

Treasury of Field Recording

Compiled by MACK McCORMICK

... A panorama of the traditions found in Houston — the city and its neighboring bayous, beaches, prisons, plantations, plains, and piney woods. . . .

BALLADS • BLUES • MONOLOGUES •
COWBOY SONGS • WASHBOARD BAND
• PRISON WORK SONGS

Notes by MACK McCORMICK

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COLLECTED BY

Harold Belikoff • Ed Badeaux • Pete Seeger
• Chester Bower • John Lomax, Jr. • Mack McCormick

SPONSORED BY

The Houston Folklore Group
The Texas Folklore Society

VOLUME ONE Traditional Music and Song

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The idea of it is that everybody 'round here plays music or makes songs or something. That's white peoples, colored peoples, that's them funny French talking

peoples, that's everybody what I mean — they all of 'em got music.

You see the fact of it is when they go to express what they be feeling or what they be thinking, they liable to produce music out of it.

And that's what it is here. It's all different kinds of the music put down on record so's you can hear and know 'bout the things going on. You listen and you know. It's sounding out to give you an understanding. — LIGHTIN' HOPKINS

THE STREETS OF LAREDO

HARRY STEPHENS

Harry Stephens has been a vital source of cowboy lore to two generations of collectors. The first encounter is documented in a footnote by John Lomax, Sr.: "One morning in the spring of 1909, Harry leaned over the gate of my home on the campus of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas and called to me: 'Professor, I've come to say good-by. Grass is a-rising and I've got to move on.' Though afterwards he has often written to me, I have never seen him since."

Fortunately, he turned up again in 1951 in Houston singing more songs in a voice that — wherever you hear it — sounds mingled with the chilly winds of an open prairie. In the 40 year interim, he'd wrangled cattle on big ranches thru the west, trail-herded from Texas to Idaho, spent a while doing rope tricks on the vaudeville stage, built up a permanent hostility to Indians, and finally settled down to live in Denison, Texas.

All of his songs are about the life he's lived — a night herd's stampede in "Little Joe the Wrangler" or an Apache attack in "Billy Venero" — and he sings them with a sense of close, personal identification. As he puts it, "All these songs is copied from some true thing that'd happen and they'd make up something about it . . ."

As I rode out in the streets of Laredo,
As I rode out in Laredo one day,
I saw a hard sight, 'twas a handsome young
cowboy,
All wrapped in white linen as cold as the day.
'Twas once in the saddle I used to go dashing,
'Twas once in the saddle I used to go gay.
First to the dram-house and then to the
card-house,
Got shot in the breast and I'm dying today.
O beat the drum lowly and play the fife slowly,
And play the dead march as you carry me along,
Take me to the green valley and roll sod o'er me,
For I'm a wild cowboy and I know I've done wrong.

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Harry Stephens, unaccompanied vocal.
Recorded by Ed Badeaux and Harold Belikoff, Houston, 1951.

Tracing the song (and also explaining where he went after leaving A&M College), Harry commented: "I've heard that especially on the XIT ranch in west Texas — I worked there in the spring of 1909 at Channing — Great XIT ranch when it was in full glory, six-horse chuck wagons, six-mule salt wagons . . ."

Ultimately, the song goes back to a British broadside in which a soldier is dying of syphilis contracted from a camp follower:

Had she but told me when she disordered me,
Had she but told me of it in time,
I might have got salts and pills of white mercury,
But now I'm cut down in the height of my prime.

It's native American outcroppings — usually associated with a particular profession and

retaining the motif of sinner's confession with his own funeral prescription — include "The Bad Girl's Lament", "One Morning In May," "Wrap In My Tarpaulin Jacket," and "St. James Infirmary." Many of these retain the anachronistic description of a military funeral.

Three versions were published in **Cowboy Songs**, including one from James (Ironhead) Baker which combines elements of several of the American variants. A version of "Streets of Laredo" or "The Cowboy's Lament" is included in almost every general anthology with an extensive comparative study in Belden's **Ballads and Songs**.

Recordings include Johnny Prude's "Streets of Laredo" issued by the Library of Congress, LP #28; Dick Devail's "Tom Sherman's Barroom", Timely Tunes 1563; Harry McClintock's "Cowboy's Lament", Victor 21761 and Buell Kazee's "Toll the Bells", Brunswick 351.

TALKING BLUES

JIMMY WOMACK

Jimmy Womack is a country boy who came to the big city — bringing with him an immense stock of traditional lore and an irrepressible song-making impulse. Born in Missouri, raised around Shreveport, Louisiana and now a part-time auto mechanic in Houston, he represents the full range of the white country tradition; from the cloying sentimentalism of "The Letter Edged In Black", to the pro-lynching ballad "Little Mary Phagan", to the Negro derived "Crawdad Song."

Now if you wanna get to heaven, let me
tell you how to do it.
Just grease your feet in a little mutton suet,
Just slip right over into the devil's hands,
Slide right on to the promised land.
Down in the hen-house, on my knees,
I thought I heard an old chicken sneeze,
It was only the rooster away upstairs,
A-helpin' the chickens a-sayin' their prayers.
A shortage on the eggs . . . get more tomorrow.
Now, down in the woods, just a sittin' on a log,
With my finger on the trigger and my
eye on the hog,
I pulled the trigger and the gun went flip,
And I grabbed that hog with all my grip.
Love chittlins . . . hog-eyes . . . cracklins, too.
Well there ain't no need o my workin' so hard,
Cause I got a wife in the white folks' yard,
She kills a chicken and saves me the head,
And brings it home where I'm layin' in bed.
Dreaming of women . . . blondes . . . brunettes
and redheads.

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Jimmy Womack, vocal and guitar
Reordered by Mack McCormick, April 1959, Houston

These stanzas go back to early plantation songs of the Negro designed to tickle the white masters. The talking form is an outgrowth of the "coon" songs popular in the last century on the minstrel stage where both white and Negro comics propagated the caricature of the shiftless, laughable Negro. At the same time, the form and verses were associated with religious songs such as "When The Good Lord Sets You Free" and with the collegiate nonsense "Polly Wolly Doodle".

The earliest collection of a related text seems to be Fenner's **Cabin and Plantation Songs by Hampton Students** published in 1877. Since then secular and religious texts, and those on the borderline between the two, have appeared as "Mona, You Shall Be Free" In Spaeth's **Read Em And Weep**; "Oh, Mourner", collected from Mississippi Negroes in 1909, in Perrow's **Songs and Rhymes From The South**, JAFL, Vol. 28; "Oh, Mourner" and other fragmentary texts in Scarborough's **On The Trail Of Negro Folk-Songs**; "Poor Mourner" in Niles' **Seven Negro Exhaltations**; and "When

The Good Lord Sets You Free" in **American Ballads and Folk Songs**.

The first publication as a recitative was "Jest Talking" in Richardson's **American Mountain Songs** (reprinted in Spaeth's **Weep Some More, My Lady**.) W. J. Jackson of Diboll, Texas, a former cornetist with minstrel shows recalls hearing these same verses in a number called the "Jailhouse Song", a comic monologue used by Black Patties Minstrels after the first World War.

Probably the earliest recording of "Talking Blues" was made in 1928 by Chris Bouchillon "The Talking Comedian Of The South". A South Carolina singer with a dry wit, his version of "Talking Blues" on Columbia 15120-D is close to that of the present singer.

Jimmy Womack learned the piece from a neighbor in Shreveport in the early 1920's.

THE JEALOUS LOVER

JIMMY WOMACK

A large part of Jimmy Womack's lore comes from his mother who was anxious for him to make these recordings to give permanency to songs handed down in her family. Contrary to the notion of "oral tradition", it is the habit of many families to have a song book in which hand written texts of ballads are kept. Such song books are, like the family Bible with its birth and marriage records, handed down from generation to generation. Unfortunately, at the time of this recording, the Womack song book had been destroyed in a fire, but Mrs. Womack and her son were busy writing out from memory a new one to be passed along to the six Womack children.

Down, down by the weeping willow,
Where the violets gently bloom,
There lies my own dear Flora,
Alone there in her tomb.

But she died not brokenhearted,
Nor a sickness caused her death,
It was all for the Jealous Lover,
Who robbed her of her health.

One night in last September,
When the moon was shining bright,
Up stepped this Jealous Lover,
To her own little cabin light.

Said, "Flora, my own dear Flora,
Come, let us take a walk,
Flora, my own dear Flora,
Of our wedding day we'll talk."

"O Edward, I'm so weary,
And I do not care to roam,
Edward, I'm so weary,
And I pray you take me home."

Now, up stepped this Jealous Lover,
And he made one silent move,
Said, "No mortal hand shall save you,
For you have met your doom."

Down, down she knelt her before him,
And she humbly begged for her life,
But into her snow white bosom,
He plunged the dagger knife.

