



KelticDead Music

Stories, Tunes and Songs in the Traditions of our Celtic Dead

To the Four Ayrts to Guide Us, and
For the Four Winds to Get Us There!

The mission of the **KelticDead Music** initiative is to find tunes and songs from around the world that have Celtic, Folk, World, Americana, and Seafaring origins, and arrange them into simple sheet music formats for folk musicians to use and share. In addition, the KDM initiative provides the in-depth stories with possible lyrics that follow the video-based, **KDM Broadside**s for a more complete music-education experience.



KelticDead Music Broadside

*All the selections and sheet music content provided in the **KelticDead Music** initiative are from traditional, made-public, made-public with credits, or cited credits where applicable. This material content is the personal interpretations of the subject and provided by **Patrick O-Shaun Young, KelticDead Music**.*

Banks of the Pontchartrain

Also known as “Lakes of the Pontchartrain”

This tune and song is classified as Americana, Irish, Scots, and Seafaring at the same time. While that may be confusing knowing how this mix came about provides a key understanding as to why. In addition, the title of the tune is also known as “**Lakes of the Pontchartrain**,” and the two descriptions are found within the lyrics.



“**The Banks of the Pontchartrain**,” is also referred to as “**The Lakes of the Pontchartrain**” because the major waterway in southern Louisiana, near New Orleans, is comprised of several lakes; Maurepas, Pontchartrain, and Borgne. Starting in the early 1800s, wood-hulled ships could pass from the Gulf Ocean through the Borgne estuary into Lake Pontchartrain.

When steel hulled ships were created starting in 1827, the waters in Lake Pontchartrain were found to be too shallow for the heavier, ocean-going ships, and the cargos were dropped off in the Lake Borgne ports. Transportation shifted more to the railroads into and out of New Orleans.

The song itself may have been created after 1827, since the traveler spoke of riding a railroad car, and a railroad line was built in the 1830s (known as the Great Northern Railway). It was in operation in the time of the Civil war in the 1860s and ran from New Orleans, Louisiana to Jackson Town, Mississippi along the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. Jackson Town was named in honor of General Andrew Jackson after the war of 1812.

Banks of the Pontchartrain

When steel hulled ships were created starting in 1827, the waters in Lake Pontchartrain were found to be too shallow for the heavier, ocean-going ships, and the cargos were dropped off in the Lake Borgne ports. Transportation shifted more to the railroads into and out of New Orleans.

The song itself may have been created after 1827, since the traveler spoke of riding a railroad car, and a railroad line was built in the 1830s (known as the Great Northern Railway). It was in operation in the time of the Civil war in the 1860s and ran from New Orleans, Louisiana to Jackson Town, Mississippi along the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. Jackson Town was named in honor of General Andrew Jackson after the war of 1812.

Another clue as to the origins of this song was the mention of the traveler's money being no good. This might refer to either U.S. or Confederate currency, depending upon who was in control of the area at the time. Thousands of banks in that time issued their own "bank notes," which may not have been accepted in various places or towns across the country.

The "**Dixie**" bank note, for example, was a common currency found in Louisiana banks and supported out of the "Central Bank" of Atlanta, Georgia. This Dixie bank note was recognized up and down the Mississippi River for trading and exchange, but not necessarily recognized in some towns or in some northern States.



Banks of the Pontchartrain

The subject of race in the song was not meant to be denigrating in any way. When our traveler mentioned his falling in love with a dark “Creole” girl it was with great respect for her.

The term “**creole**” was actually developed in France and Spain as the white populations mixed with the blacks and others from north Africa. This mix race was quite common in the French dominant areas in Louisiana as well, and creole women were considered to be quite handsome and desirable.



Made public image from internet sources showing various creole women and children from the south.

The folk song is classified as an “Americana” and “seafaring” song, as it related to the creole girl having a lover who was far out at sea. The folk tune was very popular by sailors traveling to and from the Americas.



A woman watching a ship in the distance. Made public image of a painting by Daniel Eskridge.

The language in the lyrics mentioned “Bonny girl” and that may indicate the traveler was Scots or possibly from Ireland.

As with many folk tunes and songs shared by differing cultures the melody and song quickly morphed in England, Scotland, and Ireland with a theme about a man who fell in love with a young girl, but her love was fickle, and she betrayed him with another rival.

