

**"Barbara Allen"** was a popular Broadside Ballad. The art of balladry had a long and well-established tradition in the British Isles. The joy of singing ballads, both traditional and new, was an integral part of the heritage that the early colonists brought with them from the "mother country." Ballads were a special type of solo song in which the singer recounted events connected with a myriad of situations ranging from simple romances to great acts of heroism. Like a good story, the lyrics would keep the listener in complete suspense until the final verse.

"Broadside" referred to a single sheet of paper on which ballads were printed and distributed. Sometimes, especially in the colonies, these broadsides were used to editorialize current events. They were "for sale" on the streets and, in effect, functioned as singing newspapers. Broadside were an important and powerful vehicle for the efficient and widespread dissemination of news through balladry and comment.

One of the most popular of the old British ballads and one that was known to be a favorite of General George Washington was the ballad "Barbara Allen." By 1776, the ballad was already several centuries old. Most often, the singing of the ballad drew tears from its listeners, especially the ladies of genteel background. The ballad tells of a powerful romance and a man called Sweet William who actually died from a broken heart over his cruel treatment by the hard-hearted Barbara Allen. There are many variations in both the tune and the words of this song, but the basic story is always the same.

*From A Folk Song History of America, America Through Its Songs by Samule L Forcucci*

So early in the month of May,  
The green buds they were swelling,  
A young man on his death bed lay,  
For the love of Barbra Allen.

He called his servant to his bed,  
And lowly he said to him;  
"Go bring the one that I love best,  
And that is Barbara Allen."

Slowly, slowly he got up,  
And went to the dwelling;  
Saying, "I'm sent for the one that he loves best,  
And that is Barbara Allen.

"Do you remember the other day,  
When we were at the tavern;  
You drank a health to the ladies all,  
And you slighted Barbara Allen.

"Yes, I remember the other day,  
When we were at the tavern;  
I drank a health to the ladies all,  
And three to Barbara Allen."

"Do you remember the other night,  
When we were at the ballroom dancing?  
You gave your hand to the ladies all,  
And slighted Barbara Allen.

"Yes, I remember the other night,  
When we were at the ballroom dancing;  
I gave my hand to the ladies all,  
And my heart to Barbara Allen."

He turned his pale face to the wall,  
His back upon the dwelling;  
And all his friends cried out, "For shame,  
Hard-hearted Barbara Allen."

She hadn't got more than a mile from town,  
'Til she heard some death bell ringing.  
And every knock it seemed to say,  
"Hard-hearted Barbara Allen."

She hadn't gone more than another mile  
'Til she spied his corpse a-coming,  
"Lie down, lie down that cold pale corpse  
And let me gaze upon him."

The longer she gazed, the louder she cried,  
And all of his friends a-telling.  
"The loss of your Sweet William dear,  
Was the loving of Barbara Allen.

Sweet William he died like it might be today,  
And Barbara died tomorrow;  
Sweet William he died out of pure, pure love,  
And Barbara died for sorrow.

Sweet William was buried in the new church yard,  
And Barbara in another;  
And out of his grave there grew a red rose,  
From Barbara's grew a briar

The briar and the rose they grew together,  
'Til they could not grow any higher;  
They wrapped and they tied in a true lover's know,  
For all true lovers to admire.

# Barbara Allen

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English Ballad

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**Bm** **D**

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