"O Edward, I'll forgive you,
As I draw my last breath,
O Edward, I'll forgive you,
And she closed her eyes in death.

But he sighed not as he pressed her
To his young but cruel heart,
And he cried not as he kissed her,
For he knew that they must part.

Now this young man's name was Edward,
His name was Edward Blaine,
And he was hung for the murder
Of his sweetheart Flora Lane.

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Jimmy Womack, vocal and guitar.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, April 1959, Houston

There is a vast series of American ballads in which a young girl is invited for a stroll to discuss wedding plans and is, instead, brutally murdered. The motive, sometimes stated, usually implied is that the girl is pregnant, although folk prudery sometimes offers jealousy as the cause. Such a pattern is followed by the ballads narrating the murders of Naomi Wise, Pearl Bryan, Nell Cropsey, Polly Wil-

liams, Rose Connoley, Laura Foster ("Tom Dooley"), Sarah Vail, Lula Viers, and Grace Brown, nearly all of which can be traced to actual events. Typically, each of these ballads seems to take shape at the time of a sensational murder by fitting the new names and dates to a pre-existing ballad of the type. As the ballad spreads and assumes some individual character of its own, it becomes part of the cycle and may eventually become the basis for some new adaption coming hard on the heels of newspaper headlines.

As **An American Tragedy** is the classic literary work following this motif, so "The Jealous Lover" is the classic murder ballad. Unlike the others, it is not linked to actual events, has no geographic references, and is but a distillation of the theme — a ballad that might describe a murder that happened yesterday or one that happened a century ago.

It has been pointed out that the text has certain parallels with a 19th century English broadside, "The Murder of Betsy Smith", and may have derived from that with an admixture of phrases from a sentimental song, "She Never Blamed Him", which was popular during the Civil War.

A version of the ballad collected in New Hampshire in 1908 (published in **JAFI**, Vol. 22) is very much like the present text. Numerous other versions — some entitled "Florella" or other such names — are to be found in Belden's **Ballads and Songs**; Randolph's **Ozark Folksongs**, Vol. 11; Owens' **Texas Folk Songs**; Brown's **North Carolina Folklore**; and Hudson's **Folksongs of Mississippi**, representing those collected in 16 states, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Canada. Spaeth's **Weep Some More, My Lady** includes versions entitled "Blue Eyed Ellen" and "Come, Emily".

Recordings include Vernon Dalhart's "The Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley", Victor 19951, as well as five versions in the Library of Congress' files.

Jimmy Womack is under the impression that the ballad relates to an actual murder which occurred during his childhood in Missouri. However, he felt some doubt that he had gotten the correct names of those involved. Although "Flora" and "Edward" are the most commonly heard given names, it is unusual for the song to include last names as does Womack's. Writing in the **Journal of American Folklore**, D. K. Wilgus comments that "The belief of Jimmy Womack that the "Jealous Lover" relates to an actual murder . . . might possibly refer to the murder of Mallow Drew, Benton County, Mississippi, 1930, which gave rise to an adaptation".

YELLOW GAL

HAROLD BURTON and GROUP

In 1951, when Pete Seeger as one of the successful singing group, The Weavers, was booked to appear at a Houston hotel ballroom, he wrote John Lomax, Jr. suggesting that he ask permission for them to visit the nearby prison farms with recording equipment. The governor granted permission and the group, with Chester Bower providing the tape machine and assisting, visited Ramsey and Rechine and assisting, visited Ramsey and Retrieve farms on consecutive Sunday afternoons.

Unfortunately a great deal more is known about the recorders than about the men who sang. All that's known of them is their own brief giving of names recorded prior to the song: "John C. Smith, better known as Horse

Doctor" . . . "Harold Burton" . . . "Preston Fisher" . . . "Albert Lee House, better known as Rough House" . . . "Irvin Lamb, better known as Football. . ."

Leader:

Aw my yellow
Aw my yellow, my yellow
Aw my yellow, my yellow

Group:

A purty yellow gal
A purty yellow gal
A purty yellow gal
Well I died, go to ___ bout my
Well I died, go to ___ bout my
Yellow gal
Purty yellow gal
Aw my yellow, my yellow
Aw my yellow, my yellow
A purty yellow gal
A purty yellow gal
Aw my mamma kilt my poppa about
Aw my mamma kilt my poppa about
A purty yellow gal
A purty yellow gal
Well, my yellow, my yellow
Well, my yellow, my yellow
A purty yellow gal
A purty yellow gal
I'll die and go to heaven about
I'll die and go to heaven about
A purty yellow gal
A purty yellow gal
Well, I'm goin' stone crazy about
Well, I'm goin' stone crazy about
A purty yellow gal
A purty yellow gal
Well, my big-leg, heavy-hip
Well, my knock-kneed slue-footed
Purty yellow gal
Purty yellow gal
Aw my yellow, my yellow
Well, my yellow, my yellow
A purty yellow gal
A purty yellow gal
Well, I'm goin' stone crazy about
Yes, I'm goin' stone crazy about
Purty yellow gal
Purty yellow gal
Well, my yellow, my yellow
Well, my yellow, my yellow
A purty yellow gal
A purty yellow gal
Oh, my yellow, my yellow
Well, my yellow, my yellow
A purty yellow gal
A purty yellow gal

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Harold Burton and group, unaccompanied vocal.
Recorded by Chester Bower, John Lomax, Jr. and Pete Seeger, Ramsey State Farm, Otey, Texas, March 17, 1951

Yellow gal songs go back to slavery times and early minstrel types:

Yaller gal look and trine to keep you overtime,
De bell done rung, overseer hallowing loud —
Oh, run, nigger, run —

And as Leadbelly's lines on the subject indicate, they are invariably characterized as a source of trouble:

A yaller woman keeps you worried all the time,
A yaller woman makes a moon-eyed man go blind.

Although E. C. Perrow has published Yaller Gal verses from Mississippi and Dorothy Scarborough has collected a number of them in Texas, this particular song appears to be pretty much the property of the Negro convicts in the Texas prison farms. James (Ironhead) Baker, an inmate at Central farm provided the version published in **American Ballads & Folk Songs** and Huddie (Lead Belly) Ledbetter's recordings of it are in the Library of Congress' files and on Folkways LP 242 and Stinson LP 19. The Lomax book comments, "This is one of the few folk songs about women on the lips of Negro men that have any element of tenderness".

K. C. AIN'T NOTHING BUT A RAG

ANDREW EVERETT

There's a huge knot of muscle beneath the deep-brown skin of Andrew Everett's forearm. It quietly pulses with the rhythm as he picks and thumbs his warped, paint-scrawled old Stella guitar, plentiful evidence of his hard-scuffling life in turpentine camps, railroad gangs and sugar refineries. "Sometimes I be out in the woods singing — you could hear

me two, three miles, but now I got the place I can't hardly sing, can't hardly do nothing. . . ." Everett's music is crude, individualistic and his tuning completely his own. It is not for the casual listener but only for those who can listen as if with Everett's own ears, hearing the reflections of a life-time of freight car loading, lumbering, and track lining.

Andrew Everett, guitar solo.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, Houston, 1959.

John and Alan Lomax have written of such pieces: "A fiddler will pull his bow in a long, minor moan across his top string and then start jerking it in quick, raspy strokes until you can close your eyes and hear a heavy freight train running down a steep grade. A harmonica player will blow out the high, hollering notes of a fast passenger engine, while the guitar player will make a rhythm on his bass strings like a train crossing a trestle. Together they'll play in the rhythm of car wheels clicking over sleepers; as counter-rhythm, they'll whip out the rattling bounce of a caboose as it shakes and jounces along a rough roadbed. Then they'll throw back their heads and holler —

"Lord, Lord, I hate to hear that lonesome whistle blow."¹

Pieces of this kind have as many titles as there are men to play and sing them. Most often the titles will use the word "Casey" or "K.C." and one can seldom be certain which they mean for being mostly illiterate people they use language as sound and flavor free of the rigidity of the written word. Some of the recorded examples — many of them using the same basic tune as does Andrew Everett — are "K.C. Moan" by the Memphis Jug Band, Victor 38558; "Casey's Whistle" by Lester McFarland, Vocalion 5126; "K.C. Railroad Blues" by Andrew and Jim Baxter, Victor 20962; "Katy Blues" by Blind Norris, Decca 7290; and "K.C. Railroad" by Lon Soleau. The various railroads named in such pieces are the Missouri-Kansas-Texas known as the M.K.T. or the Katy, and the Kansas City Southern with its "Flying Crow" route from Port Arthur, Texas to Kansas City known simply as the K.C. line.

¹ Folk Song U.S.A., p. 244.

THE WAITRESS AND THE SAILOR

ED BADEAUX

Ed Badeaux has contributed to the making of these recordings in more capacities than any other single person: he collected a number of the selections used, financed some of the raw tape and equipment used, and here makes his own personal contribution.

