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Rory, Bory, Alice

Words by GEORGE BOWLES

Music by WILLIAM POTTER BROWN

Moderato

1. My sweet-heart lives beside the frozen Yu-kon, She’s an equi-maux of glacial ped-i-

2. They say my love is like a dig-ger in-dian, There’s a cop-pee on her beauty, I’ll a-

3. “Will you be my wife?” I asked her gent-ly, “If Ma is will-ing,” sweet-ly she re-

gree, Her clothes are made of fur, and all you see of her, Is a gree, There may be wo-men fin-er, but my A-lace is a mi-ner, And the plied, “A-las-ka,” quick I said, and the next day we were wed. And I

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countenance that’s home-ly as can be,

nuggets that she digs be-long to me,

put the Arc-tic Cir-cle on my bride,

A mis-sion-a-ry named the la-dy

So when she weighs the dust out in the

So now we have a flat in Dawson

A-lice, And when the North-ern Lights il-lume the sky,

evening, And when the North-ern Lights il-lume the sky,

G-ty, And when the North-ern Lights il-lume the sky,

I call her Ro-ry Bory and I

I call her Ro-ry Bory and I

I call her Ro-ry Bory and I

tell the an cient sto ry That my

tell the an cient sto ry That my

tell the an cient sto ry That my

love for Ro-ry Bo-ry’l ne-ver die.

love for Ro-ry Bo-ry’l ne-ver die.

love for Ro-ry Bo-ry’l ne-ver die.
CHORUS
Allegro Moderato

Oh Rory Bory Alice, you never saw a palace, And you haven't got a bou- doir to your name.

You jabber like a parrot, But your gold is eighteen ca-rat. I love Rory Bory Alice just the same.

Oh, same.
TURKEY IN THE STRAW

A Klondike Nugget editor, Eugene Allen, wrote in his memoirs that “the good old-fashioned dances were the most popular. The miners and the stampers loved the shottish, the polka, the square dance, and such... ‘Turkey in the Straw’ was a high favorite” (Bankson 1935, 207). Its popularity remains high to this day. The music for “Turkey in the Straw” goes back to an early 1830s minstrel tune, “Ole Zip Coon.”

Squaw Dance

Many miners did not live near dance halls or saloons but in more remote areas, where the nearest residents were not other gold seekers but the Native people who inhabited the land before they arrived.

Since there were usually more men than women in the camps, the miners often enlisted the Native women from the villages in order to increase the number of suitable partners for a dance. In those politically incorrect times, the miners called this a “squaw dance.” The following dance took place at Forty Mile.

In the dusk a stolid Indian woman with a baby in the blanket on her back, came cautiously around the corner... looking neither to the right nor to the left... She was followed by a dozen others, one far behind another, each silent and unconcerned, and each with a baby upon her back. They sidled into the log cabin and sat down on the benches, where they also deposited their babies in a row....

The mothers sat awhile looking at the ground on some one spot then slowly lifted their heads to look at the miners who had slouched into the cabin after them—men fresh from the diggings, spoiling for excitement of any kind. Then a man with a dilapidated fiddle struck up a swinging, sawing melody and in the intoxication of the moment some of the most reckless of the miners grabbed an Indian woman and began furiously swinging her around in a sort of waltz while the others crowded and looked on.

Little by little the dusk grew deeper... The figures of the dancing couples grew more and more indistinct and their faces became lost to view while the sawing of the fiddle grew more and more rapid, and the dancing more exciting. There was no noise however, scarcely a sound save the fiddle and the shuffling of the feet over the floor of rough hewn logs; for the Indian women were all stolid as ever and miners could not speak the language of their partners. Even the lookers on said nothing, so that these silent dancing figures in the dusk made an almost weird effect.

One by one, however, the women dropped out, tired, picked up their babies and slouched off home, and the men slipped over to the saloon to have a drink before going to their cabins. Surely this squaw dance, as they call it, was one of the most peculiar balls ever seen... (Spurr 1900, 116–19).
A minstrel show in Eagle in 1902. The popularity of minstrel shows was high all over the continent. L. E. Robertson Photo, Alaska-Entertainment folder, #12735. University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Division.
The Miner’s Lament

TO THE TUNE OF Lilly Dale

“THE MINER’S LAMENT” is a song from the California gold rush and appears in Put’s Original California Songster (1868), by John “Old Put” A. Stone. The author of the words is unknown but Stone said that it was sung to the tune of “Lilly Dale,” by H. S. Thompson. (“Lilly Dale,” first published in 1852, was a sad song of grief over the loss of the song’s namesake. The music can be found in Chapple 1909.) The lyrics to “Lilly Dale” are also included; they set in italics to distinguish them from the lyrics to “The Miner’s Lament.”

Chad Evans in his Frontier Theatre: A History of Nineteenth-century Theatrical Entertainment in the Canadian Far West and Alaska (1983) notes that “The Miner’s Lament” was sung in minstrel shows midway through the show. Apparently, the song had a powerful impact: “And finally comes the song that tears the heart strings of the miners, ‘The Miner’s Lament.’"

Minstrel Shows

The minstrel show was a common form of theatre from the 1820s, offered then by white performers, often in blackface, mimicking their idea of Negro music. It was a form of entertainment easily adaptable for amateur performers and used often during the Klondike and Alaska rushes.

A typical show started out with an opening chorus of five performers, all with instruments, a comedian presenting local humor, some silly and nonsense songs, and then a tearjerker, such as “The Miner’s Lament.” A variety of acts might follow, ending with a burlesque (Evans 1983, 254–56).

By the 1870s, regional troupes that emphasized local jokes and characters were replaced by large national companies of white or black performers.