Old Will Dicker said I could fish if I'd lend a hand
On his two-man saw cutting wood in the fall for the long winter cold.

Well, today the crew went out with eyes and axes sharp.
We were looking for some sign of evidence.
Brannon was in the county seat searching out the deeds;
With sweat in our eyes we were swatting blackflies, following split-rail fence.
[chorus]

Old Will Dicker told me, "Stay this side of the brook
And near that stand of pines, beware barbed wire.
I had to put it up 'cause the cows were getting loose.
But that land is mine till you hit the pines or call me a liar."

We brushed out the lot line to the letter of the deed
And chained off the distance to the pines.
I turned an angle, 90 degrees, and there was that rusty wire.
It was no surprise to my eyes: that was the boundary line.
[chorus]

5 **Settled in the Mountains** (©1991)

The Minerva Historical Society asked me to write a song about Francis Donnelly, Minerva's town supervisor for 46 years. I discovered quite a tradition while researching the family. The courage and determination of his great-grandmother Catherine, who emigrated from Ireland to the Adirondacks, laid the foundation for generations of her family's public service. This version was originally released on the 1996 album *Cloudsplitter* and was recorded by Dave Kerzner at Mason Hall Studio, Fredonia, NY in the spring of 1995. Musicians: Dan - vocal and guitar; Kent Knappenberger - harp; John Kirk - pennywhistle.

To the Emerald Isle she bid adieu,
A widow along with children, too,
In eighteen-hundred and forty-two,
And she settled in the mountains, settled in the mountains.

Catherine Donnelly raised children five
On Irishtown praties they survived.
And two of her grandsons, they did thrive,
And they settled in the mountains, settled in the mountains.

For town supervisor John Donnelly did run.
His brother Tom finished the job he'd begun.
He wed Lucy Clifford and they had one son,
And he settled in the mountains, settled in the mountains.

When Francis was fourteen his father died.
Be a farmer or carpenter he couldn't decide.
But he asked Nora Phelps to be his bride,
And they settled in the mountains, settled in the mountains.

Assessor, constable, team organizer,
For forty-six years the town supervisor.
And as Francis grew older, he grew wiser,
Glad he settled in the mountains, settled in the mountains.

Whether bringing town water or building a beach,
Or lending a hand beyond his reach,
His life is a lesson that still can teach
Why we settled in the mountains, settled in the mountains.

Catherine Donnelly settled here in '42.
Like so many others traded old for the new.
And while our histories may differ what we share is true:
We settled in the mountains, settled in the mountains,
Settled in the mountains.

6 Irishtown Crew (traditional, words attributed to Jim McCoy 1880)

My music teacher at Minerva Central School, Helen Barnes, gave me a copy of this song in the mid 1960s. Little did I know that this honest-to-goodness folk song about my hometown was just a glimpse of what lay ahead. It wasn't until 1975 that I discovered the Marjorie Lansing Porter collection of Essex County folk songs and her recordings of Minerva's Yankee John Galusha that I realized there was this body of work called Adirondack folk music. In August of 1939, folk musicologists Frank and Anne Warner visited Yankee John Galusha at his home on Fourteenth Road. In the *New York Folklore Quarterly*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, June 1966, they write:

He sang us many Irish-American songs. Among them was "The Irishtown Crew," a local song of a fine rollicking character, full of the names of people about whom the song was written . . . There are many tall tales in the York State tradition -- tales which take an actual incident, perhaps, and build on it a magnificent structure to titillate pioneer risibilities. This song is in that tradition. We don't know another one like it.

A note about Gibney "thumbing out" whiskey: the story goes that the blind bartender placed his thumb inside each glass as he measured out the beverage. The live performance of this previously unreleased song was recorded on May 14, 2005 at Bluseed Studios, Saranac Lake, NY. Musician: Dan - vocal and guitar.

If you will listen, I'll sing of a set
Of Irishtown fellows at Ratigans met.
They filled up their bottles and swore solemnly
That that very night they'd go out on a spree.

They were always good fellows as ever you'd see.
They were sons of old grandeur from over the sea
From the land of shillelagh their forefathers came
And if you will listen I'll mention their names.

[chorus]
Singing folderol laddy, folderol laddy,
Folderol laddy, the Irishtown Crew.

There was Holland and Isaac and Blutcher and Breen
And one McInerny that drove the grey team.
There was Letty and William and Patty and Joe
And one Mikey Connors who lived down below.

There was one Nelson Burteau a dear friend of mine
That used to go courtin' with Black Angeline
And Tucker the mason who plastered the wall
And one Petey Mitchell, the pride of them all
[chorus]

They filled themselves up on Ratigan's beer,
Then to the Corners they quickly did steer.
Resolved before morning to finish their spree
And spend a few hours with young Tommy Mea.

