

FOLK MUSIC OF THE UNITED STATES  
Recording Laboratory AFS L1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
WASHINGTON

# ANGLO-AMERICAN BALLADS

From the Archive of Folk Song

Edited by Alan Lomax





## INTRODUCTION

by

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In 1942 the Archive of Folk Song in the Library of Congress issued its first albums of recorded folk music, thereby making some of its rich collection of field recordings available to the public. The recordings were issued under the editorship of Alan Lomax, then head of the Archive. (The editing of the sixth album was entrusted to William N. Fenton.) Each album—they really were “albums” in those days—consisted of five 78-rpm records pressed in black shellac (the famous clear red vinyl was to come later). The albums patriotically mixed ten-inch and twelve-inch records—shellac was being rationed in 1942.

The six albums in the series were planned to exhibit the main varieties of American folk music:

- I. Anglo-American Ballads
- II. Anglo-American Shanties, Lyric Songs, Dance Tunes and Spirituals
- III. Afro-American Spirituals, Work Songs, and Ballads
- IV. Afro-American Blues and Game Songs
- V. Bahaman Songs, French Ballads and Dance Tunes, Spanish Religious Songs and Game Songs
- VI. Songs from the Iroquois Longhouse.

Each album included a brochure with tran-

scriptions of the texts sung on the records and notes on the music and performers.

Attempts to devise some method for distributing the Archive's recorded treasures had begun in 1941 with the establishment of the Recording Laboratory in the Library of Congress. The press release announcing the establishment of the Recording Laboratory claimed that

when the installation is completed the Music Division of the Library will be able to provide for schools, libraries, and individuals, recordings of American folk music, American poetry read and interpreted by its makers, unpublished string quartets, new American music and other similar materials. Much of this material stands ready for use on the shelves of the Library now—records of American folk music from many parts of the country, documents basic to the history and culture of America and of the world, musical manuscripts of composers, ancient and modern. Only students who are free to come to the Library or people who can afford to have expensive copies made, now use the Library's vast collection. To the great majority of citizens this material is accessible only through the books of research students and occasional radio broadcasts. The new sound service in the Library can make a great part of it available on phonograph records to the general public.

Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish was more eloquent in his proposal to the Carnegie Corporation, whose grant made possible the establishment of the Recording Laboratory:

I cannot too strongly express to you my own conviction that such a program would be a most important force in the life of this country at this moment. It seems to me that we can either educate the American people as to the value of their cultural heritage and their national civilization, or sit back and watch the destruction and disintegration of that culture and that civilization by forces now so ruinously active in this world.

The establishment of the Recording Laboratory made it possible for people to request the duplication of specific sound recordings. In addition, the Library published recordings in an attempt to get some of the Archive's material to the person who was interested in sampling its holdings without having a specific item in mind—the auditory equivalent of the library patron who just “wants a good book.” As a trial balloon for the project in 1941 the Friends of Music in the Library of Congress issued an album of two ten-inch records consisting of “Lady of Carlisle” sung by Basil May, “Pretty Polly” sung by Pete Steele, “It Makes a Long Time Man Feel Bad”—the archetypal Library of Congress folk-song title—sung by “a group of Negro convicts,” and “O Lord, Don’ low Me to Beat ’em,” sung, spoken, and cursed by Willie Williams. The next year the Archive of Folk Song albums which are the subject of this essay appeared.

In 1956, at the time of their first issue, the LPs were direct transfers from the 78s as issued Friends of Music album was combined with that on the first of the Archive of Folk Song albums to make the record now known as AFS L1. This allowed those who wanted to buy a long-playing version of the Friends of Music album to purchase a single record, but did create a few anomalies: as it is now constituted L1 contains two versions of “Pretty Polly” and presents Willie Williams and “group of convicts” under the banner of “Anglo-American Ballads.”

In 1956, at the time of their first issue, the LPs were direct transfers from the 78s as issued in 1942. At this time the records were renumbered: six albums numbered from I to VI containing records numbered from 1 to 30 became AFS L1 through L6. The brochures which had been prepared for the 78-rpm albums continued to be used with the LPs. This caused some confusion as the record number in the brochure no longer corresponded to the actual number of the item on the record.

