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### Folk song lyrics, "Rome County" and "Brother Green"

Almeda Riddle

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From *Almeda Riddle's Book of Ballads*, Roger D. Abrahams (ed.), Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970, pg. 67-69.

This "Rome County" I also learned from my grandfather [Wilkerson]. He claimed to have known the man that wrote this. But since then, so many people have had so many versions. . . . but this is the version I learned from him. Anyhow, this man shot his brother-in-law and he was condemned to give a lifetime sentence. I remember my grandfather, who was born and reared, married, and lived in Middle Tennessee until my mother was six (she was the fourth child), telling me the story of this song and teaching me at least part of these verses. He did say the story was true and did happen in Rome County, Tennessee, back there near where he had lived. I would think it happened just before or right after the War Between the States.

### Rome County

In the beautiful hills way out in Rome County  
That's where in my happy boyhood I played.  
And that's where my heart keeps turning oh ever,  
But it's where the first mistake in my life I made.

At thirty years old I courted and married,  
And Amandya Gilbraith became my sweet wife.  
For some unknown reason her brother Tom shot me,  
And three months later I took Tom's life.

Fort twenty long years this wide world I rambled;  
I went to old England, to France and to Spain,  
But I grew heartsick for the hills of Rome County,  
Boarded a tramp steamer and came home again.

I was captured and tried in the village of Kingston;  
Not a man in the county would say a kind word.  
The jury came in with a verdict next morning;  
"A life-time in prison," was the words that I heard.

The train it pulled out, poor Mother stood weeping,  
Poor Sister she sat all alone with a sigh.  
The last words I heard was, "Willie, God bless ";  
Was "Willie, God Bless you, God bless, you goodbye."

In the burning hot sands of the foundry I'm working;  
Yes, working and toiling my life all away.  
They'll measure my grave by the Cumberland River,  
Whenever I've finished the rest of my days.

And no matter what happened to me in Rome County,  
No matter how long my sentence may be,

I still love my home way back in Rome County,  
Way back in Rome County in East Tennessee.

My Grandfather Wilkerson was not really a singer, but for some reason I do remember him teaching me these, I guess because they had stories that stayed with me. And another was this "Brother Green." Granddad did it to the tune of "Barbara Allen" – they did that, you know, using the same tune for different songs.

Brother Green

Come, Brother Green and stay with me,  
For I am shot and bleeding.  
I here no more will see my wife  
And my dear children.

The southern foe has laid me low,  
On this cold ground to suffer.  
Stay, Brother, stay, and lay me away  
And write my wife a letter.

Tell my dear wife; she prayed for me,  
That if while bullets rattle,  
That I would be prepared to die,  
If I should die in battle.

Tell Father too; he prayed for me,  
He prayed for my salvation,  
But I have beat him home at last,  
Farewell to all temptation.

And that had more verses as he sang it, but I can't call them to mind.

My grandfather gave me the impression – maybe it was just a childish one – that he knew something about this story personally, too. He was a Southern soldier. The story that he understood was that they were two brothers, two bloodbrothers, brothers in the flesh. One fought for the North, the other for the South. And my grandfather told me he had known that to happen. And then after the battle the southern soldiers were going through the wounded and caring for them. That battle, they had won it. And he found this Union soldier; he went to him. And when he turned him to where he was recognizable, it was his own brother. "Green" was a given name at that time – I knew Green Brewer here, in fact. And it was supposed to be the Brother Green that wrote the ballad. And my friend Martha Willhite heard a very similar story from her mother who taught her the song – so I guess it's true, though she didn't say it was the soldier's brother – just that it was two Civil War soldiers. But that's the story told me by my grandfather who was a Rebel soldier and who died an unregenerated Rebel. I can remember a real scolding from him because I was singing "Yankee Doodle" one time – he didn't allow that. He used to sing "Sixie" ... taught that to me.