But arriving at Gibney's they met more of the boys.
There was Early and Duffy and Jimmy McCoy
With Yankee and Neilly and Cub and Tom Flynn,
Joe Burteau, Pete Linsey and young Danny Lynn.
[chorus]

The money was plenty and the drinks they went round
And glass after glass of the spirits went down
Till in two hours time, not one man was right
But drunk as a fiddler and wanted to fight.

Old Tucker, to the kitchen, his way he did make
Where sat Wallace Plumley, all the way from Long Lake.
Says Gibney "I'll have you my house to respect
For this gentleman's here, my house to protect."
[chorus]

"I don't care for your house, I'd have you to know,
Nor this Long Lake pup that you've got for a show."
And Plumley, he quickly jumped up on the floor.
And Tucker, he knocked him right out of the door.

Plumley jumped up and he ran like a pup.
You could see not his coattails for the dust he kicked up,
Saying "I was in the right church, but in the wrong pew
For the devil himself couldn't match such a crew."
[chorus]

Gibney, he bolted and barred up his shop
And for love nor money, he'd sell not a drop,
Saying "You're all drunk now and can't have no more,"
When bang went the panels right out of the door.

Then Gibney walked out with revolver in hand
Saying "Who broke my door? Just show me the man,
For to hell or to heaven, I'll send his soul."
As a shower of rocks sent him back to his hole.

[chorus]

Some built a bonfire to keep themselves warm
And some they crawled over to Butler's barn.
Some under Sullivan's shed went to sleep,
And more were so drunk they laid out in the street.

So to conclude and finish my song,
Here's health to you Ratigan, may you live long.
But to hell with you Gibney, you're blind and can't see.
You never will thumb out more whiskey for me.

7 **Dirt Road Rag** (© 1974)

The tune started out as a memory of home when I was living in Belgium. It resurfaced one night ten years later on Trout Brook Road while Dan Duggan and I were burning the midnight oil telling stories and playing tunes. Released on the cassette *Sittin' In Your Kitchen* in 1986, the CD *Rooted in the Mountains* in 2001, it was recorded by Dave Sturtevant at the Mackie College Lodge, Brocton, NY in February 1986. Musicians: Dan - guitar; Dan Duggan - hot guitar.

8 **Logging Roads** (© 1984)

The woods and the fields are so full of stories and sometimes all it takes is to listen and look carefully enough and those stories can come to life. You can imagine an entire farm from a simple stone foundation. This is dedicated to my childhood friends who traveled those logging roads with me, Jimmy Wamsley and Priscilla Wamsley Killon. This version, originally released on the album *Mountain Air* was recorded by Dave Fridmann in the Mason Hall Studio, Fredonia, NY during the fall of 1988. Musicians: Dan - vocal and guitar; Dick Gilman - lap dulcimer; Steve Warner - concertina.

As a boy growing up, I used to go walking:
Cut through the field, get into the woods.
And stumble across what looked like a wood road,
And wonder how many had walked there before.

When a farmer needed pasture, it was cleared from the woods;
But the rest of the time, trees were cut for the cash.
And the corduroy roads that carried out timber
Outlasted the loggers and the horses they drove.

[chorus]

Was it so long ago
Folks worked and died for a living
Leaving behind
All those logging roads, graveyards, and old cellar holes.

Follow the stone wall and look for an apple tree
Or maybe a lilac where a kitchen looked out.
There are the cellar steps leading right to the root
Of a birch tree that's growing from an old fireplace.

[chorus]

One day a dirt road took me away.
It led to a graveyard under a pine.
It told of a time when families were bigger,
Lives were shorter, ends were harder to meet.

[chorus]

Now that I'm grown, I still go out walking:
Cut through the field, get into the woods.
And stumble across what looks like a wood road,
And wonder how many have walked here before.

[chorus]

9 Life on Earth (© 1997)

You already know teachers like this. My mother Dorothy Wilson Berggren, born and raised on Trout Brook Road in the Town of Minerva, taught me many things. Chief among them was to be aware of every aspect of life, great and small; to respect it and enjoy it. This previously unreleased live performance was recorded March 25, 2000 at Caffe Lena, Saratoga Springs, NY. Musician: Dan - vocal and guitar.

See her kneeling at the top of the field,
Bandana covering her head.
Picking strawberries the size of a pea,
Fingertips all stained red.
Giving thanks for each berry that goes in her pan.
Thanks for the sunshine, the shortcake and jam.

[chorus]

It's moments like this that make her smile,
Stop what she's doing and pause for while.

It's moments like this when she gives praise for life on earth.

The sun's beating down, she's dripping with sweat.
The back of her neck is red.
One taste of tomato tells her it's worth it,
As she puts the tools back in the shed.
She knows a good garden needs weeding for hours
And she loves being surrounded by songbirds and flowers.

