



Whalers' Shanties of Barouallie, St. Vincent:  
Observations on the Nature, Decline and Revival of  
a Unique Caribbean Maritime Tradition

Daniel Lanier & Vincent Reid

# Whalers' Shanties of Barrouallie, St. Vincent: Observations on the Nature, Decline and Revival of a Unique Caribbean Maritime Tradition

● **Daniel Lanier & Vincent Reid**

Independent Researchers, Barrouallie Whalers Project, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

## ABSTRACT

Barrouallie, a fishing community on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent, has a unique cultural heritage associated with its history as a whaling centre. As a way to alert townspeople of a successful catch, Barrouallie whalers sang occupational songs known as 'shanties' while rowing their whaleboats to shore. A product of diverse cultural influences, the shanties of Barrouallie may be viewed as a sub-genre, distinct from the more general body of sea *chanteys*, the work songs of international 19th century merchant seamen. As a mode of expression - not merely a work song - a shanty could function variously as entertainment, satire, and advertisement. While economic and cultural changes in this developing island nation did not favour the continuance of shanty singing, a revival of interest in Barrouallie's whaling traditions began in 2001, with particular attention to shanties and the generation of men who recall the role and significance of these songs in the local whaling enterprise.

This 21st century renaissance of a maritime music tradition among living practitioners represents a remarkable survival that deserves greater recognition. Through the performance and recording of shanties, *The Barrouallie Whalers* have been interpreting and publicising Barrouallie's whaling heritage for an international audience since 2001.

## Introduction

A foreigner visiting the Eastern Caribbean community of Barrouallie might at first perceive it as very similar to scores of other coastal villages in the region. Entering the

town along the Leeward Highway, the visitor would find small colourful rum shops lining the roads, locals engaged in relaxed conversation or a card game, a spicy mélange of island odours and the ubiquitous beat

of recorded reggae. These common features belie the special character of this extraordinary fishing community. Even among Vincentians, who generally know Barrouallie as a whaling centre, many would not fully appreciate the unique cultural heritage tied to this enterprise.

An important fishing community of approximately 5,500 persons, Barrouallie (pronounced /BEHR-a-lee/) lies approximately 10 kilometres north of the island's capital of Kingstown on the southwest or leeward coast of St. Vincent (13° 15' N, 61° W), the northernmost island in the nation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Neighbouring nations within this archipelago include St. Lucia, Grenada, and Barbados, with Trinidad and Tobago nearby. Virtually all residents of Barrouallie are of principally African descent. Here farming, in combination with part-time commercial and subsistence fishing, provides employment for many men.

While the greater Caribbean region shares an essentially Creole culture rooted in West African antecedents, one can find subtle diversity in folkways throughout the islands. Barrouallie, for instance, is distinctive in its maritime heritage. The local waters support seasonal populations of a variety of cetaceans that historically formed the basis of shore-based whale fisheries in Barbados, Trinidad, Grenada, and St. Vincent (Reeves: 2002), in which whalers could hunt in sailboats launched from the beach. Initially, these local whaling operations sought principally humpback whales. To a limited extent, Barrouallie today maintains a pilot whale fishery that commenced there in the early 20th century as a commercial enterprise. A musical element of Barrouallie's whaling traditions, one that had largely faded from the lives of its practitioners until recently, exemplifies the diversity of folk culture of which traces still remain in the Caribbean. Several whalers from Barrouallie are the last practitioners of unique Vincentian folksongs that

accompanied their shore-based whaling activities. The majority of these local occupational songs are known as 'shanties' (1), which now are a tradition endemic to Barrouallie and may be viewed as distinct from the older sea 'chantey' tradition of deepwater sailing ships.

## Prior documentation

The inspiration for the current interest in the whaling songs of Barrouallie originates in the work of American folklorist Roger Abrahams, who visited the area in 1966. Dr. Abrahams interviewed whalers and recorded their songs at that time, and later published the results of this work in a celebrated collection, *Deep the Water, Shallow the Shore: Three Essays on Shantying in the West Indies*. In his essay 'Solid Fas' Our Captain Cry Out: Blackfishing at Barouallie, Abrahams surveyed the musical offerings of his whaler informants, with emphasis on their work songs or shanties (Abrahams: 1974), and provided some insightful commentary on the role of this music in local society. Abrahams' essay became a reference work of great interest to sea chantey and maritime enthusiasts throughout the world.

