You lovers of old Ireland, come listen a short while
All ye who are to emigrate or to leave this Emerald Isle;
One kind advice I will give to you, and it’s bear it in your mind,
If you are to proceed, brave boys, don’t leave your love behind.

It was in old Ireland I was born and near to Armagh town.
My parents they were very poor although fortune on me smiled.
The farm we had being very small, and the time being pressing sore
Which compelled me to leave behind my native shamrock shore.

It’s of a rich merchant’s daughter near to Armagh did reside,
Although I was poor she loved me dear and she said she’d be my bride,
But when she heard of me going away, she wrung her hands and cried,
Saying, “Willie, will you cross the sea and leave your love behind?”

I said, “My dearest Eliza, if with me you will join,
We’ll both sail to America for it’s there you can live for free.
It’s for your sake I would venture where the Atlantic billows roar;
We’ll brave hard fortune’s cruelty till we land on the Baltic shore.”

It’s early the next morning just by the break of day
I started on my journey with my Eliza dear.
In silks my darling she was dressed, oh mostly costly to behold,
And in her belt her fortune told five hundred pounds in gold.

We both went down to Belfast and there we did agree
For to embark in an army ship bound for Americay.
We bought a farm all in that place and the trees been rid away
Which with hard toll and labour it shortly did us pay.
I wrote a letter to old Ireland and in it did explain
If my father-in-law wasn’t satisfied, I would pay him back his change.
He wrote me back an answer, and it’s this to me did say:
“Five hundred pounds I’ll pay right down on your young son’s birthday.
“I wish you every happiness that you may prosper well,
Although you took my darling child into foreign lands to dwell.
It’s there you can live happy, no toil, no grief, no woe,
No poverty is there, brave boys, if you have the heart to go.”

You lovers of old Ireland, if you have a heart like mine,
It’s come unto America, for it’s there you can live free.
It’s there you can drink brandy, good gin, good ale, good wine,
And here’s a health to the shamrock shores and the girls we’ve left behind.

This is an unusual example of the many broadside ballads inspired by the wholesale emigration from Ireland to America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most of which are rather romantic tales like “Riley’s Farewell” (Laws N8) or “Rich Amerikay” (Laws 019).

“You Lovers of Old Ireland” is similar in plot to “My Father’s Servant Boy” (Laws N11) but is clearly a different ballad. I have not found it in my North American collection, but Sam Henry included it in his “Songs of the People” (No. 535) as “Jamie, Lovely Jamie,” with the note: “Taken down from Alexander Thompson of Bushmills who learnt it over 60 years ago.” Another song in his collection, “You Lovers All” (No. 525), tells much the same story and may be a variant, although it is not as close as “Jamie, Lovely Jamie.”

Ballads about emigration were very popular with Ontario singers, and they know several others not reported elsewhere. “You Lovers of Old Ireland” is one of the most interesting because of its combination of romantic and realistic elements. The elopement with the rich merchant’s daughter is the staple fare of dozens of broadsides, as is her “five hundred pounds in gold,” but the reference to buying a farm and clearing it of trees is down-to-earth realism, and the father’s reconciliation on the birth of his grandson is touchingly human.

_Sung by Mrs. Arlington Fraser, Lancaster, Ontario_
_Collected by Edith Fowke, Sept. 1961._
_Transcribed by Peggy Seeger_

Mrs. Arlington Fraser and her son.