[chorus]

Breathing the apple air, straightening her back,
Sorting the good from the bad.
The deer and the bear have eaten their share.
For the windfall that's left she's glad:
Glad that some of the orchard is still alive,
Glad for the applesauce, cider and pies.

[chorus]

While the wood stove takes the chill from the kitchen,
The balsam is adding it's scent.
She's stuffing the pillows with needles she's cut;
Each one to be mailed as a present.
She stitches them closed and stops now and then
To think about each of her long distance friends.

[chorus]

In the dark of night or the broad light of day,
Any time's good for a prayer.
A moment of silence to take it all in.
A moment to be aware
Of all living things under the sun.
On this living planet we all are one.
It's moments like this that make me smile.
Stop what I'm doing and pause for a while.
It's moments like this when I give praise for life on earth.

10 **Trout Brook Road/Trail to Trout Brook** (© 1980)

Whether it was from college, the army, or living across the state, every time I returned to that "house on a hill and lots of space," there was the comforting sense that this quiet scene of country life looking north to the Sleeping Giant had always been that way. This version was originally released on the album *Rooted in the Mountains* and was recorded by Jim Briggs III at the Mackie College Lodge in Brocton, NY in March 2001.

Musician: Dan - vocal, banjo and guitar.

Down in Pinch Gut there's a place,
A house on a hill and lots of space.
Time slows down, so I've been told,
Three miles down on Trout Brook Road.
In the shadow of Merrills Hill
I can never get my fill.
It's been there ever since I knowed,
Three miles down on Trout Brook Road.

Cat's in the kitchen where the stove is warm.
Dog's in the shed, sheep's in the barn.
There's a great big garden where seeds get sowed
Three miles down on Trout Brook Road.
The blackflies are so bad in June
I saw a hound-dog chased by a coon,
A rooster hooted and a hoot-owl crowed
Three miles down on Trout Brook Road.

Been working in the woods and I'm all bit up.
Mosquitos at the spring when I fill my cup.
When I get tired I rest my load
Three miles down on Trout Brook Road.
In the valley where the giant sleeps
The pine grows tall and the willow weeps,
Fields grow wild when they don't get mowed,
Three miles down on Trout Brook Road.

11 House Call (© 1986)

The Minerva Historical Society asked if I'd write a song about their museum's theme that year: old time doctors. The home visit seemed to sum up what was unique about medical help in the past. This song is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Jacques Grunblatt, who once made a house call for me when I had pneumonia. This version was originally released on the album *Mountain Air* which was recorded by Dave Fridmann in the Mason Hall Studio, Fredonia, NY during the fall of 1988. Musicians: Dan - vocal and guitar; Carmen Gilman - autoharp; John Kirk - fiddle.

Doctor, I just had to wake you. I'm sorry, it's about my wife.
No, it's not me. It's Molly, you see.
Never been sick a day in her life.
I think Molly's got pneumonia or some other germ, I'm not sure.
But the coughing won't stop and I'm afraid she'll drop.
Please follow me to my door.

[chorus]

Doctor, doctor, can you make a house call?
Can you come and make her feel alright
Doctor, doctor, can you make a house call
And come to my house tonight? And he said
"Yes, I will. I'll grab my bag and my pills
Even though it's the middle of the night.
I'm sorry she's sick, but I'll be there real quick.
It's my job both day and night,
Oh yes, it's my job and I do it right."

Doctor, I want to pay you, but you see I'm not quite sure how.
I'll make it good you know, but I'm low on dough;
Maybe firewood or milk from the cow.
Doctor, I just have to thank you, for giving us the best of care.
You've put my Molly on the mend and you've been a friend.
It's good to know you're always there.

[chorus]

So many folks need doctors, but there's not enough to go 'round.
So hard working men of mountain medicine
Have got to travel from town to town.

There are no business hours, 'cause there's sickness all around the clock.
All men, women, children get sick now and then.
Everybody needs the doc.

[chorus]

12 **The Dying Drummer's Sweethearts** (words - traditional, tune - © 1981)

My aunt Frieda Lynn Wilson in Schroon Lake gave me these words found amongst the papers of an older aunt and I put a tune to them. Clarence Jones told me he wasn't exactly sure where they came from but he used to have them posted in his store in Minerva. And Noelle Donahue of the Minerva Historical Society sent me a copy of the same words that she ran across in the scrapbook of Dr. John Breen who served Minerva in 1907. This previously unreleased song was recorded at Grove Street Studio, Ballston Spa, NY on May 19, 2005. Musician: Dan - vocal.

