

# Monongahela Sal - accompaniment

Robert Schmertz

Capo 5



1. She was born in an old Mannessan Alley  
Her Ma and her Pa named her Sal  
She grew up to be the pride of the valley,  
A typical Monongahela gal.  
    She was smart, she was pert, she was pretty---  
    And the bloom of health was on her cheeks  
    But she bought it in Monongahela City  
    And the druggist swore that it would last for weeks.

**Chorus:**

Roll on, roll on Monongahela,  
Roll on past the O-Hi-O  
Roll past the All-i-quippy, down to the Mississippi  
Clear to the Gulf of Mexico.

2. One night Sal was strollin' by the river  
When she saw the "Jason" standing nigh  
Her heart gave a leap and a quiver  
When she spied the handsome pilot's roving eye.  
    His name, you must know, was Moat Stanley  
    And he wore a fancy sporting coat.  
    He was tall, dark and handsome, and manly  
    Slickest pilot ever steered a boat.

**Chorus:**

Roll On, roll on Monongahela,  
Where the catfish and the carp left long ago.  
You used to be so pure, but now you're just a sewer,  
You're messing up the Gulf of Mexico.

3. Well, Moat gave a toot on the whistle  
And the "Jason" backed water at the stern,  
And Sal, stepping light as a thistle  
Stepped up and took Moat Stanley's hand in her'n.  
    It was love, careless love, by the river  
    It was love, careless love, by the shore.  
    And I'm sure that the good Lord will forgive her,  
    For she never knew what love was like before.

**Chorus:**

Roll On, roll on Monongahela.  
Away from the ice and snow,  
I think you're mighty lucky to roll past old Kentucky,  
Clear to the Gulf of Mexico.

4. Moat swore that he always would love her  
As they locked through the old Amsworth dam.  
But that night, overboard he did shove her  
And then Moat Stanley took it on the lam.

Well, no one could say our Sal was sickly.  
She didn't even take time out to bawl.  
She just high-tailed it out for Souickly  
Slappin' out a fast Australian crawl.

**Chorus:**

Roll On, roll on Monongahela.  
And lap the waters gently at Dravo  
Where they're back to making barges at much more normal charges  
Than the LSTs they made a year ago.

5. Then Sal jumped a freight for Rochester  
She swore she would have Moat Stanley's gore.  
From a yard bull who tried to molest her  
She went and took a great big '44.

Now Sal hit the grit, right at Beaver  
And the Jason was a-comin' round the bend  
In the pilot house stood Moat, the gay deceiver  
Says Sal, "I'm sure to get him in the end."

**Chorus:**

Roll On, roll on Monongahela.  
And blow, gentle breezes, blow  
'Cause it's getting mighty smoggy and the folks are getting groggy  
I've lived here all my life and I should know.

6. So raisin' that big shooting iron  
Sal pumped six bullets into Moat  
And when she had finished her firin'  
She'd sure messed up that fancy sporting coat.

Now Sal to the judge said, "Good Mornin!"  
The jury foreman said, "Not Guilty, gal";  
So let all you pilots take warnin'  
Don't mess around Monongahela Sal!

**Chorus:**

Roll On, roll on Monongahela.  
Where the catfish and the carp left long ago.  
You used to be so pure, but now you're just a sewer,  
You're messing up the Gulf of Mexico.

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"Monongahela Sal" was printed in **Pennsylvania Songs and Legends**, Korson et al, published by Johns Hopkins Press.

Korson notes:

Monongahela Sal (Sung by Robert Schmertz, the copyright holder, at Pittsburgh, 1947 and used by his permission. Recorded by Jacob A. Evanson.)

For some years past, people have asked me, "Do you know 'Monongahela Sal'?" I finally caught up with the man who made it, Robert Schmertz, an architect and a member of the faculty of Carnegie Institute of Technology.

"I'm nuts about hillbilly," said Schmertz. "Years ago somebody left a long-neck banjo at my house. I don't know anything about music, but I figured out how to play a few chords on it, and I've been making up songs ever since."

These songs were made to be rendered tongue-in-cheek, as it were, and Schmertz sings them with a straight face. He plays the banjo in perfectly steady rhythm but sings the melody with such free and intricate rhythms and pitches that only by writing out each stanza can justice be done. Only the basic melodic structure, which is a variant of "Red River Valley," is given here, together with the rolling chorus-tune and a special tune for stanza 8. I have included all stanzas and choruses of the long narrative song, which is in the rootin'-tootin'-shootin' "he done her wrong" tradition. Schmertz has a grand sense of the place names of this region that "roll on the tongue with venison richness": Monongahela, Monessen, Ohio, Aliquippa (Alliquippi for a rhyme with Mississippi), Emsworth, Sewickley.

I learned it from Pete Seeger.