



## TallShipTuesdays

### Historical Context

Sea chanteys are typically work songs which are used to unite a crew of sailors and make the collective effort of work easier. The origins of sea chanteys are lost in the mists of history, but we know that they date back at least to the mid 1400s.

Most chanteys that we know the words and tune to are more recent inventions, dating largely from the second half of the 1800s. Chanteys are for the most part regarded as a product of the merchant maritime tradition, with foc's'l (*pronounced "foke-sull"*) songs being more associated with naval tradition. The naval environment was disciplined and singing while on duty was generally frowned upon.

Chanteys come in several varieties depending on what work needed to be done. The unifying characteristic of all chanteys is keeping a steady rhythm to get all of the sailors pulling together while doing a specific task. For example, it's much easier to raise a yard if everyone pulls at the same time. Chanteys were typically led by a single person – called a *chantyman* – in a call-and-response format. The chanteyman would sing a verse, and everyone would join in for the chorus.

How long would sailors be hauling? Depending on the task at hand, sailors could be hauling for thirty seconds or five minutes!

### Did You Know...?

- You didn't need to be a wonderful singer to be a Chantyman, you just had to be:
  - Loud
  - Able to keep the beat
  - Clever enough to make up new verses when a task ran long
- There is a debate over how "chantey" is spelled and pronounced. You may see *chanty* or *chantey*, *shanty*, *shantey*, it depends on where you're from and what you believe. Some view *shanty* or *shantey* as the British English version while others see *chanty* or *chantey* as the American English version.

## #TallShipTuesdays