Ed's first contact with the music of his native region was, ironically, as a radio disc jockey assigned to the 5 a.m. "Bar None Ranch" over Houston's KXYZ. In the ten years since he has utterly rejected radio announcing and pursued his interest in American folklore, becoming an accomplished guitarist and 5-string banjoist, a featured performer at the Houston Folklore Group's Hootenannies, and busied himself singing, writing, photographing, and recording contemporary folkways. His LP albums, the documentary set "Sounds of Camp" and "Songs of Camp", and his study of folk guitar styles "American Guitar" are released by Folkways records.

Once there was a waitress
In the Prince George Hotel
Her master was a fine one
And her mistress was a swell
Along came a sailor lad
Fresh from the sea
That was the beginning
Of all her misery

She brought him a candle
To light his way to bed
She brought him a pillow
To rest his weary head
Then this foolish waitress
Acknowledging no harm
Jumped right into bed
Just to keep the sailor warm
Early next morning
When the sailor had arose
He drew out a five pound note
From the pocket of his clothes
Saying, "Take this
My pretty one,
For the harm that I have done,
If it be a daughter, if it be a son".
"Now if it be a daughter,
Just bounce it on your knee,
If it be a son,
Send the bastard out to sea."
"With bell-bottom trousers,
And coat of navy blue,
Let him do the navy,
The way that I did you."
"So gather round my fair ones,
And listen to my plea,
Never trust a sailor lad
An inch above your knee".
"For I did trust a single one,
And he put out to sea,
Left me sittin' all alone,
A bastard on my knee."

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Ed Badeaux, vocal and banjo.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, June 20, 1959, Houston.

Ed Badeaux learned this song from a Houston housewife who failed to teach him, or did not know, a verse which G. Legman has described as "the rare verse of wonderfully graphic detail" which would have properly come between the fourth and fifth verses sung here.

Once an inhabitant of the English music hall stage, two world wars have put this ballad into world wide circulation and it is published in those books which make some sincere, though weak attempt to document the traditions of seamen and soldiers as Niles' **Songs My Mother Never Taught Me**, Shay's **Iron Men and Wooden Ships** (which includes a closely related version of "Home, Dearie, Home"), and Palmer's **G.I. Songs**. A corruption popularized by tin pan alley in 1945 entitled "Bell Bottom Trousers" obscured the ballad's intended cynicism. An analogous ballad, "The Trooper and the Maid" (Child #299), was an earlier immigrant to America, collected in Sharp's **English Folk-Songs from the Southern Appalachians**.

CORRINE, CORRINA

LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS

Sam Hopkins — the only major recording artist included in this set — is a celebrity who strangely resists being the center of attention. There has always been some reluctance to overcome in setting up his most recent recording sessions (those which produced the "77" and Heritage LP's in England and the Tradition LP's in the U.S.). By contrast, he is usually eager to help others to record, often lending himself as accompanist and giving song ideas to other singers. He has been responsible for his various proteges — L. C. Williams, Luke Miles, Ruth Ames — making their first records. In a sense, he is repaying his own debt to the various blues singers, notably Texas Alexander and Blind Lemon Jefferson, who gave Lightnin' what he calls "the idea of it".

When Lightnin' learned of this recording project, he appointed himself talent scout and over a period of many months, it was not unusual to open the door and find someone with a guitar or harmonica saying, "Lightnin' said come here and make some songs".

His attitude is derived from the intense community song making spirit of Lightnin's east Texas home where, as he puts it, "They

all — I mean everybody, big and little, black and white and any other color — they all make music."

Corrine, Corrina, where you been so long?
Corrine, Corrina, where you been so long?
I ain't had no lovin' — since you been gone.

I love Corrine — tell the world I do,
I love Corrine — tell the world I do,
Just a little more lovin' — let your love be true.

Corrine, Corrina, won't you come on home,
Corrine, Corrina, won't you come on home,
I ain't had no lovin' — you been gone too long.

Yeah . . .
I love Corrine — tell the world I do,
I love Corrine — tell the world I do,
Just a little more lovin', baby, let your love be —
Corrine, Corrina, what I did to you?
Corrine, Corrina, what I did to you?
You don't treat me like you used to.

Yes, I love Corrine . . .
And this is a long story about her . . .
She once said she loved me but:
Now she is gone!

Corrine, Corrina, please come back home,
Corrine, Corrina, please come back home,
If you come back, babe, I'll never do you wrong.
Corrine, Corrina — Yea, Lord!

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Sam Lightnin' Hopkins, vocal and guitar.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, July 13, 1959, Houston.

This is one of that elite group of songs which is known on all levels of American culture. Like "Careless Love" and "The Crawdad Song" it is sung by both white and Negro country people, is part of the jazzman's heritage, and a standard among professional entertainers, hillbilly bands, etc.

Although it is known to the folk as one of their favorites, folklorists have yet to "discover" it. It is not published in any of the general anthologies and is not included in records produced for the folk music public. Like several others included in this set — "Baby, Please Don't Go" and "Deep Ellum Blues" — it is still the property of the people and not of the scholars.

The song is equally well known in different verse forms:

Corrine, Corrina, where'd you stay last night?
You come in this morning just as it was
getting light,
Clothes all rumbled, and you wasn't
smelling just right.

And:

Corrine, Corrina, where'd you stay last night?
Corrine, Corrina, where'd you stay last night?
Come in this morning, your clothes
wasn't fitting you just right.

The song may have grown up in company with "See See Rider" as is suggested by the singers frequently stitching together verses which float in and out of both songs. Probably the earliest recording of the kind is Blind Lemon Jefferson's "Corrina Blues", Paramount 12367. Other fragments of the verses show up in Bea Booze's "See See Rider Blues", Decca 8633; Leadbelly's "Black Girl (In The Pines)", and in Brownie McGhee — Sonny Terry's "Tell Me Baby", Savoy LP 14016.

A copyright version — that is, a specific adaption or arrangement of public domain material — bears the names Bo Chatman, an early blues singer, and Mitchell Parish, the lyricist of "Stardust".

Lightnin' says of it, "That's an old song, older me twice. I sang it when I was young and my daddy said he sang it when he was young. May be older'n him twice!"

THE BALLAD OF DAVY CROCKETT

MRS. MELTON

Mrs. Melton is just what she sounds like — a little, old lady with a sharp temper and a ready wit to keep young upstarts in their places. When asked to say something by way of introduction to her song, she answered, "Well, I didn't have anything to say about it except that I was just going to sing it. . ."

I guess you'd like to know where I'm concerning,
Where it was I come from and where I got
my learning?

The world is made of mud and (out of)
the Mississippi River,
The sun's a ball of foxfire, you may discover.

Take the ladies out at night.
They shine so bright.
They shine at night when the moon
don't shine.

So one day when I was goin' hunting.
I met Davy Crockett and he's going cooning.
Says I, "Where's your gun?" "Haven't got none."
"How you goin' kill a coon? You haven't
got a gun?"

Says he, "Pompcalf, just follow after Davy,
He'll soon show you how to grin a coon crazy".
I followed on a piece and there set a squirrel,
A-settin' on a log and a-eatin' sheep sorrel.
And when he did see, he looked around at me,
Says, "All I want is a brace agin your knee."
There I braced a great big sinner.
He grinned six times hard enough to
get his dinner.

The squirrel on a log, and he didn't
seem to mind him,
He just kept a setting there and he
never looked behind him,
And then he said, "The critter must be dead.
I see the bark a-flyin' all around the critter's
head."

I walks up for the truth to discover,
Drat! It was a pine knot so big it made me shiver,
Says I, "Colonel David is this what you
call a-cooning?"

Say he, "Pompcalf, don't you begin to laugh,
I'll pin back my ears and I'll bite you half in half!"
I throwed down my gun and all my ammunition,
Says I, "Colonel David, I can cool your ambition!"
He throwed back his head and he blowed
like a steamer.

Say he, "Pompcalf, I'm a Tennessee screamer!"
We locked horns, we wallered in the thorns,
I never had such a fight since the hour I was born.
We fought a day and night and then agreed
to drop it.

I was pretty badly whipped — and so
was Davy Crockett.

I looked around and I found my head a-missing,
He'd bit off my head and I'd swallowed his'n.
And then we did agree to let each other be;
I was pretty hard for him and he was
too hard for me.

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Mrs. Melton, unaccompanied vocal.
Recorded by Ed Badeaux and Harold Belikoff, 1951, Houston

Reminiscent of the encounter between Robin Hood and Little John in English tradition, this ballad occupies an equal position in American lore, concerning a figure whose legendary image, much of it helped along by Col. Crockett's own writings, over-shadows his actual deeds as frontiersman, Congressman, and defender of the Alamo.

It has been published as "Pompey Smash and Davy Crockett" in Cox's *Folk-Songs of the South* and in Owens' *Texas Folk Songs*; and as "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" in *Publications of the Texas Folklore Society*, Vol. VI (reprinted in *American Ballads and Songs*.)

