

# The Bank Trollers

When the buds swell green on the B. C. Coast and win-ter is on-ly a  
fad-ing ghost The trol-lers drive for the off-shore banks with  
ice in their holds and gas in their tanks. You will see them leave from the  
lan-ding slips Tur-ning sea-ward small wood-en ships.

Words by Bertrand W. Sinclair, skipper of the  
"Hoo Hoo". Edited and arranged by Philip J.  
Thomas. Tune by P.J. Thomas. Transcribed by  
Shirley A. Cox. © Philip J. Thomas 1978

When the buds swell green on the B.C. coast  
And winter is only a fading ghost,  
The trollers drive for the offshore banks  
With ice in their holds and gas in their tanks.  
You will see them leave from the landing slips,  
Turning seaward—small wooden ships.

From Port of Vancouver, from snug James Bay  
From Rupert Harbour at break of day,  
From tide-swept Juan de Fuca Strait  
From the narrow gut of the Lion's Gate,  
Or out from the mouth of Queen Charlotte Sound  
You will see them roll to the salmon ground.

They go to plow in a Hell's Half-acre  
On the breast of the old grey widow-maker.  
With hook-scarred fingers they ply their trade,  
In the place where the ocean storms are made,  
From dawn till a bloodshot sun goes down  
To feed hungry folk in some distant town.

From Umatilla to Icy Strait  
From gaunt Cape Beale to Skidegate,  
The troller's poles go waving by  
Etched against a bleared grey sky,  
Where millions of herring and needlefish breed  
And spring and cohoes upon them feed.

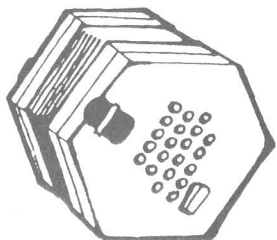
And the men that man them are men who have come  
From the Labrador and the coast of Maine,  
From the shallow Baltic, the cold North Sea,  
From the shores of Japan and Italy.  
Finns and Norskys, Canucks and Yanks  
Drag trolling gear on the salmon banks.

No weekly paycheck, no eight-hour day  
Not so many hours for so much pay.  
Out there beyond pierhead or harbour docks  
They take no orders, they punch no clocks.  
They own their boats (if not always clear).  
Their souls are their own and so is their gear.

Why do they plow in the Hell's Half-acre  
On the breast of the old grey widow-maker?  
In rain, fog, sunshine, in calm or blow,  
Loaded or empty they come and go;  
They fish for a living, as you and I  
Must work for a living until we die.

Bill Sinclair trolled on the grounds he wrote of in "The Bank Trollers" for some thirty years, active until a few years before his death in 1972 at the age of 91. When I was his neighbour in Pender Harbour in 1951, he sang an old shanty for me, one of the first songs I collected. "The Bank Trollers" originally appeared in *The Fisherman*, the newspaper of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union.

*Phil Thomas*



*Photo: Henk Pikel*



*Phil Thomas*

**Phil Thomas: WHERE THE FRASER RIVER FLOWS—AND OTHER SONGS OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST.**

*Skookumchuck Records: 4158 W. 10th Ave., Vancouver, B.C.*

Phil Thomas is the most important collector of British Columbia songs, and his recent book, *Songs of the Pacific Northwest* (reviewed in the *Bulletin* Vol. 2, No. 6) is a significant contribution to the literature of folk songs in Canada.

The nineteen songs on this record present a colourful panorama of B.C. history and industry, including songs of logging, fishing and prospecting, songs from the gold rushes of the Fraser River, the Cariboo and the Klondike, and songs from B.C.'s turbulent, and sometimes violent, labour history. As an example of the latter, the title song was written by the great Wobbly song writer, Joe Hill, in 1912 for striking construction workers on the Canadian Northern Pacific Railway.

British Columbia songs are not as well-known, even by students of Canadian folk music, as are songs from some other areas of the country. This record helps to fill that gap by making available an excellent sample of this material, together with well-researched notes by the collector. In addition to their historical significance, the songs are alive with drama and humour.

Accompanying Phil are Barry Hall, Stan Triggs, Michael Thomas and Bob Webb.

It is a good record, full of authentic material and enjoyable to listen to.

*Al Cox*