During the years 1964 to 1966 the six LPs were remastered from the original field recordings; these remastered discs occasionally included alternate “takes” from those used on the original 78s. The remastering project also allowed the engineers to present complete versions of several cuts which had before appeared only as excerpts. Consequently the transcriptions of these songs in the brochures no longer accurately reflected the words on the records. This was one of the several considerations which led to the present revision of the textual material accompanying the recordings. The recordings themselves, though now numbered AFS 1 through 6 rather than AAFS 1 through 6 (reflecting the change of name of the issuing body from Archive of American Folk Song to Archive of Folk Song), have not been changed since the 1960s remastering.

The current republication furnishes all six records with new covers and a new sleeve note, supplies the present historical introduction, renumbers the notes on the selections to correspond to the numbering on the LP labels, and revises the transcriptions to include all the text contained on the LP. Otherwise the brochures read as they did when they first appeared in 1942. We have even hesitated to change transcriptions when our ears hear something different than did those of the original transcriber. This is partly attributable to cowardice. Revising such transcripts as those of Mrs. Ball's nonsense syllables on AFS L2, A7 (“Jennie Jenkins”) or the ring-shout of AFS L3, A7 (“Run, Old Jeremiah”) is not a task one views with enthusiasm. But our decision was based partly on common sense. After all, Alan Lomax heard most of these people in person and singing many songs, while we only hear them for a single song and on a record.

Three decades later it is useful to look at these pioneering issues of recorded folk music and consider the assumptions—conscious and unconscious—that went into their production. Some of these assumptions have colored subsequent Library record issues up to the present day; others were not meant to apply to any but the first issues. Still, all of them played a part in the creation of the image of the Library

of Congress folk music record, and some—notably number 3 below—played an important part in its development. Here are some of these assumptions, more or less in descending order of importance:

1. The Library of Congress recordings were designed as a method of making the wealth of field recordings housed in the Archive of American Folk Song available to the public. They were—and have remained—recordings of material *from field recordings in the Archive*. (In 1976 the Library of Congress began a complementary series of recordings, *Folk Music in America*, edited by Richard K. Spottswood, which drew on commercial recordings and field collections other than those in the Archive, as well as an occasional irresistible Archive field recording.) This explains many of the questions asked about the Archive's series of folk music recordings, including the perennial "Why doesn't the Library of Congress issue a jazz series as well as a folk music series?" The answer: the field recordings of the Folk Archive did not, in the 1940s contain sufficient and sufficiently trenchant jazz material to undertake such a series. As the Archive's earliest field recordings were done in the late thirties and early forties in rural areas—see number 5 below—they would not have picked up much important jazz besides the roots-of-the-blues material so ably represented on L3, L4, and their successors. The Jelly Roll Morton recordings, the one important set of jazz "field" recordings in the Archive during the early 1940s (if we can call a set of recordings made in the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Auditorium "field recordings") were commercially viable and would thus come under the interdiction of number 3 below—as would, indeed, most jazz.

2. Since the purpose of the record series was to make the treasures of the Archive available to the general public, the choice of individual performances was made to some extent on the basis of beauty of performance rather than its use for folklore scholarship. These were the performances that the Lomaxes wanted to share with the world.

Not all of the performances are by otherwise unknown singers and instrumentalists caught for a brief moment by the microphone of the Library of Congress. Many are by people who even then were fairly well-known folk performers: Mrs. Texas Gladden, the salty radical Aunt Molly Jackson, honey-voiced Vera Hall, harmonica man Sonny Terry, and even Woody Guthrie. There are also less widely known musicians, from the anonymous little girls of "Ain't Gonna Ring [Rain?] No More" and the pseudonymous "Lightning"—who would not give John A. Lomax his real name—to such people as Jimmie Strothers, the gentle axe murderer who is known only through his Folk Archive recordings. But it cannot be claimed that every cut of L1 through L5 makes articulate a voice that would otherwise have remained unheard save by those living within a few miles of the singer. This is not to suggest that the early Library of Congress records sacrificed authenticity for easy listening. They are American folk music pure from the fount. Still, the newcomer to these records should be warned that Wade Ward, to give an example, is not the undiscovered hill-dweller of the cartoons ("Hey, Paw, here comes the man from the Library of Congress with that machine"). By 1942 he had already been broadcast nationwide on the American School of the Air.