Pompey Smash or Pompcalf is, like Old Zip Coon, a favorite character in minstrel lore, dating from before the Civil War. Mrs. Melton is uncertain of where she learned the song, saying in general that she "learned em before I was grown, most of them. I lived in Austin a long time and I lived in Houston."

THE MILLER BOY

JOHN Q. ANDERSON

John Anderson was born in 1916 in the Texas panhandle. His parents had settled there after leaving the Indian Territory — "The Nation" — that is now eastern Oklahoma.

It was an isolated community of which he says, "People there were ranchers, farmers, and cowboys. Social activities included square dances, pie suppers, singing schools . . . songs were passed down by word of mouth from the older to the younger, no one thought of them as folksongs because no one knew what folksongs were."

"It was a tradition in my family, in fact, that a child by the time he was eight or nine would be able to sit in with the family group

and chord on the mandolin, and then when he was a little older and his fingers longer, he was expected to play the guitar. My father and older brother played the fiddle. As a consequence, we played for numerous square dances."

Happy was the miller boy,
Lived by the mill;
The mill turned around by its own free will,
Hand on the hooper, the other on the sack —
Ladies step forward and gents step back.

Happy was the miller boy,
Lived by the mill;
The mill turned around by its own free will,
Hand on the hooper, the other on the sack —
Hold to your partners and turn right back.
Happy was the miller boy,
Lived by the mill;
The mill turned around by its own free will,
Hand on the hooper, the other on the sack —
Ladies to the center and the gents fly the track.

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John Anderson, vocal and guitar.
Recorded November, 1959, College Station, Texas.

"The Miller Boy" — widely known square dance call — has been included in *Randolph's Ozark Folksongs*.

John Anderson learned it in his community where some religious people had prejudices against dancing but permitted their children to play "swinging games". Since musical instruments were not allowed, the music and rhythm for the play-parties was furnished by one or two hand-clapping singers. Anderson recalls having sung at such gatherings of ten or so couples for several hours on end and recalls this song as a favorite because it was a "cheating" in which extra boys could attempt to get a girl away from her partner.

CRYIN' WON'T MAKE ME STAY

R. C. FOREST & GOZY KILPATRICK

Like many guitar players, R. C. Forest's intent is to be the center of attention, to attract the suggestive glances of women, to cadge tips to support his wine drinking. Except when he's in the City Hospital recovering from "the fevers and trembles", he spends his time sleeping till mid-day, uses his afternoons sprawled on his porch — just off thriving West Dallas Street — engaged in small talk and romance with passersby, and in the evening prowls the neighborhood bars.

I'm goin', yes, I'm goin' . . .
And your cryin' won't make me stay,
Cause the more you, now, now, now, now,
The further I'm goin' away.

Yeah, my mama she done told me,
And my papa told me too,
"Son, that woman that you got,
Ain't no friend to you."

Say, "She ain't no friend to you."
But I'm goin' back home,
Fall down on my bended knees,
Gonna beg my mama and my papa,
"Forgive me if you please."

Oh, Lord,
Yes, now Lord.
Cause I did wrong once in life,
Forgive me if you please.

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R. C. Forest, vocal and guitar; Gozy Kilpatrick, harmonica.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, March 1959, Houston.

In the blues it is rash to speak of a particular song. It is only permissible when certain phrases, theme, or a distinctive tune associate themselves in a characteristic manner that continues being heard from various singers. In addition to the present recording, two other artists represented in this set, Dennis Gainus and Lightnin' Hopkins, have sung "Cryin' Won't Make Me Stay" in a comparable fashion. Others have reported having heard the song from singers in Texas and in Mississippi. It, therefore, seems to be a song branching off from the vast family of leaving-blues and obtaining some consistent individuality of its own.

There are recent recordings of it as "I'm Going Away" by Leroy Dallas, Sittin' In With 526; and as "Gonna Leave You Baby" by Roy Milton.

Related tunes and texts, however, extend back through the entire history of recorded and collected blues: "Catfish" by K. C. Douglas, Cook LP 5002; "Mean Ole Frisco" by Big Boy Crudup, Bluebird 34-0704; "Sugaree" by Lazy Slim Jim, Savoy 868; "Down On My Bended Knee" by King Solomon Hill, Crown 3325. Published relatives include "Blind Lemon" in Lomax' *Negro Folk Songs As Sung By Lead Belly*; "I'd Ruther Be Dead" in Odum & Johnson's *Negro Work-a-Day Songs*; and "I'm Goin' Away, Baby, To Weary You Off My Mind" in Longini's *Folk Songs of Chicago Negroes, JAFL*, Vol. 52 (where it is shown to be part of the same group as "Hello, Central, Give Me 209"). An early recording, "Crying Won't Make Him Stay", by Grant and Wilson, Paramount 12272, may be an antecedent.

BABY PLEASE DON'T GO

DUDLEY ALEXANDER AND WASHBOARD BAND

The average middle class Houstonian seldom talks to his maid or delivery man enough to learn that a huge part of the city's population are French-speaking Negroes from Louisiana. Coming here steadily since the mid 1930s in search of better jobs, these people have settled mostly in the northwest quadrant of the city which is termed among themselves Teche City. Along with other attributes of their rural culture, they've brought a sugar-flavored approach to the English language and a strong traditional dance music equally influenced by Afro-American Negro forms and the Arcadian country music of the bayou country.

They call it Zydeco which is Gumbo French for snapbean, derived from the French, *les haricots*. They have Al-Jambles nightly along such streets as Lyons Avenue, West Dallas, and Settegast Road. Al-Jamble being simply the term which describes the occasion of a dance with Zydeco music — typically consisting of washboard, played with beer bottle openers rasped along it, fiddle, and wind-jammer (concertina or accordion). Two local groups, those of Clarence Garlow and Clifton Chenier, have achieved nationwide record sales with their interpretations of Zydeco music.

The three musicians heard here frequently work together or with others of their kind. All came to Houston during World War II. Dudley Alexander, the vocalist, was born in 1914 in New Iberia, St. Martinville Parish, Louisiana; Vincent Frank, born 1919, and Alex Robert, Jr., born 1916, both at Opelousas, Louisiana.

I say Le Zydeco
Le Zydeco that means snapbeans in English
But in French — on dit Zydeco
'Cause that means snapbean.

A las comme French Town, you see
Houston tout le monde dit Zydeco

.....
In English that means only snapbean.
Which is a common name they use in Louisiana,
New Iberia, Louisiana, round St. Martinville.
Now I'm gonna play y'all a Zydeco in French.
.....

.....
"Baby Please Don't Go"
I'm 'a sing you "Baby Please Don't Go"
Now, I'm 'a tell it to you in English
And then I'm 'a sing you the word in French.
But I'm 'a announce the word in, in English
So you can know what I'm talking about.
Baby, please don't go!
Je crois tu va en ville
You got me way down here

Je crois tu va en ville
Y bien, moi ici
Y connais pas quoi tu fais
.....

Je crois tu viens avec moi
Je crois tu va la-bas.
Well, I told that girl
She got me way here with a ball and chain
An I don't want her to leave me.
An I don't want her to go back down to
New Orleans
Cause it's bad down there.
Toi tu vai, moi je vais

Je suis ici, et je restera
Je vais pas aller la dedans
Je bois du vin ici

Viens pour aller avec moi
Aller loin d'ici
Listen here at me, say
Baby, please don't go.
Well that baby better not go
Cause I'm gonna tell it to you in French.
Pourquoi tu va d'ici
C'est pour venir avec moi
Je vois bien ce qui se passe
C'est pour risquer avec moi
Toi t'es une petite fille
Tu peux pas t'en aller
C'est que toi avec moi
T'as beua rester ici
Yeh, he havin' trouble wi' that girl
But he say that girl gotta stay around here.
T'as beua rester ici
Tu peux pas t'en aller.

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Dudley Alexander, vocal and concertina; Alex
Robert, Jr., fiddle; and Vincent Frank, washboard.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, April 1959, Houston.
French transcript and translation by Alex Korner)

This is another song unknown to folklorists, widely known to the folk. It has been sung by most of the Negro artists represented in this set — Lightnin' Hopkins, Dennis Gainus, R. C. Forest, Zozy Kilpatrick, Joel Hopkins, and Andrew Everett, and can be assumed to be equally familiar to singers in every hamlet and village through the South. Moreover, its tune is the same as that of the eloquent "Another Man Done Gone" which probably goes back to slavery times.

The towns mentioned however, are usually four: New Orleans, St. Augustine (Texas or Florida?), Parchman Farm, Mississippi, and Baltimore — places which for reason of individual significance or flavor of the sound are frequently heard mentioned in many blues.

The musicians here are uncertain as to when they first began playing this although they felt it was learned after they moved to Texas.