In his detailed account of the Barrouallie blackfish (pilot whale) industry, Vincentian researcher Leroy Jackson explained that *the crew make it known to the people that they have made a catch by singing chanteys when they come near to the shore* and provided one shanty excerpt as an example (Jackson: 1967, p. 11). Jackson remarked that even if only a few individuals heard the singing, this would suffice to notify the entire community very quickly.

American cetologists, David and Melba Caldwell, visited Barrouallie during 1968 to 1971 in the course of their field research on dolphins and whales. Having portable tape-recording equipment with them, the

Caldwells recorded the shanties of several of the whalers Abrahams had recorded slightly earlier (Caldwell and Caldwell: 1968-1971).

During the same period, Jack Stanesco, a young American Peace Corps volunteer taught school in Barrouallie (Paton: 1971, pp. 3-4). As a folk musician himself, Stanesco learned several of the Barrouallie shanties while there and tape-recorded some of the singers (2). Now, a generation later, several of the men Abrahams interviewed, and the Caldwells and Stanesco recorded in the 1960s, are providing a fresh look at the *capella* folk music of Barrouallie.

## Sailors and whalers

Historically, shipping enterprises have employed many Vincentians. Islanders shipped as merchant seamen or whalers in British, Canadian, and American craft throughout the 19th century. Inter-island trade by sailing or auxiliary craft such as sloops and schooners figured importantly in the regional commerce into the mid-20th century. From the beginning, St. Vincent's agricultural exports relied on deepwater shipping to reach their markets. Thus, the island's economy has longstanding maritime connections to the outer world (Adams: 1996).

Originally, the Grenadines whalers - and later the Barrouallie men - hunted from Yankee-style 25-foot wooden whaleboats powered by sail and oar (see Plate 1), and manned by a crew of six, in a manner similar to that of 19th century American whale-men. With technology adopted from American whalers (Ward: 1995), this enterprise produced whale oil for export and meat for local consumption. Into the 1960s, a fleet of perhaps a dozen Barrouallie whaleboats caught hundreds of pilot

whales annually and sometimes brought in larger killer and sperm whales as well. By the early 1970s, many whaleboats had been fitted with outboard motors and light harpoon guns mounted on the foredecks. A few whalers in Barrouallie continue to catch blackfish and porpoises, which are species subject to fewer hunting restrictions by the International Whaling Commission than larger cetaceans. Whale meat constitutes an important part of the local diet and remains a marketable commodity in nearby Kingstown.

## Chanteys and shanties

The 'Great Age of Sail' gave rise to a class of (principally) American and British deepwater sailors with a common body of occupational lore that included maritime work songs, a tradition that reached its apex in the mid-19th century. The classical period of chanting, roughly the 1840s to the 1860s, coincided well with the height of the American sperm whaling industry.

Chanteys, as songs of sea labour, fit generally into several functional categories of shipboard work that these songs accompanied. Thus, *Blow the Man Down*, was a halyard chantey used while setting square topsails, and *Rio Grande*, was a capstan chantey to accompany the work of turning a capstan around to heave up an anchor. Similarly, work songs accompanied the dockside tasks of stevedoring or cargo-handling. Several other categories of chanteys exist, each adapted in its musical form to a specific type of work. For instance, hauling songs, such as halyard chanteys, generally have alternating solos and short choruses, the choruses featuring specific points (indicated by the words and metre) at which the sailors were expected to haul together simultaneously.



**Figure 1**  
Blackfish whalers from Barrouallie, circa 1970.  
Photograph courtesy of the New Bedford  
Whaling Museum (Caldwell Collection)

Known to us now from collected texts and archival sound recordings, these chanteys enjoyed their most widespread circulation and use as work songs during the mid-19th century, a period of time during which American and west European sailing vessels dominated deepwater shipping. Virtually all the major collectors and compilers of sea chanteys have observed, to a greater or lesser extent, the diversity of cultural influences in this genre. The crews of deepwater merchant vessels, comprising members of many nationalities and ethnicities but sharing a common body of occupational lore, naturally had ample opportunity to exchange and develop their tradition of work songs over the course of many voyages. Among the most prominent contributors to the genre were Americans, African-Americans, Caribbeans, English, and Irish. Collectively, however, chantey practitioners were nearly as diverse as the crews themselves, with Scandinavians, Germans and others in the mix.

