



Ballad of The Downfall of the Fish House

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Ballad of the Downfall of the Fish House

A

1. Lament in verse lament in prose
Our late fish-house mourn;
A weighty loss tho' proved to be
A scaly old concern
2. They there sold King-fish, mullets, sprats,
And our Cabildo paid;
El branche, and oyster branches too,
Were branches of their trade.



3. Their commerce throve-and every month
Much profit did they get;
The fish-hall netted much-
(for all, was fish that came to net.)

4. The house grew old- the house grew frail;
Till it excited laughter,
For heavy rains and solar beams,
Decayed each beam and rafter.

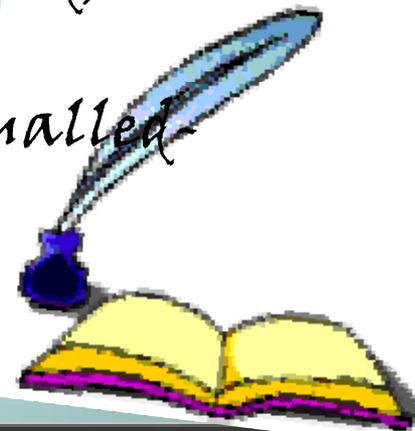
5. The Regidors were rigid men,
They would make no repair;
But selfishly they still resolved
That folks should sell fish there



B

6. The public prints the building quizzed,
But still they made reply-
“It is no use your roasting us,
We’ve other fish to fry”

7. At length there came a gust of wind,
That startled half the town;
The folks within the fish house squalled-
The squall the house threw down



8. Down fell into the briny sea
Roof, rafter floor and prop;
The fishmongers had grown quite proud
And so they "sunk the shop"

9. The fish they floundered in the gulf,
T'was their emancipation
Their owners had not mortgaged them,
So got no compensation.

10. The turtle casks were overthrown,
The turtle were in clover
They were quite drunk with joy-at least,
They soon were half-seas over.





11. In haste the boatmen baled their boats
To try the fish to save;
And to the ruins pulled in vain,
Fin-bail the fishes gave.



12. The cauramaw escaped men's maw,
(The cooks looked on with stupor);
The crowd for snappers, snappish were,
And groped in vain for grouper

13. To catch the turtle next they tried
And pulled with rapid action;
The turtle mocked their action-t'was
Mock-turtle in perfection.

14. Illustrious Board! Illustrious Board!
Your errors all bewilder,
Your house has fall'n-you must be,
Cabildo-its rebuilder.

Robbing-Hood
Port of Spain Gazette, November 1836



Annotations

- † **cauramaŋ** [>metathesis] a pun on “mawracaw” or morocoŋ – land tortoise (Joseph, ed. Winer et al. 2001, 514).
- † **compensation** Terms and Rules of Compensation for distributing twenty million in compensation to the West India slave proprietors” (*P.O.S. Gazette* July 15, 1834 Vol.11:56).
- † **el branche** [< Fr., and Sp.,] A coined expression. “ Branch” in English is a nautical term for a warrant or commission to pilot vessels in certain waters (De Kerchove, 94).
- † **fin -bail** [< fin adj.+ bail n.] false security (OED online) See also “leg-bail “ in annotations to *Warner Arundell, 2001*.
- † **grouper** *Epinephelidae* of various sizes and species of “Sea Bass” or “Rock-fish” (Guppy, 92 ; Winer et al., 514).
- † **half seas ober** “half-drunk” (OED online). A likely critique of drunkenness among emancipated slaves.
- † **in clover** To live (or be) in clover or “to live luxuriously” (OED online).
- † **king -fish** *Scomberomorus cavalla*. *Large inshore fish or “Tassard salé”* (See Guppy, 75).
- † **maŋ** belly. obs., (OED online).
- † **mock -turtle** [< mock adj.+ turtle n.] A dish consisting of a calf’s head prepared so as to resemble turtle (OED online).
- † **mulletŋ** *Mugilidae* inhabit fresh water and warm coasts feeding on organic matter (See Guppy, 59; Vincent, 49).
- † **Regidor** A member of the Cabildo or municipal council (OED online; Millette, 39).
- † **snapper** *Lutianidae*, popularly “*Red Snapper*” found near reefs and rocky bottoms. Described as being excellent to eat and in great demand (See Guppy,102; Winer et al., 506).
- † **sprats** *Engraulidae* and *Clupeidae* small herrings, “small fry” or shoal fish found in sandy muddy shores. (See Guppy, 74; Vincent, 51).
- † **to catch the turtle** literally to catch a turtle by throwing it on its back rendering it powerless (OED online). Fig. for catching slaves.
- † **turtle caskŋ** Fig. turtle shells compared to shackles.