YOU GONNA LOOK LIKE A MONKEY

DENNIS GAINUS

Dennis Gainus is from Crockett, Texas. To the west of his home lies the black-soil cotton lands and their huge tenant-system plantations, and to the east is the Davy Crockett National Forrest and the piney woods, saw-mills, and turpentine camps. In this region is concentrated a musical heritage in which "they all had to learn to play something . . ." Both early and recent "hillbilly" artists — Bob Wills, Al Dexter, and Moon Mullican to name only a few — have come from the region in a steady stream, owing a great deal to the Negro tradition in such recordings as "New Milk Cow Blues", "Fan It", and "Trouble In Mind."

Dennis tells of street singers he's seen in the area, as Blind Willie Johnson in Madisonville, Blind Lemon Jefferson in Palestine, Texas Alexander in Crockett, and Lightnin' Hopkins, "a young scamp who was all over the place with them older ones." But in Dennis' memory there is an even more fascinating figure, a Mexican known by the name of Seville: "He was there when I was born and he was old then. He came from Mexico and he brought with him a guitar with 12

strings. They say he was the first man to be around playing such a guitar and he taught it to a whole bunch of others. He come from Mexico and he brought with him this guitar and they say he brought the boll weevil too. He used to make guitars and sell 'em to those wanted to learn. He made me my first guitar. It was 12 strings and then later I got this one after I wore out the first."

The book **The Negro In American Culture** is stated to be "a unique record of what America has done to the Negroes — and what the Negroes have accomplished in and for America." It fails rather pitifully at characterizing the Negro people's own view of their part in America for the book makes no mention of two adulated and heroic figures — Jack Johnson and Blind Lemon Jefferson.

It is not simply a question of Johnson's seven year reign as heavyweight champion or Jefferson's stature as a blues singer, but rather the symbol of achievement that each represents. These two were among the first to obtain the respect of the white world, their deeds pioneering the idea that a Negro could be as good as any one else without being the same as everyone else. Their successes were based on two of the proudest attributes of the race, physical power and the creation of music, and so it is these two figures — not the statesman or concert artist or poet — with whom the average southern Negro most completely identifies himself: the childhood idols of the past fifty years.

Jack Johnson came from Galveston and Blind Lemon Jefferson from Limestone County in east Texas, and so it is routine for Texas Negroes of 30 years or more to speak of personal acquaintance or blood relationship with one or the other of these men. One can conclude that most informants are lying or, in a more understanding fashion, one can conclude they are simply making legend, bringing themselves into the circle of the man "who had a gift."

Dennis Gainus was born in 1905 and grew up under the spell. He says, "My mother, she was first cousin to Jack Johnson — that was the great prizefighting gentleman — and my mother, too, she was first cousin to Blind Lemon Jefferson — that was a man everybody loved, he was blind, but he went everywhere. My mother, her name was Julia Ann Smith before she married, she was first cousin to them both."

You gonna look like a monkey when you get old,
You gonna look like a monkey when you get old,
I tell you something you don't know,
You gonna look like a monkey when you get old.
I told you, you gonna like what —?

I can tell by your feet when you get old,
I can tell by your feet when you get old,
I can tell there's something going on wrong,
You're been trying to tell me wrong.

You gonna look — a monkey when you get old,
You gonna look like a monkey when you get old,
You gonna look like a monkey when you get old,
I can tell something you don't do,
You can tell me something you done done.

But listen here . . .
You gonna look like a monkey when you get old.
You doin' something, you ain't gonna do it no more.

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Dennis Gainus, vocal and guitar.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, May 1, 1959.

This song may derive from a Tin Pan Alley composition popular in 1930 — or that song may derive from a folk song. At any rate, the song is now in traditional circulation. Alex Robert, one of the Zydeco band members, says he still frequently plays it and hears it from others.

Dennis Gainus learned the song in east Texas but can't recall the date.

BAD LEE BROWN

JIM WILKIE

Jim Wilkie began moving about very swiftly after leaving the University of Texas. For a time, he was writing technical manuals for RCA's outpost in the Philippine Islands, returned briefly to the United States stopping off in Houston to appear as best man at a friend's wedding and sing a few songs into a tape recorder before heading for Mexico. He hesitated in Ciudad Victoria, changed his mind and returned to Texas where for a time, he isolated himself on a ranch near Corpus Christi and began work on a novel. Later word from him came indirectly through letters post-marked Washington, D. C., North Carolina, and other points over the country.

Early one morning while I'm making my rounds,
Took a shot of cocaine and I shot my woman
down.

Went straight home and I went to bed,
Stuck another forty-four beneath my head.
Got up next morning and I grabbed that gun,
Took a shot of cocaine and away I run,
Made a good run but I run too slow,
They overtook me down in Juarez, Mexico.
Sittin' in a hop-joint a-rolling my pill
In walked the sheriff from the Jericho hill.
Said, "Willie Lee your name is not Jack Brown.
You're the dirty hop that shot your woman down."

"Yes, oh yes, my name is Willie Lee,
You got a warrant? Then read it to me.
Shot her cold cause she made me sore,
Said I was her daddy but she had five more."

When I was arrested I was dressed in black,
Put me on a train and they sent me back,
Had no friend to go my bail,
Slapped my dried up carcass in that county jail.

Woke up next morning about a half-past nine,
I seen that jailer coming down the line.
I stand and called as he cleared his throat,
Said, "Come on you dirty bum down to that
district court."

Down at the court house the trial began,
My case was handled by twelve honest men,
Just as the jury started out,
Saw that little judge commence to look about.

Five minutes later in walked the man,
He held that verdict in his right hand,
Verdict read murder in the first degree,
I hollered, "Lordy, Lordy, have mercy on me."

Judge read the sentence and he read it with a
grin,

"Ninety-nine years in the San Quentin pen."
Ninety-nine years underneath that ground,
I'll ne'er forget the day I shot my woman down.
Come all ye hops and listen to me.
Leave that whiskey alone, let that cocaine be.

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Jim Wilkie, vocal and guitar.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, May 31, 1958, Houston.

The geography of this song is, in itself, fascinating. The Jericho Hill(s) is a section in the Texas panhandle and is mentioned consistently in versions of the song dating back to 1893. The bad man is sometimes running from, sometimes running to Jericho. Some versions of the song mentioning running down the track which suggest the Rock Island Line that passes through Jericho. Huntsville Penitentiary is mentioned in some instances, San Quentin — though a Texas criminal would hardly be sentenced to the California State Prison — in others. Yet neither prison fits the subtle descriptive line "Ninety-nine years underneath that ground" which most strongly suggests the old Federal Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas which was built over a coal mine where convicts actually worked underneath ground. Although leasing convict labor to mines was common in many locales, Leavenworth is the stronger symbol since it was territorial prison in the days of the early west and became notorious among Negroes following the Houston riot during the First World War when many soldiers of the race convicted of armed rebellion were sent to Leavenworth.

The earliest reported text is given in two fragments collected in 1890 and 1893 published in Thomas' **South Texas Negro Work-Songs in Publications of the Texas Folklore Society**, Vol. 5, (1926). Another fragment appeared in Scarborough's **On the Trial of**

Negro Folk Songs. Substantial versions were published as "Little Sadie" in Henry's **Songs Sung in the Southern Appalachians**; as "Bad Man Ballad" in **American Ballads and Folk** and as "Late One Night" in Wheeler's **Steam-boat-in' Days**.

Recordings in the Library of Congress files are from North and South Carolina, Florida, Arkansas, and — which supplied the Lomax text — Mississippi.

Jim Wilkie learned the song from a Texan he met while serving in the Army. Pete Rose sings a similar version which he learned in Marathon, Texas.

SAND MOUNTAIN BLUES

PETE ROSE

Pete Rose is a 26 year old geologist for Shell Oil Company. His family presented him with strikingly handsome features and a strong musical heritage. His father still plays jew's harp and guitar at occasions around east Texas and his uncle, Travis Rose, was once featured as "The Planter's Peanut Boy" over a Shreveport radio station — probably KWKH which has since the early 1930s relied heavily on country music talent for its broadcasts which cover east Texas and the Mississippi valley.

Pete's grandfather, a Scotsman, played at dances in west Texas until he became too deaf. "One night," Pete says, "they say he couldn't get in tune with the others so he got disgusted, went off and sold his fiddle for a dollar."

Pete was born and raised in Austin, Texas, later attended the University of Texas there. While at the University an older student, Don Winston, tended to revive his interest in his native music and Pete began giving more serious attention to his heritage (although he'd been playing and singing since his fifteenth year). Another big influence was a group of four brothers who had a string band at a place called Nightmare Annie's in Marathon, Texas.

Standing by the depot,
Waiting for a train,
I'm gonna catch that midnight train,
Never come back again.

A lonesome feeling . . .
Sand Mountain Blues
I went to the gypsy,
Just to hear what she would say,
She said that gal don't love you,
You better be on your way.