Joanna Colcord, who had first-hand experience on Yankee ships, summarised this phenomenon, with respect to the sources of chanteys on British and American vessels:

*With the ships of both nations meeting in the ports of all the world, and the sailors mingling freely and shipping indifferently in both English and American bottoms, it would be difficult if not impossible to disentangle the matter of origins.* (Colcord: 1924, Foreword, p. 4)

Colcord noted that several chanteys showed indications of origins in the southern cotton ports of the United States such as Mobile Bay, where similar work songs had accompanied the arduous manual labour of stowing cotton into vessels with jackscrews and wedges. This seasonal occupation brought together a diverse international labour force of sailors and stevedores, many of them African-Americans.

Maritime folklorist, Horace Beck, who collected several chanteys from the Grenadines during many visits, recognized the uniqueness of the region's chanting traditions. Beck observed that the chanteys he found there did not closely resemble the corpus of familiar sea chanteys in print, although they certainly shared common elements. Beck had the good fortune, in the 1960s, to witness chanting (principally in Bequia and Carriacou) as a living tradition integrated into community tasks such

as vessel launching, careening, and rowing for whales. In his view, the Grenadines chanteys, while descended from deepwater song, had been greatly modified to suit local attitudes and activities (Beck: 1973).

In the context of Grenadines whaling, the singing of chanteys at the oars was undoubtedly established by the early 20th century. Frederic Fenger wrote in 1911, during a visit to Ile-de-Caille (Caille Island) in the southern Grenadines, of hearing on a moonlit night *the plaintive chanty of the whalers as they sang to dispel the imaginary terrors that lurk in the shadows of the cove* as these humpback whalers returned from their day's work on the sea. (Fenger: 1958, p. 48)

Among the fishermen of Barrouallie, shanties pertained principally to just two work activities - rowing and hauling. A comparison of only the mechanical applications of sea chanteys as work songs, however, overlooks the critical communicative functions of these musical expressions in their occupational and social contexts. The definition and deliberate use of the more specific term 'shanty' in this discussion underlines the role of these songs as vehicles of social expression within the local community. Today, in fact, persons from Barrouallie who can recall hearing shanties a generation ago will associate them not so much with work, but with the return of a happy whaling crew, lustily singing to announce their success.

### **Shanties of Barrouallie whalers**

As noted earlier, the musical form known in St. Vincent as 'shanty' is associated with the practice of longshore whaling, and especially blackfishing, the industry for which Barrouallie is renowned. As songs that once accompanied the rowing of whaleboats ashore after a successful hunt, shanties have a special significance in Barrouallie. From the perspective of Barrouallie fishermen, their shanties served as a sort of broadcast or advertisement to alert the local populace that the catch would soon arrive in port and that the crew would soon need help with the work of bringing their quarry ashore. In addition, Barrouallie has a few hauling songs that accompanied the work of hauling blackfish or larger whales on to the shore. The latter include the widespread Caribbean song *Yardo*, which was known, for instance, in nearby Bequia and Carriacou and more distant Jamaica.

Remarkably, a majority of the shanties known in Barrouallie are recognisable as direct descendants of

classic deepwater sea chanteys such as *Blow the Man Down*, *Goodbye Fare-You-Well*, *Rio Grande*, and *Blow, Boys, Blow*, once known by sailors throughout the world and included in every major sea chantey collection. Tunes and textual elements of these sailor songs persisted in many of the Barrouallie shanties long after the demise of their ancestral chanteys. A majority of the shanties feature melodies and refrains very close to their deepwater predecessors, although the songs have acquired distinctly local flavours and meanings in the texts of the solo lines.

Many of the shanties refer to whales or whaling, and signify aspects of the hunt. *Seven Long Years* and *Long Time Ago* were shanties appropriate to sing after a long and arduous whaling episode or in the event of a catch following a long period without success. Excerpts from these examples illustrate how the deepwater chantey had become adapted to its role in Barrouallie as a whaling song, while preserving its general form and some similar phrases:

Chantey: *Shenandoah*

*Seven years I courted Sally,  
Way-hay, you rolling river  
Seven more I longed to have her  
Ha-ha, we're bound away, 'cross the wide Missouri*  
[Colcord: 1924, p. 32]

Shanty: *Seven Long Years*

*Seven long years, into de ocean  
Hoo row, my rollin' river  
Seven long years, I never touch one  
We are bound away from this world of misery*

The tunes of these two versions bear a marked resemblance to one another, but the subject matter has altered considerably. While the former deals with a sailor's protracted courtship, the latter concerns the lengthy pursuit of a whale. Subsequent verses of the Barrouallie shanty refer to details of the hunt and the hardship endured by the whalers.