3. The third assumption is the inverse of the second. It has been the policy of the Library of Congress not to compete in its publications with commercial companies. The recordings put out by the Folk Archive mirror this policy, none more clearly than the first six. The folk wisdom of the Music Division has it that in 1942 Lomax and Harold Spivacke, then chief of the Music Division, were advised that it might be unwise for the Library's record series to issue any record which could profitably be released commercially. Many of the well-known "Library of Congress recordings" that generations of record buyers have treasured have not, in fact, been released by the Library, but have been released on commercial labels from material recorded by or at the Library of Congress; thus the Archive has been able to get its treasures into circulation without competing with commercial record labels. A few highlights of commercial recordings made from material at the Library of Congress include the Jelly Roll Morton interviews

on Riverside, the Bartok-Szigeti recital on Vanguard, Blind Willie McTell on Piedmont, Aunt Molly Jackson on Rounder, Budapest String Quartet broadcasts on Odyssey, and the more or less complete works of Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter and Woody Guthrie on Elektra.

Few of the performances in the Folk Archive's collections in 1942 would have been considered to have commercial value in that year. Still, the attempt not to compete with regular record companies may explain why, in a series of records leaning heavily on black convict songs, there is nothing by the Lomax's most famous discovery, Leadbelly. By 1942 his recordings had appeared on the commercial market on more than one label.

What was not commercial in 1942 was not to be forever uncommercial. Several of the artists appearing on the Archive's first issues recorded commercially later (Sonny Terry, of L4, even shows up on the original cast album of *Finian's Rainbow*), and one, McKinley "Muddy Waters" Morganfield, who sings "Country Blues" and "I Be's Troubled" on L4, is now recognized as a major commercial artist with a considerable discography.

The first three attitudes discussed have concerned the general philosophy of the Library of Congress folk music recordings. The remaining considerations apply particularly to AFS L1 through L5 (L6, the Indian recording, being a special case).

4. The recordings are predominantly southern. The Lomax's collecting for the Library was done predominantly in the South; the South was thus the main source for the Library's folk collection. The first two albums, however, contained some material recorded in such nonsouthern locations as Rhineland, Wisconsin, and Visalia, California, while the sixth album was recorded in New York and Ontario. So the records as they were issued proclaim their southern bias only by the note "recorded in Southern U.S." on L3 and L4.

The southern accent of the first Library of Congress recordings probably reflects the earliest experiences of the Lomax family, which began in Texas and spread east through the southern states, but it also reflects the practical necessities of folk-music collecting: better fish one section of the pond than spread your net too thin. (During their lives the Lomaxes, par-

ticularly Alan, were to spread their nets very widely indeed.) The next two aspects, interrelated, do represent the Lomax family's attitudes, attitudes widely shared among earlier folk music collectors but increasingly challenged by more recent collectors.

5. The sources of the recordings are exclusively rural.

6. The records are dedicated to the preservation of the old songs and styles of the folk, principally interpreted by older musicians, with little attempt to document the new styles and songs that were emerging. The next-to-last cut of L2, complete with Hawaiian guitar, for example, is offered as a single sample of "American folk music, 1942."

The view of the folksong as a rural and old, and therefore dying, art remains common to this day. In the 1940s there was a particular feeling that radio and the phonograph were wiping out our folk heritage, which was to be found in its most vital form where the electric power line had not—or had only recently—penetrated. At that time, a few folklorists were only beginning to discover the folk music of the city, with its multiple ethnic strains; and several of the new-fangled styles that the Lomaxes did not record are now respectable styles whose origins might well have shown up on these records.

A third of a century after their release we can see that the rural and old-style bias of the early Library of Congress folk music recordings provided something less than the full range of American folk music. From the perspective of the year they were released, however, they are an amazing document of taste, courage, and confidence. To have released in 1942 a record of Anglo-American ballads only two of which had the comforting accompaniment of a guitar was to invite instant rejection by the general listener, who usually likes his folk music with the harmonies explained. The faith of Alan Lomax and Harold Spivacke that the authentic voice of folk music could be accepted by the American people is, placed in proper perspective, far more important to consider than any "bias" the records might have. If today we note what the records omit it is partly because they have become so much the archetypal set of folk music records that one is conscious of their limits or, occasionally, unconscious. (The

present writer grew up in New Hampshire under the impression that New Hampshire had no folk music, since none of it appeared on Library of Congress records.)

