

The Greenland Whale Fisheries

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'Twas in eight - een hund - red and fif - ty three And of

June the thir - teenth day, That our

gal - lant - ship - her - an - chor - weighed, And for

Green - land bore - a way, brave boys, And for

Greer - land bore - a way.

- "Twas in eighteen hundred and fifty-three
And of June the thirteenth day,
That our gallant ship her anchor weighed,
And for Greenland bore away, brave boys,
And for Greenland bore away.
- The lookout in the crosstrees stood
With spyglass in his hand;
"There's a whale, there's a whale,
there's whalefish" he cried
"And she blows at every span, brave boys
She blows at every span".
- The captain stood on the quarter deck,
And a fine little man was he;
"Overhaul, overhaul! Let your davit tackles fall,
And launch your boats for sea, brave boys
And launch your boats for sea".
- Now the boats were launched and the men aboard,
And the whale was full in view.
Resolv-ed was each seaman bold
To steer where the whalefish blew, brave boys
To steer where the whalefish blew.
- We stuck the whale the line paid out,
But she gave a flunder with her tail.
The boat capsized and four men were drowned,
And we never caught that whale, brave boys,
And we never caught that whale.
- "To lose the whale," our captain said,
"It grieves my heart full sore,
But oh! to lose (those) four gallant men
It grieves me ten times more brave boys
It grieves me ten times more". *
- The winter star doth now appear,
So, boys we'll anchor weight;
It's time to leave this cold country
And homeward bear away, brave boys
And homeward bear away.
- Oh Greenland is a dreadful place
A land that's never green.
Where there's ice and snow, and the whalefishes
blow
And the daylight's seldom seen brave boys
And the daylight's seldom seen.

* Alternate verse 6:

6. "To lose those men," our captain said,
"It grieves my heart full sore".
But the losing of that hundred barrel whale
It grieved him ten times more brave boys,
It grieved him ten times more".

In most of the versions collected from oral sources, the song opens up giving a date for the events that it describes (usually between 1823 and 1853). However, the song is actually older than this and a form of it was published as a ballad before 1725.

Other whaling songs in this section are:

"The Bonny Ship the Diamond"

"Blow, Ye Winds"

"Rolling Down to Old Maui"

It was recorded by Theodore Bikel, The Chad Mitchell Trio, The Pogues, The Weavers and Peter, Paul and Mary.

I learned this first from **The Burl Ives Songbook** and later from Lomax's **Folk Songs of North America**.