Alternatively, *Goodbye, Fare-You-Well*, based on a famous chantey of the same name, refers to *those girls from Bermuda*, meaning the so-called 'tame blackfish' that were easy to approach and harpoon:

*Those girls from Bermuda come pay us a view,*

*Hoo row, hoo row, hoo row, my boy  
To de nor'west we roam, and we now comin' home  
Goodbye fare-you-well, goodbye fare-you-well.*

Some of the shanties, as Abrahams perceptively explained, express the tension between boat owners and crews with respect to the proper outfitting of whaleboats. The well-known *Blow de Man Down* (see below) is one such example. In this, the shanties, not unlike their deepwater ancestors, provided a musical mechanism for venting sailors' grievances toward those in positions of power and authority.

## Diverse influences

As Caribbean culture in general has evolved from a variety of sources, so the musical heritage of Barrouallie suggests multiple influences. Ostensibly, the Barrouallie shanties originated with the sea chanteys of deepwater sailors, as they share many melodic and textual features with several chanteys well-known to merchant seamen and whalers of the 1800s throughout the English-speaking world. Indeed, the nearby Grenadines island of Bequia, a famous centre of humpback whaling and the source of Barrouallie whaleboats, had a direct historical connection with Yankee whaling (3) and a chanting tradition.

A related genre to which a few of the shanties bear a marked resemblance, is Afro-Caribbean rowing songs, such as were sung contemporaneously with shanties into the mid-20th century in the Barrouallie vicinity. Leeward canoes, also known as 'passage boats,' constituted a critically important mode of transportation for St. Vincent before the development of modern roads around the island. These approximately 10 to 12 metre long dugout canoes of native Carib design carried cargo and passengers along the Leeward coast to the capital city of Kingstown under power of oars. The oarsmen and 'steerman' (coxswain) sang to synchronize their rowing. One such rowing chant went:

### EXAMPLE 1



The chorus - *wa bap!* - coincided with the unified pull of the oars, coordinating the effort in precisely the manner that other sea chanteys synchronized the hauling

or heaving of shipboard machinery. The steerman would shout words of encouragement to the rowers between choruses: *move, boy!* and *now we movin!* (4)

Barrouallie was the home port for some of the leeward canoes. One of the whalers' rowing songs, *Black Bird Get Up*, though based in part on a 'ring play' (singing game), has a form and metre that resemble those of the passage boat chant described above:

**EXAMPLE 2**



The whalers of Barrouallie explain that their captain would initiate this song to encourage the men and coordinate their rowing when in pursuit of a whale. This type of rowing song represents a particularly ancient variety of sea chantey, obviously ancestral to the Barrouallie shanty tradition in general.

Remarking on the improvisational aspect of chanting, Stan Hugill, a most prolific writer on the subject of chanteys, compared the performance style of African-American chanteymen to that of calypso singers:

*"in typical Negro shanties" the first two or three verses were so-called 'regulation' and the remainder improvised in the manner of calypso singing.* (Hugill: 1961, p. 32)

Calypso, the music of Carnival and a quintessentially Caribbean genre, undeniably resonates with the Barrouallie shantie tradition. Among the many popular varieties of music now enjoyed in the nation - reggae, gospel, soca, ska, and others - none has greater importance to Vincentian culture and society than calypso. With a distinct performance style and roots in African banter song traditions, this form of topical song is the preferred vehicle for social and political expression in the islands. Shantying, in its heyday at Barrouallie, could serve communicative functions on the local scale similar to the satirical functions of calypso as enjoyed throughout the Caribbean. The calypso singer and the shantyman share the gift of spontaneous composition and performance, much esteemed by their audiences. As in calypso entertainment, the shanty could express

with humour, rhyme, and rhythm the opinions and grievances of a social group - in this case, whalers - with greater satisfaction than other available means of communication.

As Abrahams has noted, the whalers of Barrouallie adapted the old chantey *Blow the Man Down*, to satirise a boat owner who provided inferior equipment to his workers (Abrahams: 1974). When old, worn-out whaling tackle broke owing to its poor condition, the whalers might sing the following lines:

**EXAMPLE 3**



Other solos of the shantyman on this theme included: *If you give me some rope, I will tie dem like goats* and *If you give me some line, I will treat you real fine.* (5). With this type of musical commentary, the fishermen's shanty served a time-honoured social control function identical to that of the calypso.