7. "The labourer is worthy of his hire." The Library of Congress was careful to get permission from all locatable performers and to pay them for releasing their performances. The fee was nominal—around ten dollars per song—but for a series of records dedicated to commercial unacceptability (number 3 above) it was a pledge of faith to the artists whose work had been used. The efforts to locate singers were heroic; but sometimes even the U.S. government had to give up. A 1942 Alan Lomax memo, "Report on Clearances," tells many stories of his attempts to secure clearances, including this one about the Bahamas records:

One of the singers on this record lives on the remote Cat Island of the Bahamas chain. She was written on April 17, 1942, and so far no reply has been obtained; perhaps none ever will. The only other Bahaman singer who has been located was found because the Nassau postmaster published a notice in the newspaper announcing that he had a letter for him. There is no newspaper within 500 miles of Cat Island . . .

Some people felt that ten dollars was not enough. Again, from the "Report on Clearances" :

This party asked for a fifteen per-cent royalty; and so we have dropped the side, substituting an even better one by a performer who has been very cooperative in the past. A letter has gone to this performer, and a reply should be expected within a very few days.

If the first performer meant 15 percent of the profits by his request for a "fifteen per-cent royalty," he would have done better to stick with the ten dollars. But at least one performer was pleased with his payment. In a recent interview Muddy Waters recalled, "the Library of Congress sent me \$10.00 a side and that \$20.00 went a long way, as far as a hundred dollars goes today" (*Unicorn Times*, April 1978, p. 40). Sometimes denominational problems may have hindered the obtaining of permission:

These two items were recorded with the collaboration of three Negro ministers. After a month of correspondence, I discovered that it was necessary for all three to be consulted on the matter of the release of these two items. On May 8, 1942, I wrote all three again, explaining the situation; so far I have received no reply. I shall wire again today for a definite yes or no answer.

Apparently no answer was received, for another performance was substituted for the performances involving the three ministers' permission. The substituted piece was Willie Williams singing "The New Buryin' Ground": it is therefore hard to regret the ministers' recalcitrance.

Lomax summed up the trials of getting clearances for the first six albums of the Archive series at the end of this report:

This matter of locating a hundred old folk singers all the way from Cat Island to the Colorado buttes and back has been an epic chase. It is an experience that I have enjoyed but that I am not anxious to repeat soon. . . .

If Lomax was not anxious to repeat the experience soon, the Folk Archive was fully prepared to keep up its searches: the second set of six albums, under the general editorship of B. A. Botkin, appeared one year after the initial six. Eventually, the rigorous seeking of permissions became less exhaustive and exhausting. Payments are held in escrow for performers who appear at new locations after their performances are released.

The first six albums issued by the Archive of American Folk Song have become documents almost as much as the music they sought to preserve. They are still as capable as ever of giving pleasure, instruction, and sustenance to the listener who comes to them for the music they contain. By now, however, they also serve as witness to the state of folk-music collection in the 1930s—both as to the sound quality of the records produced and the attitudes toward collecting of the gatherers—and to the manner in which this material was presented to the general public in the 1940s.

Few people who care for folk music would suggest that these six albums be retired for obsolescence—though we do get about three letters a year suggesting that if we cannot issue records with better audio quality than these we should get out of the business, and an occasional letter suggesting that anyone who would put out a record entitled [fill in title of any one of the albums] without including an example of [fill in any currently fashionable folk-derived style] is guilty of deceiving the public. There have been suggestions, however, that we revise the printed material accompanying these records, either to bring it up to the current stand-

ards of ethnomusicological writing or to bring it in line with current racial attitudes. Against this proposal is the fact that most of the annotations on these records were made by the people who pointed the microphone at the singers and said "sing." This has seemed more germane to our purposes than folkloric or sociological up-to-dateness—what is up-to-date in the 1970s may be passé in the 1990s, but AAFS 1 through 6 will be 1933 through 1942 forever. So we have added this historical note and reproduced the original annotations substantially as they were written in 1942. They are still good reading; by now they are history as well.

