

## **"The Shores of Ponchartrain"**

**By Gerry Murphy**

### **I**

In the state of Louisiana, in 1832  
Took place a terrible tragedy  
Which I'll recount to you  
A tale of woe so tragic  
As the role-call of the names  
Of the humble Irish "navvies"  
And the Lake of Ponchartrain

### **II**

The Mississippi River  
Its muddy waters flow  
Through the marshlands of its delta  
To the Gulf of Mexico  
Came thence the brave Acadians  
These swamplands they did train  
Around the town of New Orleans  
On the shores of Ponchartrain

### **III**

And then there came an architect  
And then an engineer  
They chose the deepest cypress swamp  
Their mission was to clear  
And side by side with civic pride  
Outlined their new campaign  
To link the Mississippi  
To the lake of Ponchartrain

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\*"navvies" is an abbreviation of the term "navigators" commonly used in Britain and Ireland to describe communications construction workers.

### **IV**

To dig a channel deep and wide  
Was that company's grandiose scheme  
To bring such wealth and commerce  
To the port of New Orleans  
A deep and wider channel  
Large vessels would sustain  
From the Muddy Mississippi  
To the Lake of Ponchartrain

### **V**

They said, "The Irish working man  
Is perfect for the work  
Their children they go hungry  
And from nothing they will shirk  
Far better than our own slave hands  
Whose value we'll retain  
To work upon the fertile lands  
By the lake of Ponchartrain"

### **VI**

When thousands swung their picks  
To dig the "New Basin Canal"  
The cholera proved stronger  
And twice it killed them all  
Ten thousand lost their lives all told  
And thousands more were maimed  
When they channelled the Mississippi  
To the Lake of Ponchartrain

### **VII**

One hundred years after  
They built an Interstate road  
The New Basin was now filled in  
Its story seldom told

Of the hapless Irish navvies  
Only memory still remains  
They haunt the Mississippi  
And the shores of Ponchartrain

### **VIII**

Now hush my little darlin'  
Dry teardrops from your eyes  
Their souls went straight to Heaven  
And their sons and daughters thrived  
Their children are their monument  
They did not die in vain  
Beside the Mississippi  
And the shores Ponchartrain

### **XI**

Today in downtown New Orleans  
Full thirty storeys high  
A bank they call "Hibernia"  
Stands proud against the sky  
A Celtic cross is on the spot  
Where the navvies lives were claimed  
And the Mississippi floweth not  
To the Lake of Ponchartrain

### **Coda**

A Celtic cross is on the spot  
Where the navvies lives were claimed  
As they sing of Tipperary  
On the shores of Ponchartrain