

James Bird

More-or-less as sung by O.J. Abbott

Chord suggestions by Ian Bell

Bm A F#m A Bm

Sons of free - dom lis - ten to me And you daugh - ters too give ear.

5 Bm A F#m A Bm

To as sad and mourn - ful a sto - ry as was ev - er told you'll hear.

9 A A A F#m

Hull, you know his troops sur - ren - dered and de - fense - less left the west

13 Bm F#m A

Quick - ly then our troops ass - em - bled The in - vad - er to re - sist

Sung by O. J. Abbott, Hull, Quebec.

"James Bird", which dates from the War of 1812-14, is one of the most widely known of the native American ballads. Its author, Mr. Charles Miner (1780-1865) printed it in his own paper, The Gleaner, Wilkesbarre, Penn., late in 1814. It shortly passed into oral tradition and has been collected in Ohio, Missouri, New York, California, Utah, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia as well as in Canada.

The Battle of Lake Erie which the ballad describes took place on Sept. 10, 1813. Captain Oliver Hazard Perry commanding a small American fleet headed by the Lawrence engaged the British fleet under Captain Barclay. After fierce fighting the Lawrence was forced to strike her flag, but Perry managed to withdraw to the Niagara and continued the battle until the British ships were captured. He then sent the famous message, "We have met the enemy and they are ours."

1. You sons of freedom listen to me, and you daughters
too give ear,
You a sad and mournful story as was ever told shall
hear.
Hull you know his troops surrendered and defenceless
left the West,
Our forces quick assembled the invaders to resist.
2. There was one amongst the number tall, graceful and
serene,
Firm his step, his look undaunted, ne'er a nobler
youth was seen.
One fond kiss he snatched from Mary, craved his mother's
prayer once more,
Pressed his father's hand and left them for Lake Erie's
distant shore.
3. Soon he came where noble Perry had assembled all his
fleet.
Here this noble Bird enlisted expecting soon the foe
to meet.
Where is Bird when battle rages? Is he in the strife
or no?
Hark, the cannon's roar tremendous, here we meet our
furious foe.
4. But behold a ball has struck him, see the crimson
current flow.
"Leave the deck!" exclaimed brave Perry. "No", cried Bird,
"I will not go.
Here on deck I took my station, Bird will ne'er his
colors fly.
I will stand by you, brave Perry, till we conquer or
we die."

5. And did Bird receive a pension or was he to his friends
restored?
No, nor ever to his bosom clasped the maid his heart
adored.
But there came most dismal tidings from Lake Erie's
distant shore.
Better there that brave Bird had perished after the
battle's awful roar.

6. "Dearest father, tell my mother when this letter
reaches you
Not to mourn, her first beloved oh dearly bids his
last adieu.
I'm a sufferer for deserting from the brig Niagery.
Dearest mother, read this letter, 'tis the last you'll
hear from me."

7. Dark and dismal was the morning Bird was ordered out
to die.
Where's the heart that would not pity or for him would
heave a sigh?
See him kneel upon his coffin, sure his death can do no good.
Spare him! Hark! O God, they've shot him, see his bosom
stream with blood!

8. Farewell, Bird, farewell forever! Home nor friends you'll
see no more.
Now his mangled corpse lies buried on Lake Erie's distant
shore.
Bird will ever be remembered, aye unto this present day.
Oh what can beset or wrong them who engage in war or
fray?