A gay and handsome traveling man lay on a bed of pain.
All hope was passed, his life ebbed fast. He ne'er will rise again.
"Have you no sweetheart, fair and true?" they whispered o'er his bed,
"Whom you would tell a last farewell?" The young man softly said:

"There's Daisy back in North Creek and Bess in Sandy Hill.
There's Millie down in Warrensburg and Kate in Olmstedville.
There's darling Jess in good old Schroon and Mary up in Jay,
And write to Sue in Newcomb too, or hell will be to pay."

The watchers started in wild surprise and then they said once more,
"And tell us pray, without delay, the girl whom you adore.
The girl whom you have sworn to love and bring both wealth and fame.
Your promised wife, your hope and life,
Quick, let us know her name."

"In Chestertown my Jennie lives, go phone her quick" he said.
And Carrie calls from South Glens Falls and Anne from old Fort Ed.
There's Mamie over there in Ti and Maudie in Whitehall."
The young man sighed, "It's time I died. I've sworn to love them all.

13 **Pinch Gut** (© 1998)

I lived in the Leonardsville section of the Town of Minerva which was also known as Pinch Gut. But it's more than a geographical location, it's a regional piece of time that represents a way of life. According to Jim Higgins, one of my grandfather's close friends, the name came about because underpaid, underfed loggers had to tighten their belts so much that it pinched their gut. This previously unreleased tune, played on a fretless banjo made by Dick Gilman, was recorded during the height of black fly season on June 5, 2002 on Trout Brook Road, Olmstedville, NY. Musician: Dan - fretless banjo, Irish bouzouki, percussion.

14 **Harry** (© 1973)

My first Adirondack song, written in 1973 while stationed in Frankfurt, Germany, was about my grandfather. Harry, a farmer and mailman, liked nothing better than to spend a few well-earned moments of relaxation fishing. This version was originally released on the 1985 album *Adirondack Green* recorded by Anthony Distefano at Mason Hall Studio, Fredonia, NY in the fall of 1983. Musicians: Dan - vocal and guitar; Marc Facci: bass.

Harry twitched his mustache as he walked along,
Wearing a wide-brimmed hat and singing a song.
He looked at the mountains and he knew he was free.
Oh, how I wish that were me.
He always did the best that he could.
He never forgot the earth was good.

Harry helped his father run the farm.
He kept his own family fed and warm.
He'd rise up early during haying time.
His will and his back were strong.
He always did the best that he could.
He never forgot the earth was good.

Harry cleared a place by the riverside,
And made him a castle that broke when he died.
I stumbled upon it one day in the woods.
When I saw the pieces I cried.
He always did the best that he could.
He never forgot the earth was good.

I worked with the pieces for months at a time,
Making it reason and trying to make it rhyme.
I almost got it together but then I had to go.
Harry, I need you so.
He always did the best that he could.
He never forgot the earth was good.

15 **Big Beams** (© 1992)

The barns I pictured when I wrote this song, and every time I sing it, are right there on Trout Brook Road. Our parents and our teachers are our big beams. They pass on their strength to us. This previously unreleased live performance was recorded on May 14, 2005 at Bluseed Studios, Saranac Lake, NY. Musician: Dan - vocal and guitar.

Driving down a back road, "Chew *Mail Pouch* " caught my eye:
Faded paint on the side of a barn buried in weeds grown high.
Buildings going up all over, but there's no more need for this one.

That weathered wood has a tale to tell
But there's no one 'round here to listen to those

[chorus]

Big beams, hand-hewn out of hemlock
Holding tractors, plows and livestock
For the women and men who worked so hard. Just like
Big beams, ones you can depend on
To bear the load and send on
The courage and the strength to be big beams.

It reminded me of back home and the three barns side by side:
The horse and the sheep and the hay barn, built with muscle and pride.
When I worked for my dad in the summer those dog days seemed so long.
And I wondered what kept him going,
What made my father so strong? Just like

[chorus]

When we sat in the horse barn doorway, Dad told me stories and dreams.
And that weathered man had a tale to tell, he'd been working since he was
sixteen.

But now we've both grown older, he's not as strong as he used to be.
He said "Where did all my strength go?"
I told him "You gave it to me." You gave me

[chorus]

16 **Irishtown Breakdown** (traditional)

Cecil Butler played for square dances for 66 years. He learned this tune, one of his favorites, from the boys "o'er to O'Connors still" around 1915. I recorded this in his kitchen in Loch Muller, NY during the winter of 1975-76 and it was originally released on the 1985 album *Adirondack Green*. Musicians: Dan - guitar; Cecil Butler - fiddle.

All songs © by Dan Berggren, Berggren Music / BMI except the following:
"Irishtown Breakdown" (traditional);
the words to "The Dying Drummer's Sweethearts" (traditional);
and "Irishtown Crew" (traditional, words attributed to Jim McCoy, 1880).

Front cover photo, Dan Berggren; back cover photo, Mike Thorp.
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