The new variant became known as “**Lily of the West**” or “**Molly-O, Lily of the West.**” In that variant, the young man killed his rival, but was let off by a “technicality,” and he lived to tell the story. The new variant came back into America in around the 1870s, into the Louisville, Kentucky area, and became known as “**Flora,**” or “**Flora, Lily of the West.**” In that Kentucky variant, the man was hung.



Made public image of painting by Brozik Vaclav (Czech, 1851 – 1901).

Banks of the Pontchartrain

KDM Traditional Ballad Lyrics chosen for the music project arrangement ...

It was on one bright March morn I bid New Orleans adieu,
And I took the road to Jackson town, me fortune to renew.
I cursed all of my foreign money, no credit could I gain
Which filled my heart with longin' for the Lakes of the Pontchartrain.

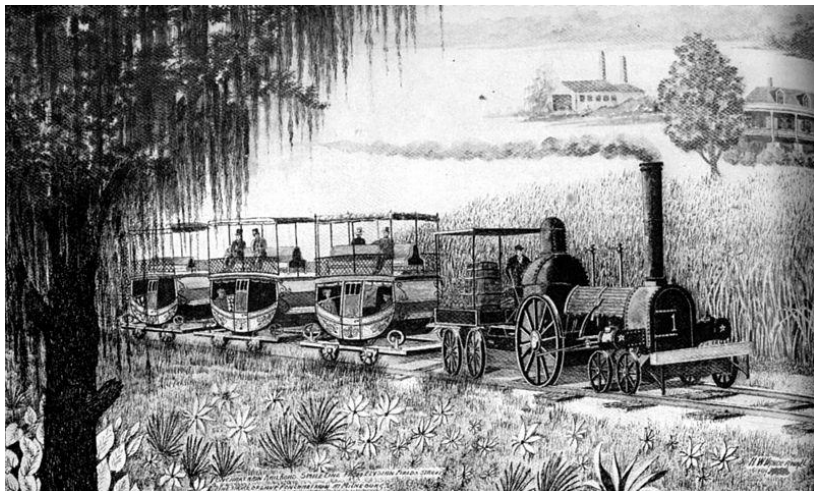
I stepped on board a railroad car beneath the morning sun,
And I rode the rails 'til avenin' time and laid me down again.
All strangers there, no friends to me 'til a dark girl towards me came,
And I fell in love with a Creole girl from the Banks of the Pontchartrain.

I said "My pretty Creole girl, me money is no good,
And if it weren't for the 'gators I'd sleep out here in the woods."
"You're welcome here kind stranger. Our house it's very plain.
We'll ne'er turn out a stranger at the Lakes of the Pontchartrain."

She took me to her mother's house and treated me quite well.
The hair upon her shoulders in jet black ringlets fell.
To try and paint her beauty I'm sure it would be in vain,
So handsome was my Creole girl from the Banks of the Pontchartrain.

I asked her if she'd marry me, she'd said it'd never be
For she had a lover, and he was far out at sea.
She said that she would wait for him and true she would remain,
'Til he returned for his Creole girl from the Banks of the Pontchartrain.

So fair thee well me bonny girl I'll never see you more.
I'll ne'er forget her kindness at the cottage by the shore,
And at each social gathering a flowin' glass I'll raise.
I'll drink a health to me Creole girl from the Lakes of Pontchartrain.



The **Milneburg** train ran on a line from the harbor in around 1836 and eventually connected with another railway system around Lake Pontchartrain that became known as the **Great Northern Railway** that was in operation into the 1860s.

Banks of the Pontchartrain

Banks of the Pontchartrain

Lakes of the Pontchartrain

Arrangement by KelticDead Music

Traditional, Seafaring, Americana



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIMfdXX-bn0>

The sheet music arrangement can be played slowly or lively, and as mentioned there are several “adaptations” of this melody for other folk songs. I used Irish-tuned, Low-Octave Bouzouki, the Kerry Mezzo C whistle and voices. **Earnie Taft** came in with his fiddle, and **Linda King** provided the guitar support.

KelticDead Music Initiative

is a private, on-line music-education initiative. All the music projects are recorded with live, acoustic instruments and performed in accordance with simplified sheet music arranged in eight bar formats (whenever possible) in accordance with the guidelines that are within the Celtic music traditions. For more music videos and stories visit ...

<https://www.KelticDeadMusic.org>

To receive on-line, PDF copies like this one, join the KelticDead Music Newsletter list at KelticDeadMusic@gmail.com . It's free. All members are blind copied to protect privacy.



Shaun,
“That KelticDead Guy”
Patrick O. Young,