

## The Free Slave

Sung by Dick Richardson, Napanee, Ontario, 1960.  
Transcribed by Richard Paul.

This is a song from Edith Fowke's collection. It dates from the time before the American Civil War when slaves were escaping from the southern States to Canada. It probably was not sung by the slaves themselves, but by the abolitionists.

A fuller version appears in *Singing Our History* (Doubleday 1984), but the second verse in this one is not found in that version. Anne Lederman's 1991 recording of the song, on the album *Not A Mark in this World* (Aural Traditions 119), was based upon that volume.



1) Here I stand, a free man up - on the north-ern sea Of Lake E rie, that fresh wa - ter  
free as the waters that floods a - neath my feet And the si - ckle that flies so swift-ly



sea, And it fills my ve-ry soul to watch the bil-lows roll And to know like the  
by. No mas-ter do I fear or dread the auc-tion - eer, And the driver with his



waves that I am free. 2) I'm as Oh mas-sa, I pray thee  
whip I do de - fy.



I will ne-ver be a slave an - v more I am free from toil and slawv(?), safe with-



in the li-on's claws, And he'll growl if you come up-on the shore. 3) Now how well do I re-



mem-ber that wide spread-ing oak Where you gave me the last for-ty four, And you



bowed your haugh-ty head when you saw how I had bled, But a - las I'll nev-er bleed there any more.

Here I stand, a free man up on the northern banks  
Of Lake Erie, that fresh water sea,  
And it fills my very soul to watch the billows roll  
And to know like the waves that I am free.

I am as free as the waters that floods a-neath my  
feet  
And the sickle that flies so swiftly by.  
No master do I fear or dread the auctioneer,  
And the driver with his whip I do defy.

Oh massa, I pray thee,  
 I will never be a slave any more.  
 I am free from toil and slawv [*indecipherable*], safe within the lion's claws,  
 And he'll growl if you come upon the shore.

Now how well do I remember that wide spreading oak  
 Where you gave me the last forty-four,  
 And you bowed your haughty head when you saw how I had bled,  
 But alas I'll never bleed there any more.



Two members of Yemaya performing  
 at a memorial service  
 conducted at the University of Calgary  
 for fourteen women murdered  
 during the Montreal Massacre,  
 December 6, 1989.  
 Yemaya is an all-woman  
 percussion group which performs  
 in Calgary.



*At the Christmas season Dad always organized a Christmas party at the school. A big spruce tree was brought in from Beaver Dam and suitably decorated, even to wax candles in clip-on holders. A collection was taken up a couple of months before Christmas and a count made of all the children in the area. Then presents were selected for each child from the Eaton's catalogue. These were then individually wrapped and named for each child. A Santa Claus for the occasion called out the names and handed out the gifts. There was also a program of music, song and recitation. The school had an organ and the two Phillips boys played violins. It ended up with a dance of old time two-steps, waltzes, polkas, and square dancing. Every girl from nine or ten years up was expected to dance as men were in the majority. Dances were arranged every two or three months in winter. Sometimes it would be a basket social, men paid twenty-five cents and each lady brought a box-lunch which was auctioned off. The buyer of the box then ate lunch with the lady who brought it. The money was used to pay the musicians and buy oil for the coal-oil lamps hung on the walls. The coffee was usually made at Rendles in a copper wash boiler and someone with a quick team would get it in time for midnight lunch. These were popular during the war to raise money for the Red Cross. Sometimes on the first of July there would be a community picnic held in the poplar grove to the north of us. However, when Halkirk came into being, July first was celebrated there with an afternoon of sports, followed by a baseball game.*

Arthur and Elisabeth Rendle, *Halkirk Home Fires* (Halkirk, Alberta)