Another object of the whalers' ridicule was *De Man in de Waistcoat*, the official who collected duty from the whalers for landing their catch at the slip:

**EXAMPLE 4**



This song goes on to expound comically on the character of this well-dressed, but unpopular, fellow. Another verse: *He sittin' on his stool jus' like a little boy in*

*Sunday School, de man in de waistcoat love fisherman money.*

The Caribbean has served as an incubator of deepwater sailors for centuries and, as folklorists have observed, chanteys or chantey-influenced songs have lingered among these islands to a greater extent than elsewhere. The Grenadines, because of its commercial whaling history, appears to have offered a setting particularly favourable for sustaining the use of chanteys for so long. The whaling activities of Norwegians in the vicinity during the 1920s (Romero and Hayford: 2000) and later, may have influenced the longevity of this musical tradition (6), as classic chanteys were well known to Scandinavian seamen. The Eastern Caribbean is virtually the only part of the English-speaking world in which such clear vestiges of this old sea music tradition has survived into the 21st century among living practitioners.

Commentators on chanteys have expressed nearly unanimous consensus on the giftedness of African-Americans, in general, as chanteymen. For instance, Colcord, recalling her deepwater sailing experiences of the 1890s and discussing the merits of American, English, and Irish chanteymen, wrote: *...they in turn were far outstripped by the American negroes - the best singers that ever lifted a shanty aboard ship.* (Colcord: 1924) Another respected chantey documenter, William Doerflinger echoed this opinion:

*There were no finer shanteymen, as a class, than the Negroes, whose racial gifts of song, dance, and humor also made them particularly popular as [shipboard] entertainers.* (Doerflinger: 1990, p. 97)

The distinctive musical abilities of African-American singers, on which such observers remarked, had their roots, not in some sort of racial predisposition of course, but deep within in African culture and the musical styles to which it gave rise.

In the substantial body of sea chanteys compiled and interpreted during the past century, one can find ample evidence that West Indians contributed significantly to the genre and practice of chanteys (Abrahams: 1974, pp. 6-9). Those who observed and recorded chanting - many of them travellers - often commented on the exceptional improvisational skills, and particularly the use of harmony, in West Indian chanting. Some of the pre-eminent chantey collectors credit Eastern Caribbean sources in particular. Frederick Pease Harlow included

several West Indian work songs in his *Chanteying Aboard American Ships* and described his recollection, in superlative terms, of Barbadian dock workers singing at their work in 1878:

*The negro stevedores at the fall where the cargo was hoisted by hand, sang this chantey day after day "The harmony of their voices outshone any college quartet ever heard. Such singing I never expect to hear again under similar circumstances.* (Harlow: 1948, p. 241)

Beginning his collection a half-century after Harlow's trip to Barbados, the celebrated British chantey anthologist and seaman, Stan Hugill, learned many sailor songs in the Windward Islands, and ultimately attributed approximately 50 versions of chanteys in his monumental collection, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*, to Eastern Caribbean seamen. Hugill's sources included at least five such informants, among them a Vincentian chanteyman (Hugill: 1961). Clearly, the examples of Harlow and Hugill point to the richness of this region as an esteemed source and ultimate haven for chanteys.

Chanteys persisted in popular Caribbean tradition for many years following the passing of the 'Age of Sail' in the early 20th century, as American ethno-musicologist Lomax documented during his highly successful collecting forays throughout this region in the 1930s and 1960s (Lomax *et al.*: 1997). Whereas, with the demise of commercial sailing ships, chanteys had all but vanished from use among merchant seamen by the early 20th century, chanting maintained some currency in Caribbean islands where a few types of heavy manual labour justified their use. The endemic Afro-Caribbean culture had favoured communal singing among workers since plantation days, and the islands preserved such practices to a greater extent than mainland communities.

## Decline of shanties in Barrouallie

The eventual abandonment of sea chanteys as work songs accompanied the inevitable decline of commercial square-rigged vessels and the professional seamen who sailed them. One might at first suppose that an analogous process occurred in Barrouallie, with the advent of outboard motors (in the late 1960s) and other mechanical conveniences that made shanties obsolete as work songs. The whalers themselves, when asked why the singing of shanties had ceased, have offered another

explanation.