You're gonna be sorry . . .
For breaking my heart
I don't know where I'll go,
Any old place will do,
I'm leavin' old Sand Mountain,
Just gettin' 'way from you.

It's a lonesome feeling . . .
Sand Mountain Blues
I could love another,
I could love one or two,
But when I saw you darling,
It'd make me sad and blue.

You're gonna be sorry . . .
For breaking my heart
Raining on Sand Mountain,
It's raining kinda slow,
When I leave this town,
You'll know I didn't want to go.

It's a lonesome feeling . . .
Sand Mountain Blues
Standing by the depot,
Waiting for the train,
I'm gonna catch that midnight train,
Never come back again.
It's a lonesome feeling . . .
Sand Mountain Blues

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Pete Rose, vocal and guitar.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, August 12, 1959, Housaon.

Pete Rose learned this song from a fellow student at the University of Texas who also indicated that Sand Mountain is in Georgia which seems borne out by the fact that two Atlanta artists, Gid Tanner, and Clayton McMichen, once recorded a dialogue on "Jeremiah Hopkins" store at Sand Mountain.

The motifs of visiting the gypsy — see "Been To the Gypsy" in Scarborough's **On the Trail of Negro Folk Songs** — and waiting at the station — see "10,000 Miles Away From Home"

in Sandburg's *The American Songbag* — occur in dozens of songs. A recording of the song by The Delmore Brothers is on King 849.

SOLDIER, WILL YOU MARRY ME?

LINNA BELLE HAFTI

Belle Hafti is a young grandmother who delights the neighborhood children in the early evening with songs recalled from her own childhood in Cross City, Florida. It's a minor tradition for the children on the block, the younger of her own three boys and her grandson, to gather around her porch and sing along in songs like "The Cuckoo" and "Once There Were Three Fishermen." She married at the age of 17 and shortly thereafter came to Houston — in 1936 — and has lived in the city since.

"Soldier, soldier, will you marry me,
With your musket, fife, and drum?"
"Oh, no, sweet maid, I cannot marry thee,
For I have no shirt to put on."
Then up she went to her grandfather's chest,
And got him a shirt of the very, very best.
And the soldier put it on.

"Soldier, soldier, will you marry me,
With your musket, fife, and drum?"
"Oh, no, sweet maid, I cannot marry thee,
For I have no coat to put on."
Then up she went to her grandfather's chest
And she got him a coat of the very, very best.
And the soldier put it on.

"Soldier, soldier, will you marry me,
With your musket, fife, and drum?"
"Oh, no, sweet maid, I cannot marry thee,
For I have no shoes to put on."
Then up she went to her grandfather's chest,
And got him a pair of the very, very best.
And the soldier put them on.

"Soldier, soldier, will you marry me,
With your musket, fife, and drum?"
"Oh, no, sweet maid, I cannot marry thee,
For I have no hat to put on."
Then up she went to her grandfather's chest,
And got him a hat of the very, very best
And the soldier put it on.

"Soldier, soldier, will you marry me,
With your musket, fife, and drum?"
"Oh, no, sweet maid, I cannot marry thee,
For I have no gloves to put on."
Then up she went to her grandfather's chest,
And got him a pair of the very, very best,
And the soldier put them on.

"Soldier, soldier, will you marry me,
With your musket, fife, and drum?"
"Oh, no, sweet maid, I cannot marry thee,
For I have wife of my own."

One of the most widely known songs, Belle Hafti's tune seems distinct from those versions previously heard. The song has been published in *Newell's Games and Songs of Children*, *Sharp's English Folk-Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, *Cox's Folk Songs of the South* and *Owen's Texas Folk Songs*. Recordings are by Bass Family, Decca 5432, and by Russ Pike issued by the Library of Congress on #8 and LP #2.

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Lima Belle Hafti, unaccompanied vocal.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, August 1959, Houston.

GOOD TIMES HERE, BETTER DOWN THE ROAD

JOEL HOPKINS

Joel Hopkins has earned two nicknames in his lifetime: buck dancing in traveling tent shows he was known as "Squatty" and later when the Texas Rangers raided a bootleg still on some property where he was working he was dubbed "Extract".

He's picked cotton in Arizona — "that cotton got thorns on it!" — and served time on County Farm gangs — "they'd try to bust you open on that county farm!" — and drunk his share of wine — "wine made me do too many bad things!" — and wound up working on an estate in Dickinson, Texas — "I done got used to these white peopled down here!"

Born in 1904 at Centerville, Texas, Joel is a remarkable contrast to his younger brother, Lightnin' Hopkins. He is quick in movement and speech, a manner that suggests energy continually in search of an outlet. His style is harsh and rhythm-dominated, the lines

sounding as if they are being torn away and flung at the listener. Yet his songs are not his composition but a potpurri of verses remembered from the singing of Blind Lemon Jefferson, Lonnie Johnson, Texas Alexander, and his older brother John Henry Hopkins.

This here is a good-time hymn . . . better down the road.
It's a good time here but it's a better down the road,
Lord, it's a good time here, baby, but it's better down the road.
I'm gonna leave here walkin' cause runnin' most too slow,
Runnin' most too slow,
Lord, I'll leave here runnin' walkin' most too slow.
You can take it out of my coffee, put it in my tea,
Say you take it out of my coffee and put it in my tea.
Well, say, it's sweet enough for me.
Well, I ain't gonna roll for the big-hat man no more,
Say, I ain't gonna roll for the big-hat man no more.
Mmmm-mmmm, for the big-hat man no more.
You never miss your water until you well went dry,
Well, I never miss my baby until she said goodbye.
Oh, Lord, Oh, Lord . . . Lord, Lordy, Lord, Lord.
Says I walk last night with my four-forty-five in my hand,
I's tryin' to catch my baby with some old travelin' man.

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Joel Hopkins, vocal and guitar.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, June 12, 1959, Dickinson, Texas.

The slaves used to sing about "Ol Massa" but as waves of people settling in Texas — the Old South planters in the river bottoms, the Tennessee woodsmen in the Piney Woods, the Scotch and Irish on the western plains — began adopting millinery by John B. Stetson as a common insignia, the Negro evolved a more eloquent description: "The big-hat man."

THE GREY GOOSE

JOHN LOMAX, JR.

The name Lomax is deeply connected with American folklore, but the individual members of the family are not always well distinguished in the public eye. For clarification one can refer to the song *Lead Belly* composed when he worked for the Lomax family. It was called "Elmira" and dedicated to their cook, and in turn, to the entire household:

Workin' for her boss man, Mister John A. Lomack;
Workin' for her mistis, Miss Terrill Lomack;
Her little boss man, Mister Alan Lomack;
Her little mistis, Miss Bess Brown, suh;
Her third boss man, Mister John A. Junior;
On Thirty-fourth Street, In de four hundred block, suh;
Must be in Austin, in Austin, Texas.¹

It was the present singer's father who pioneered the collecting of native American lore, a radical departure from the gathering of immigrant child ballads to which his contemporaries were limiting their efforts. The senior Lomax first amassed an enormous body of cowboy lore and then, realizing that slavery time music and folkways were being perpetuated on southern prison farms, began an equally extensive series of tours, collecting and recording at the southern prisons. Today, the younger of his two sons, Alan Lomax is the outstanding writer and collector on the American folklore scene, being perhaps the only scholar who fully appreciates that the boundaries of folklore are only where the folk indicate them to be.

¹ *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly*, p. 95-97.

But "Mister John A. Junior" is not of the scholarly breed. Although he has worked with his father and brother in collecting projects, and engaged in those of his own, John's interest is in the expression itself; a subjective view and personal intensity which displays itself not in the tracking down but in his own singing of what he has heard and made his own.

Well, las monday morning,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
My daddy went a-huntin',
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,

And he went to the big woods,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
And he took along his hound dog,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
And he took along his zulu.¹
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Then the hound dog 'gin to whining,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Along come the grey goose,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Up to the shoulder,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
And he rammed the hammer way back
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
And the hammer went click-clack,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
And the zulu went boo-loo!
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Down he come a falling,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Took two days to find him,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Then on to the wagon,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
And we hauled him to the big house,
Well your wife and my wife
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Gonna have a feather-picking,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Then we put him on to parboil,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Took four days to parboil,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Then we put him in to bake him,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Took eight days to bake him,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Then onto the table
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
But the fork couldn't stick him,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Then we threw him in the hog pen,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
But he broke belly's² jaw bone.
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
And the hogs couldn't eat him,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Then we hauled him to the saw mill,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
But he broke the saw's teeth out,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Well, the last time I seen him,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
He was flying cross the ocean,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
With a long string of goslings,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
They was all goin' "Quick-quonk!"
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
Well, to heck with the grey goose,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,
To heck with the grey goose,
Lawd, Lawd, Lawd,

1 zulu — shotgun
2 belly — sowbelly, a hog
John Lomax Jr., unaccompanied vocal.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, July 1, 1959 Houston.