## A1—THE HOUSE CARPENTER.

Sung by Mrs. Texas Gladden at Salem, Virginia, 1941. Recorded by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax.

At the time the first British settlers came to the United States, the singing of old-time ballads was evidently still very common in Great Britain. This is indicated by the survival of more than a hundred of the so-called classic popular ballads in the folk tradition of the United States along with scores of ballads of other types. These ballads took on renewed importance in the wilderness of the thirteen colonies where the people were completely dependent for amusement on the resources of their memories and imaginations; and they are still known in every part of the country, although most commonly in isolated rural areas. Not only were these ballads an important form of recreation for the pioneers, but they gave a sense of history and they expressed certain deep-running patterns of idea and feeling, important to the structure of the American community.

The ballad of "The House Carpenter" (sometimes called "The Daemon Lover") is one of the most widely distributed British ballads in this country. With other ballads of its kind, it has furnished amusement for lovers, for family groups and for children in every part of our land.

Child No. 243. For a note giving other versions of this ballad, see pages 79 ff., of H. M. Belden, *Ballads and Songs Collected by the Missouri Folk-Lore Society*, University of Missouri Studies, xv, no. 1, 1940.

1. "Well met, well met, you old true-love!  
Well met, well met!" said she [*i.e.*, he].  
"I've just returned from the seashore sea,  
From the land where the grass grows green.
2. "Well, I could have married a king's daughter  
there,  
And she would have married me;  
But I refused the golden crown  
All for the sake of thee.
3. "If you'll forsake your house carpenter,  
And come and go with me,  
I'll take you where the grass grows green,  
To the lands on the banks of the sea."
4. She went 'n' picked up her sweet little babe  
And kissed it one, two, three,  
Saying, "Stay at home with your papa dear,  
And keep him good company."
5. She went and dressed in her very best,  
As everyone could see.  
She glistened and glittered and proudly she  
walked  
The streets on the banks of the sea.
6. They hadn't been sailing but about three  
weeks—  
I'm sure it was not four—  
Till this young lady began to weep,  
And her weeping never ceased any more.
7. "Are you mourning for your house carpenter?  
Are you mourning for your store?"  
"No, I'm mourning for my sweet little babe  
That I never will see any more."
8. They hadn't been sailing but about four  
weeks—  
I'm sure it was not more—  
Till the ship sprang a leak from the bottom of  
the sea,  
And it sank to rise no more.

## A2—THE FARMER'S CURST WIFE.

Sung by Horton Barker at Chilhowie, Virginia, 1939. Recorded by Herbert Halpert.

One of the best known of all the British ballads found in the United States, this tale of a scolding wife evidences its popularity by the number of melodies and the number of nonsense refrains it has acquired in its long travels across the centuries. It still delights any audience with its broadly comic version of the Orpheus legend. I was told by a mountain singer that husbands actually have used it to silence their shrewish wives; the superstitious women believed that what happened to one woman might well happen to another. The story is always the same. The devil appears to a farmer in his field; the farmer gives him his scolding wife; the devil carries her off to hell where she proceeds to murder as many of Satan's imps as come within her reach; Satan, realizing that the old woman is "about to clean out Hell," carries her

back to her husband, proving the old folk adage that "nothing is meaner than a mean woman."

Child No. 278. For reference material on this ballad see pages 94 ff. of Belden, *Ballads and Songs*.