As a whaleboat approached Barrouallie, its crew would sing to alert the townspeople that a catch was coming in, the rowers' voices echoing from the volcanic hills surrounding the harbour. The weary oarsmen would need assistance hauling whales ashore and beginning the other processes contingent on the fresh catch, and thus expected a crowd to assemble at the beach. Traditionally, such activities had a strong element of communal participation, and local conventions called for some degree of sharing of the whale meat. The 1960s and '70s were a time of rapid development and profound changes in Barrouallie and other Caribbean communities. As cash transactions became increasingly important in the local economy, a shift in community values affected the practice of whaling, which had rarely ever been a particularly profitable venture. A catch shared among the whalers, boat owner, and a select few, yielded a better cash profit than a catch shared more generally in the community. So, with the increasing difficulties of making a living in the business of whaling, the returning crews became quieter (7).

The shanty known as *Bear Away Yankee* speaks directly of this turn of events.

#### EXAMPLE 5



The image shows two staves of musical notation in 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is simple and rhythmic. Below the first staff, the lyrics are: "Who na been off na come a bay. Bear away Yankee, bear a-way". Below the second staff, the lyrics are: "Bear a-way to that - il - more, Bear away Yankee, bear a-way".

In the local dialect, the first solo line *who na been off, na come a bay* means 'whoever hasn't gone out (whaling), don't come to the bay.' The song continues with further admonitions: *If you want de liver you have to buy*, and *If you want de guts you have to buy*, meaning that the whalers expected payment for even the most undesirable parts of the catch. This shanty's lyrics, somewhat ironically, were intended to discourage communal participation rather than to attract a crowd, while it expressed the growing concern for financial profit.

Of course, in Barrouallie as elsewhere in the developing Caribbean, economic changes brought about many cultural transitions. These developments attended a general decline of oral folklore and folksongs throughout the region. Folk tales ('Anansi' stories), ring

plays, and a host of other once-popular folk traditions now remain only in the memories of older residents, except for an occasional resurrection in the classroom.

## A Renaissance of shanties and shantymen

At the suggestion of the authors, the group of men now known as 'The Barrouallie Whalers' first assembled as such in early 2002 at the home of Alfred Mason, one of Dr. Abrahams' chief informants. About 36 years earlier, these men had been among those who provided the essential material for Abrahams' essay on Barrouallie shanties.

Now in their 60s and 70s, the Barrouallie Whalers (8) represent the last generation of Caribbean whalers who hunted from wooden whaleboats powered by sail and oar. These men engaged in such work from the late 1940s until the 1970s, and one of them has continued blackfishing (with more modern technology) into the present century. The Barrouallie Whalers did not truly consider themselves performers - much less, professional musicians - until their invitation to travel abroad and perform publicly for folk music enthusiasts. This opportunity, and the interest it generated, encouraged the men to practice and remember the songs of their whaling days.

During the Spring of 2002, a remarkable cultural exchange took place when four of the Barrouallie Whalers travelled to the United States to speak and sing of whaling at America's premiere maritime museum, Mystic Seaport Museum in Connecticut. For the first time, the Barrouallie Whalers brought their unique repertoire of songs, stories, and whaling lore overseas and participated in the museum's annual *Sea Music Festival*, an event that draws an international cadre of performers and an audience of several thousand. A CD produced at the *Sea Music Festival* contains three tracks by the Barrouallie Whalers, which demonstrate how well they adapted to their new role as entertainers.

Since 2002, the Barrouallie Whalers have embarked on an organised effort to revive and preserve their whaling heritage of lore and song. In October 2003, the Barrouallie Whalers journeyed to Friesland, in the Netherlands, to take part in a maritime festival at Workum. There, as guests of honour, they participated in several musical and dramatic performances during a three-day international event. Locally, St. Vincent's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries hosted a

*Fisherman's Day* in 2005, at which the Barrouallie Whalers made presentations for the exhibition in Kingstown. Other public events have provided opportunities for them to perform in St. Vincent as a way of highlighting their cultural heritage.

The revival of interest in the Barrouallie shanties and whaling tradition is not a spontaneous phenomenon; it has been inspired from outside the region by American and European aficionados of maritime history and culture. Indeed, on the local level, there seems little that would favour a resurgence of shanties, now an arcane and obsolete occupational music form, and one associated with a bygone era of very demanding work and a lower standard of living. Commercial blackfishing continues as an important local industry, but without the older socio-cultural complex in which the shanties thrived. Official proponents of St. Vincent's national heritage, who are very sensitive to the whims of tourism, recognise that - out of environmental concern - whaling would not always be perceived favourably by foreigners. Some might therefore be reluctant to draw undue attention to the subject. For the most part, it is outsiders who have taken the lead in celebrating the merits of Barrouallie's musical traditions, although most of the whalers themselves have responded enthusiastically. The whalers' genuine enthusiasm for the shanty revival reflects their inherent pride, a degree of nostalgia and the excitement of feedback from an appreciative international audience.