This song, an analogue to the English "Cutty Wren", is one of many that people have dedicated to fabulous animals like the rambling "Darby Ram" and the bucking "Strawberry Roan."

In his *American Folksongs of Protest*, John Greenway reasons that the Negro identified with the indestructible Goose, who, despite all that might be done to him, ends up flying away with a string of youngsters behind him.

Known throughout the Texas prison farms, versions in the Library of Congress files are from Lightnin' Washington at Darrington, AAFS 182; Augustus (Track Horse) Haggerty at Huntsville AAFS 223; James (Iron Head) Baker at Central State Farm, issued by the Library of Congress on #15 and LP #3 (and transcribed in *American Ballads and Folk Songs*); and most recently from Grover Dickson on Retrieve who interpolated lines from "Grizzly Bear" to conclude his version:

Well, it a mighty tough grey goose
Well, I'm going down (on the) new ground
Gonna hunt that grey goose
Says, it ain't no use partner
To be hunting no grey goose
For you can't hold it
He'll fly across the ocean
With a long string of feathers.

Former inmate of the Imperial Farm (now Central), Huddie Ledbetter has recorded "The Grey Goose" on Victor 27267, Disc 726, Folkways LP 241, and for the Library of Congress files, AAFS 155 (all separate recordings). The last mentioned is transcribed in Lomax' *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly*.

John Lomax first heard the song from Lead Belly, but learned it from Iron Head during

a period when "the porch climber" worked for the Lomax family — after his release from Central, and before being returned to Ramsey in 1941 as a habitual criminal. Iron Head, a soft voiced singer with an immense song lore that ranged from traditional British Ballads to "Ain't It Hard To Be A Right Black Nigger?", said he learned all his songs from a single, older convict who had spent his "natural life" in the prison.

HELLO, CENTRAL, GIMME 209

ANDREW EVERETT

Andrew Everett was born at Silas, Alabama in the Tombigbee river valley in 1895. He left there in his teens and he's been leaving places and women ever since.

"Been married three or four times . . . and I ain't got no wife yet. Everytime I'd marry — Decide I'd get a wife, I's gettin' a devil. Couldn't stay together . . . But I can't get — can't do without em right on. I've got to catch em and let em go. I'm old but yet and still I ain't too old for to like em . . ." ¹

¹ Quoted from Everett's contribution to a documentary LP in progress, *Hurts My Tongue To Talk*.

I wish I had never knowed your name,
I wish I had never knowed your name,
I wouldn't been worried and bothered with you
this way

Hello, Central, Gimme 209,
Hello, Central, Please gimme 209,
I just wanna talk to the one I left behind.

I hate to see that rising sun go down,
I hate to see the rising sun go down,
That keeps me worried and bothered all my life.
Early this morning, just about the break o day,
I looked at the pillow where you used to lay
your head.

I ain't gonna be your low down dog anymore,
I ain't gonna be your low down dog no more,
I been your dog, baby, ever since I knowed
your name.

So long, baby, I'm leaving you today,
Oh, so long, baby, I'm leaving town today,
I'm leaving you, baby, just to wear you off my
mind.

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Andrew Everett, vocal and guitar.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, 1959, Houston.

In 1901 a sentimental song, "Hello, Central, Give Me Heaven", represented a child innocently trying to reach her deceased father. By 1909 Lead Belly was singing "Hello, Central, Give Me Long Distance Phone" around Tell, Texas and the telephone idea was becoming a traditional opening gambit with which to link various leaving-blues verses. (Tin Pan Alley returned during World War I with "Hello, Central, Give Me No Man's Land" and King Oliver announced "Hello, Central, Give Me Doctor Jazz".)

The number most often called is 209, just as in train-blues it is most often the 219 that figures.

BLUES IN THE BOTTOM

EDWIN PICKENS

"Buster" Pickens calls himself one of the "old original barrelhouse piano players." In the early 1930s he worked along the Santa Fe spurs that cut in to the loblolly pine country of east Texas and Louisiana, earning \$12 a week, room and board at the barrelhouses that clustered around those isolated, company-town saw mill camps. "They was tough places. Call 'em barrelhouses or some call 'em chockhouses cause they'd have barrel of something called chock, something like beer, and you'd dip it right out of the top of the barrel. It cost 15¢ a cup and you're not going to drink more than 30¢ worth of chock."

During those years he knew most of the Texas pianists whose records are legend: Black Boy Shine, Pinetop Burks, Son Becky, Andy Boy, Joe Pullum, Rob Cooper, and Moanin' Bernice Edwards. But Pickens never recorded himself until after the war when he played on some jump band sides and accompanied Texas Alexander on the two sides

that famed early blues artist made a few years before his death.

Pickens was born in Hempstead, Texas in 1915 and has worked all his life as piano player: for the migratory cotton pickers during the harvest in south Texas, at various "fast houses" around the state ("the bar and piano'd always be about a block down the road from where the girls stayed"), at various cabarets around Houston, and just before this recording was made, he completed a couple of weeks with a traveling medicine show, perhaps the last of its kind still active in the South.

Blues in the bottom, blues in the bottom, got me
blue as I can be,
Blues in the bottom, just as blue as I can be,
My baby's left me — my heart is full of misery.
I lost my cotton, lost my corn, lost everything
I had,
I lost my cotton, lost my corn, — 'thing I had,
Boys, you know — blues got me feelin' sad.
My baby left me, my baby left me,
left me all alone,
My baby left me, left me all alone,
Lord, I love my baby, she got me all wrong.
I got the blues, I got the blues, I got the blues
all around my head,
I got the blues, blues all around my head,
It's hard saying, the very blues I said.
Blues in the bottom, blues in the bottom, cause
me to moan all night,
Blues in the bottom, cause me to moan all night,
These blues keep on worrying me, boys,
I'll have to take a flight.

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Edwin Pickens, vocal and piano.
Recorded by Mack McCormick, August 17, 1960, Houston.

This simple, catchy tune is one of the fundamental blues. To the same melody, the Texas singer Blind Lemon Jefferson has sung: Blue jumped the rabbit, Blue jumped the rabbit, Chased him for a solid mile,

And his contemporary Barbecue Bob from Atlanta has sung:

So glad I'm brownskin, so glad I'm brownskin,
Chocolate to the bone,

While the Kansas City bartender Joe Turner has shouted:

Hey Lawdy Mama, Hey Lawdy Mama, meat shaking
on your bones,

And a tin pan alley lyricist has set down the words:

Up jumped Aunt Hagar, Up jumped Aunt Hagar,
And shouted out with all her might.

In Texas, oldsters recall one of the very first songs to be called a blues, one closely related to Edwin Pickens' sharecropper's song as:

Blues in the bottle, blues in the bottle, stopper
in my hand.
And running through all of these is the eloquent cry:
Hey Everybody, hey Everybody, now listen to
this song!

SHAKE IT, MISTER GATOR

JOSEPH JOHNSON, R. G. WILLIAMS AND GROUP

Along the last, winding 50 miles of the Brazos River before it empties into the Gulf of Mexico, there are seven prison farms — Harlem, Central, Blue Ridge, Darrington, Ramsey, Retrieve, and Clemens. These are gigantic plantations in the soggy, sand and salt land of the Brazos bottoms, raising sugar cane, cotton, a few vegetables and cattle. Mile after mile the exact, long-stretching rows march across the land, presenting a hypnotic pattern to weekend fishermen who rush down highway 288.

There are two elements in the scene, the land and the sky, both incredibly flat; monotony broken only by an inviting stretch of greenery in the distance that marks the edge of the Brazos, and by a plain red brick building, a huge dormitory dwarfed by the surrounding flatness as if it were a pack of cigarettes tossed out on the floor of an empty warehouse.

Except for a few incorrigibles kept in the walls at Huntsville Penitentiary, the Negro convicts are hastily shipped off to Ramsey, Retrieve, Clemens, or one of the several units at Central. A murderer who served time on the 17,000 acre Ramsey farm in 1945-48 has described it: "The moment a convict's off the transfer truck on Ramsey State Farm, those

old bosses look you over with their eyes half closed, and snuff dried in the corners of their mouths. Hell starts for you if you are a Negro. Nearly all these 'demented' bosses on Ramsey Farm are from one community — Madisonville, Texas. And most of them are kinfolk — either by marriage or blood.

"Since the farm is only 25 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, it never really gets cold for more than three days. The chief crops are corn, sugar cane, and cotton. They grow enough corn to feed 400 convicts for four or five months, to ship to the main unit in Huntsville and to feed the 400 mules. By the beginning of October, they are through picking cotton. Then from November to February, they're cutting cane to make hundreds of gallons of syrup and thousands of sacks of raw sugar in the Farm mills.