1. There was an old man at the foot of the hill,  
If he ain't moved away he's livin' there still.  
Sing heigh, diddle-eye, diddle-eye, fie!  
Diddle-eye, diddle-eye, day!
2. He hitched up his horse and he went out to  
plow,  
But how to get around he didn't know how.  
Sing heigh, etc.
3. The Devil came to his house one day,  
Says, "One of your family I'm a-gonna take  
away."  
Sing heigh, etc.
4. "Take her on, take her on, with the joy of  
my heart;  
I hope by gollies you'll never part!"  
Sing heigh, etc.
5. The Devil put her in a sack,  
And the old man says, "Don't you bring her  
back."  
Sing heigh, etc.
6. When the Devil got her to the forks of the  
road,  
He says, "Old lady, you're a terrible load."  
Sing heigh, etc.
7. When the Devil got her to the gates of Hell,  
He says, "Punch up the fire, we want to  
scorch her well."  
Sing heigh, etc.
8. In come a little devil a-draggin' a chain;  
She upped with the hatchet, and split out  
his brains.  
Sing heigh, etc.
9. Another little devil went climbin' the wall,  
An' says, "Take her back, Daddy, she's a-  
murderin' us all."  
Sing heigh, etc.
10. The old man was a-peepin' out of the crack,  
And saw the old Devil come a-waggin' her  
back.  
Sing heigh, etc.

11. She found the old man sick in the bed,  
And upped with the butterstick and paddled  
his head.  
Sing heigh, etc.
12. The old woman went whistlin' over the hill.  
"The Devil wouldn't have me, so I wonder  
who will?"  
Sing heigh, etc.
13. This is what a woman can do:  
She can outdo the Devil and her old man,  
too.  
Sing heigh, etc.
14. There's one advantage women have over  
men:  
They can go to Hell and come back again.  
Sing heigh, etc.

### A3—THE GYPSY DAVY.

**Sung with guitar by Woody Guthrie of Okemah, Oklahoma. Recorded in Washington, D.C., 1940, by Alan Lomax.**

Reed Smith says that one of the best American versions of this romantic ballad was collected in Ohio from a Russian Jew who learned it in Salt Lake City, Utah, from the Mormons. The tale has had an enormous appeal for the common people, since it depicts the defeat of the aristocrat; for women it has meant romantic escape from the slavery of frontier marriage.

The original ballad comes out of seventeenth-century England where it was called "Johnny Fa" or "The Raggle Taggle Gypsies." In America in the early part of the nineteenth century it was sufficiently well known to everyone to be parodied on the stage. Woody Guthrie, our best contemporary ballad composer, has edited this version to fit his Oklahoma upbringing. The "milk white steed" of the earlier ballad has become the "buckskin horse"; the "lily white gloves" have turned "buckskin," too. Then Woody has put in a stanza of his own, number 3, which makes the story over into a western ballad, "big guitar" and all. The melody has been completely Americanized, and the guitar accompaniment is a recent development. Woody learned his guitar style from listening to records of the famous Carter family of "hill-billy" fame.

Child No. 200. For a note on other versions of this ballad see pages 73 ff. of Belden, *Ballads and Songs*.

1. It was late last night when my lord come home,  
Inquirin' 'bout his lady.  
'N' the only answer he received:  
"She's gone with the Gypsy Davy,  
Gone with the Gypsy Dave."
2. "Go saddle for me my buckskin horse  
And a hundred-dollar saddle.  
Point out to me their wagon tracks,  
And after them I'll travel,  
After them I'll ride."
3. Well, he had not rode till the midnight moon  
Till he saw the campfire gleamin',  
And he heard the gypsy's big guitar,  
And the voice of the lady singin'  
The song of the Gypsy Dave.
4. "Well, have you forsaken your house and home?  
Have you forsaken your baby?  
Have you forsaken your husband dear  
To go with the Gypsy Davy,  
And sing with the Gypsy Dave?"
5. "Yes, I've forsaken my house and home  
To go with the Gypsy Davy,  
And I'll forsake my husband dear  
But not my blue-eyed baby,  
Not my blue-eyed babe."
6. She laughed to leave her husband dear,  
And her butlers and her ladies,  
But the tears come a-trickelin' down her cheeks  
When she thought about her blue-eyed baby,  
And thought of her blue-eyed babe.
7. "Take off, take off your buckskin boots,  
Made of Spanish leather,  
And give to me your lily-white hand,  
'N' we'll go back home together,  
Go back home again.
8. "Take off, take off your buckskin gloves,  
Made of Spanish leather,  
And give to me your lily-white hand,  
'N' we'll go back home together,  
Go back home again."

(*Aside*) How ya, Sue? Hello, Sue.<sup>1</sup>

9. "No, I won't take off my buckskin gloves,  
Made of Spanish leather;  
I'll go my way from day to day,  
And sing with the Gypsy Davy,  
'N' sing with the Gypsy Dave."