As true bearers of tradition, rather than mere revivalists, the Barrouallie Whalers have phenomenal importance for our appreciation of the shantying tradition. Not professional entertainers *per se*, these men are skilled performers nonetheless, as their concerts have demonstrated. The whalers appreciate a gifted shantyman and expect variety in the delivery of a shanty. For any particular shanty, each rendition will be unique and extemporaneous. Spontaneous vocal harmonies are a natural feature in many shanty refrains, rather than an embellishment added for the public's enjoyment. Their performances illustrate many of the elements of shantying (or chantying) most difficult to convey in transcriptions or even sound recordings. Some of these elusive features include textual improvisation, vocal overlap, syncopation, spoken commentary, synchronised movement, and a myriad of other interactions - subtle or emphatic - that occur within the group and within a given performance setting (9). The shanty tradition of Barrouallie exemplifies the best qualities of Caribbean

folk music.

While the future of Barrouallie's shanty tradition is uncertain, the men who now enjoy performing have taken up the cause of interpreting this tradition and seeing that it is not forgotten. Since the late 1960s the Barrouallie school music curriculum has, from time to time, featured some of the shanties, often through the efforts of teachers who had family members in the blackfishing trade. The renewed interest in Barrouallie's whaling heritage generated by the international success the Barrouallie Whalers shows promise of re-inspiring local preservation efforts.

Local and national organisations, including the Barrouallie Fisherman Cooperative and St. Vincent's Ministry of Tourism and Culture, have expressed support for efforts to preserve and document Barrouallie's whaling heritage. The annual government-sponsored *Fisherman's Day* serves to educate the public about the old traditions and innovations in the blackfishing industry and has become an opportunity to showcase Barrouallie's shantymen as important exponents of local culture and as performers. Musical entertainment at the *Fisherman's Day* often includes a folksong competition in which contestants compose and perform songs with a theme related to fisheries. Although this competition does not involve the shantymen, the fact that such live, local entertainment accompanies the event demonstrates that the Barrouallie community remains both receptive to folk music and able to generate new musical material in the context of its maritime heritage. As eco-tourism grows in popularity and importance for St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Barrouallie becomes increasingly aware of the importance of marine habitat conservation and sustainable fishing practices. Perhaps the whalers and their descendants will find that the interpretation of Barrouallie's whaling history - including the performance of shanties - has a place in the development of the whale-watching business for tourists.

## The Barrouallie Whalers Project

Conceived in 2001 by the present authors American, Dan Lanier, and Vincentian, Vincent Reid, the *Barrouallie Whalers Project* aims to document and preserve important aspects of Barrouallie's whaling heritage, to encourage the enjoyment of this unique culture, and to publicise these activities for Vincentians and other interested persons throughout the world. On a co-

**Figure 2**  
Barrouallie whalers (standing, from left) Edgar Mulraine, Veron Harry, and George Frederick, demonstrating whaleboat operations in 2002 at Mystic Seaport Museum in Connecticut. Seated is senior museum interpreter James Mortimer. The 1841 whaling bark Charles W. Morgan is in the background. (Photograph by Carol Entin)



operative, volunteer basis, Lanier, Reid, and the Barrouallie Whalers are actively engaged in the promotion of this project. Based in the United States, the *Barrouallie Whalers Project, Inc.* is a nonprofit organization. Readers who wish to know more about the Barrouallie Whalers may visit the web site <http://www.barrwhalers.org>, which features photographs, brief recorded samples, and other information. 🇺🇸