"If you were unfortunate enough to be handling a pair of mules which got scared and bolted and knocked down some cane shoots, you'd be in trouble . . . Or if you happen to leave some Johnson grass roots in hoeing a field. First of all, you are made to pluck up the grass, blade by blade, with your bare hands. Then when you return to "bar-racks" after fifteen hours of work, you are made to stand on a barrel or put "on the cuffs".

"This means you are placed on a narrow bench with your feet straight out and your hands behind you. Handcuffs are then snapped on. Sometimes convicts' wrists swell so much they lose the use of their hands . . . You have to get up and get just the same — or else be bludgeoned to insensibility. They have a grave yard all of their own there, and it must be running over with Negro bodies."¹

In these circumstances, song is a way of survival.

1. Quoted from an article by Jack Lee as told to *Our World* magazine. Although the music heard here grew up under the system described, in fairness to the present prison administration it must be pointed out that the level of brutality has lessened in the past decade according to recently released men. On the other hand, prison reform has abolished the humane practice of allowing conjugal visits on Sunday afternoons (from which the song "Shorty George" derives.)

Joseph Johnson, leader:

I was down in the bottom,
Upon a log,
I was whoopin' and hollerin',
Aiming like a dog.
Well, here come the rider,
Come a-riding along,
Say, "You better go to rolling,
If you want to make it back home."

R. G. Williams, leader:

Well, my momma and my poppa,
Told me a dirty lie,
They gonna get me a pardon,
About the fourth of July,
June, July and August,
Done come and gone
Well, they left me rolling,
But I ain't got long.
Why don't you shake it, Mister Gator?
Dog gone your soul,
Why don't you shake it, Mister Gator?
Till your money holes.

Well, I went to the river,
And I couldn't get across,
Well, I jumped on a gator,
And I thought he was a log.

(chorus)

June, July, and August,
Done come and gone,
Well, they left me rolling,
But I ain't got long.

I didn't come here to hold em,
I come here to stay,
Come to do my time,
And not to run away.

(chorus)

Well, the Captain and the Sergeant,
Come a-riding along,
Says, "You better go to rolling,
If you want to make it back home."

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Joseph Johnson, R. G. Williams and Group, unaccompanied
vocal.
Recorded by Chester Bower, John Lomax, Jr., and Pete
Seeger, March 17, 1951, Ramsey State Farm, Otey, Texas.

One of these verses pops up in such widely

diverse songs as the collegiate "Polly Wolly Doodle" and the Negro "Bottle Up and Go." Others, marked by the convicts' individual kind of humor, are part of the prison tradition. Some of these appear in the "Godamighty Drag" which was collected from Augustus (Track Horse) Haggerty at Huntsville Penitentiary in 1934, and included in the *Our Singing Country*.

With their keen study of animal life, the Negro's songs often make reference to the alligators, always seeming to taste the sweet "gator tail" meat.

When a gator hollers
Sign of rain, babe, sign of rain.

The first few bars of the tune are similar to those of another Texas prison song, "The Midnight Special."

GRIZZLY BEAR

GROVER DICKSON and GROUP

The man who did most of the song leading at Retrieve Farm introduced himself starkly: "I am Grover Dickson, age 45, I'm serving a term of twenty years, state penitentiary.

He sang 14 songs ranging over the best known of those perpetuated in the Texas prisons — such as "Long John" and "Go Down Ol Hannah" and "Grey Goose" — and included several of his own making like "I Don't Believe She'd Know Me" and startled everyone with a reworking of "John Henry" set in prison terms:

John Henry said to the Captain,
He'd be looking around over the yard,
"Ain't a thing up and down this line,
I mean, that's too hard,
Oh, Lord, I mean, that's too hard."

Explaining the song "Here, Rattler, Here" he said, "We made that song up, because we have a dog man, who, if you escapes, he gets after us. The boys make up songs about him in the woods, working, and all like that . . . They run, off, some of em, and they catch em. And the others tell the others how they be caught, trapped. And they make up songs about em, we does." In reply to a question about the escapee Riley mentioned in the song, he said, "Riley, that was one that left off of Clemens, over there, a long time ago. He's the one that gave me the information on how it was. And I tried it but they caught me."

Elsewhere his comments pointed out the lengths of songs as they span the 11 hour days in the sunbaked fields: "We knows those verses . . . we made em up down here . . . A song like that, I guess, would keep on going half an hour."

And finally he explained why the work song: ". . . sing it out in the fields, working . . . cutting wood, or hoeing on the turnrows. Something like that, where I got em all in a line, where we can all raise our tools at the same time, let em fall. It's much more exciting, then, when you can hear the tools fall with it."¹

¹The limitations of equipment did not permit recording the men at work and consequently a vital element is missing although it is suggested by the easy, fluid, long-practiced pattern of the songs. The only available recordings on which convicts at work are heard is the compilation from Parchman Farm: *Negro Prison Songs from the Mississippi State Penitentiary*, Tradition 1020. (Released in England under the title *Murderer's Home*).

It was a great big ugly

Group response: Grizzly bear!

It was a great big ugly
I'm going down in the bottom, hunt a
I'm going down in the bottom, hunt a
It was a great big ugly
It was a great big ugly

A-then who is that great big
Well, if I tell you, doncha tell about the
Well, if I tell you, doncha tell about the
Well, if I tell you, doncha tell about the
I says, the Captain is a great big
Oh, the Captain is a great big
I'm going down in the bottom, hunt a
I'm going down in the bottom, hunt a
He made tracks in the bottom like a
He made tracks in the bottom like a
He laid tracks in the bottom like a

Leaving tracks in the bottom, like a
Well, I'm scared of that great big
Yes, I'm scared of that great big
He hunting tracks in the bottom like a
Well, he's down in the thicket with a
Way down in the thicket with a
With that great big ugly
With that great big ugly
I gonna set a trap for the
I'm gonna set my trap for the
I'm gonna hunt him with a shotgun
I'm gonna hunt him with a shotgun
Well, he's a great big ugly
Well, he's a great big ugly
Jack O'Diamonds was a great big
Jack O'Diamonds was a great big
He made tracks in the bottom like
He laid the tracks in the bottom like
I'm gonna hunt that great big
Gonna hunt that great big
Yes, my papa told my mama bout a
Yes, My papa told my mama bout
Oh, bout the great big ugly
Bout the great big ugly
Got his gun in the bottom after a
Got his gun in the bottom after a
I'm gonna find that great big
Gonna find that great big
I'm gonna shoot that great big
I'm gonna shoot that great big
Gonna show you how to skin that
Make a coat outa the great big
Make a coat outa the great big
Won't be no more trouble with the
No more trouble in the bottom outa
I'm gonna talk about the great big
I'm gonna show you about the
Ain't no harm to be no
Ain't no harm to be no
That's the end of the great big
That's the end of the great big
That great big grizzly, that great big bear . . .

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Grover Dickson and others, vocal.
Recorded by John Lomax, Jr. and Pete Seeger, March 12,
1951.
Retrieve State Farm, Snipe, Texas.

The ritual bear hunt is dramatized in man's oldest portrait of himself, the paleolithic cave paintings such as at Trois Freres. In other, even older caves, man once lived in some kind of a community relationship with families of bears and before he began ceremonial burying of his own dead, he had begun burying the dead of the bears, their bones carefully arranged and betokened in their graves.

Among the Alabama Indians of the United States — whose survivors have been Federally deposed to a government reservation a few miles north of Houston — a myth has it that fire once belonged to the bears and on one occasion when they were away searching acorns, man stole it and ever since fire has belonged to man.

In the contemporary art of Ingmar Bergman's film *Sawdust And Tinsel (The Naked Night)* the circus owner's rebellion against circumstances ends with his killing of a bear that resembles himself.

In myths and fairy tales the bear is the traditional totem of the evil mother.

"Grizzly Bear" seems to contain parallels to all these images, and yet on another level, is poking fun and innuendo at the homosexual relationships of the convicts themselves. Given this interpretation, it's merely another term for the hairy, old homosexual, (called "Wolf" by white convicts, "Bear" by Negroes), of the dormitory. Since conjugal visits have been forbidden the prisoners, there has, of course, been no sudden celibacy but rather a booming homosexuality in the prisons.

But the Grizzly Bear never remains any one thing. In the three different versions of the song collected in 1951, he (or she) is: ". . . a great big ugly . . ." or ". . . he had big blue eyes . . ." or "Jack O'Diamonds was a great big Grizzly Bear" or "The Captain is a great big Grizzly Bear" or "He laid tracks in the bottom . . ." or "He came a-wobbling and a-squabbling . . ."

The song has apparently never been collected before the 1951 visits to the prison — though it was at that time widely known at both Ramsey and Retrieve — though it seems to have roots in an earlier work song sung in the prisons:

George went a-huntin' O Mount Zion!
He kill an eagle O Mount Zion!