## NOTES

1. The term 'shanty' (with the Vincentian pronunciation /shahn-tee/) serves herein as the designation for this Barrouallie singing tradition for two principal reasons: a) to maintain consistency with Abrahams' orthography and, accordingly, to recognize his seminal role in this research; and b) to identify the work songs of Barrouallie specifically as a sub-genre distinct from the body of classical 'sea chanteys' (the latter spelling reserved for this more general category) as practiced by 19th century merchant seamen.
2. Upon his return to the United States, Jack Stanesco performed a few of the Barrouallie shanties on two phonographic recordings issued by Folk Legacy Records of Sharon, Connecticut. These recordings popularised these songs among American folk music enthusiasts. In addition, Stanesco donated his recordings of Barrouallie whalers to the folk music archives at the United States Library of Congress.
3. The acknowledged originator of Grenadines whaling, William T. 'Old Bill' Wallace, Jr. (b. 1840), served in Yankee whaling vessels in the 1860s and up to 1880. In 1875, Old Bill founded his first whaling station on the island of his birth, Bequia (/bek-way/), next to St. Vincent (Ward: 1995).
4. Personal communication in 2002 with Edgar Mulraine of Barrouallie, St. Vincent.
5. Internal rhyme within each solo line occurs throughout this shanty.
6. Personal communication in 2001 with Alfred Mason of Barrouallie, St. Vincent. Mason recalled that a Norwegian whaler knew sea chanteys.
7. Personal communication in 2002 with whalers Veron Harry and George Frederick of Barrouallie, St. Vincent.
8. The Barrouallie Whalers who have participated in international events include Edgar Mulraine (now deceased), George Frederick, Milton Patrick, Veron Harry, and George Marson.
9. Certainly, some of these performance elements belong more appropriately to recreational performance or entertainment events, rather than strictly to a work song setting.

## REFERENCES

- Abrahams, Roger D. 1974. *Deep the Water, Shallow the Shore: Three Essays on Shantying in the West Indies*. (Austin, TX, U.S.A: University of Texas Press)
- Abrahams, Roger D. 1966. Field recordings from Barrouallie, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. (personal collection of Roger Abrahams)
- Adams, Edgar. 1996. *Linking the Golden Anchor with the Silver Chain*. (Kingstown, St. Vincent: Edgar Adams)
- American Folk Life Center, 1970. Jack Stanesco Duplication Project (tape recording), No. AFS 14,222 (Washington, DC.: United States Library of Congress)
- The Barrouallie Whalers Project, Inc.: *Web Site of the Barrouallie Whalers* <http://www.barroualliewhalers.com> (consulted September 2006)
- Beck, Horace P. 1973. *Folklore and the Sea*. (Middletown, CT, U.S.A., Wesleyan University Press.)
- Caldwell, David and Caldwell, Melba. 1968-1971. Caldwell Collection of the New Bedford Whaling Museum (New Bedford Massachusetts. Old Dartmouth Historical Society)
- Colcord, Joanna C. 1924. *Roll and Go: Songs of American Sailormen*. (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co.)
- Doerflinger, William Main. 1990. *Songs of the Sailor and Lumberman*. (Glenwood, Il.: Myerbooks)
- Fenger, Frederic A. 1958. *Alone in the Caribbean, The Cruise of the Sailing Canoe 'Yakaboo' in the Lesser Antilles*. (Belmont, MA: Wellington Books)
- Harlow, F.P. 1948. *Chanteying Aboard American Ships*. (Salem: The American Neptune)
- Hugill, Stan. 1961. *Shanties from the Seven Seas. Shipboard Work-Songs used as Work-Songs from the Great Days of Sail*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul)
- Hugill, Stan. 1969. *Shanties and Sailors' Songs* (New York: Frederick A Praeger)
- Jackson, Leroy R. 1967. *The Blackfish Industry of Barrouallie, St Vincent*. (Kingstown, St. Vincent: unpublished manuscript)
- Lomax, Alan, Elder, J.D., and Lomax, Bess Hawes. 1997, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (New York: Pantheon Books)
- Merriam, Alan. P. 1964. *The Anthropology of Music*. (Chicago: Northwestern University Press)
- Paton, Sandy. 1971. Long-playing phonograph recording liner notes to *The New Golden Ring 'Five Days Singing' Volume 1*. (Sharon, C.T: Folk Legacy Records, Inc.)
- Reeves, Randall R. 2002. The origins and character of 'aboriginal subsistence' whaling: a global review. pp.71-106 in *Mammal Review* Vol. 32, No. 2.
- Romero, A. & K. Hayford. 2000. Past and Present Utilization of Marine Mammals in Grenada. pp. 223-226 in *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management* Vo. 2. No. 3.
- Ward, Nathalie 1995. *Blows, Mon, Blows. An Anthropological Study of the Bequia Humpback Whale Fishery*. (Woods Hole, MA: Gecko Productions, Inc. Publishing)