<sup>1</sup>The singer saw his little daughter in the studio and spoke to her.

#### A4—BARBARA ALLEN.

Sung by Rebecca Tarwater of Rockwood, Tennessee. Recorded in Washington, D.C., 1936, by Charles Seeger.

For two hundred years "Barbara Allen" has been the best loved of all English ballads. It encompasses both of the ideas which are commonest in British and American ballads of love, i.e., that love leads to death, and that a proud lover always destroys himself and his loved one. The air of the ballad always seems fresh and tender, no matter how often one hears it, and the verses paint a picture that has all the soft cruelty of spring. Only last summer a Georgia mountain farmer told me, "Every time I hear 'Barbara Allen' it makes the hair rise on my head."

Rebecca Tarwater, the singer, although she has had some voice training, gives us the melody as it was sung to her by her mother. The text is extremely short—six stanzas in place of the usual ten to fifteen.

Child No. 84. For reference material on this ballad see pages 60 ff. of Belden, *Ballads and Songs*.

1. 'Twas in the lovely month of May,  
The flowers all were bloomin';  
Sweet William on his death-bed lay  
For the love of Barbry Allen.
2. He sent his servant to her door,  
He sent him to her dwellin':  
"My master's sick and he calls for you,  
If your name be Barbry Allen."
3. Then slowly, slowly, got she up,  
And to his bedside goin':  
"My master's sick and he called for you,  
If your name be Barbry Allen."<sup>2</sup>

4. He turned his pale face to the wall,  
And bursted out a-cryin':  
"Adieu, adieu to all below,  
And adieu to Barbry Allen!"
5. Sweet William died on a Saturday night,  
And Barbry died a Sunday.  
Their parents died for the love of the two;  
They was buried on a Easter Monday.
6. A white rose grew on William's grave,  
A red rose grew on Barbry's;  
They twined and they twined in a true-lover's  
knot,  
A-warnin' young people to marry.

The singer mistakenly repeats these lines from Stanza 2. They usually are sung: "No better, no better, you will ever be, For you can't have Barbry Allen."

#### A5—PRETTY POLLY.

**Sung with guitar by E. C. Ball at Rugby, Virginia, 1941. Recorded by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax.**

There is a general belief among certain American folklorists that ballads generally grow feeble in the process of communal transmission and re-creation. "Pretty Polly" is one of the many examples one could cite in refutation of this generality, for the broadside ballad from which it is probably derived ("The Wexford Murder") is as clumsy and dull and unpalatable a piece as the poets of Grub Street ever penned. In the mountains of the South all the circumstantial trappings of the original ballad have been cut away until the lines are as clear, direct and poignant as the best of classic balladry. The product of this process of folk editing—"Pretty Polly"—is the "American Tragedy" in six brilliant stanzas (the same subject that occupies a ponderous volume in Theodore Dreiser's work of that name). The singer learned this tune and accompaniment from an excellent commercial phonograph record issued by Victor in 1925, now out of print. He has cleverly adapted the original banjo accompaniment of that record to his guitar. Here we have the phonograph record taking the place formerly held by the wandering ballad singer. Nowadays the radio performs a similar function. Folk singing has more than nine lives.

For reference purposes see page 308 of John Harrington Cox, *Folk-Songs of the South* (Harvard University Press, 1925).

1. "Pretty Polly, pretty Polly, come go 'long  
with me,  
Pretty Polly, pretty Polly, come go 'long with  
me,  
Before we git married, some pleasure to see."
2. She got up behind him and away they did go,  
She got up behind him and away they did go,  
Over the hills to the valley so low.
3. They went up a little farther and what did  
they spy?  
They went up a little farther and what did  
they spy?  
A new-dug grave and a spade lying by.
4. He stobbed her to the heart, her heart blood  
it did flow,  
He stobbed her to the heart, her heart blood  
it did flow,  
And into the grave pretty Polly did go.
5. He threw somethin' over her and turned to  
go home,  
He threw somethin' over her and turned to  
go home,  
Leaving nothing behind him but the girl left  
to mourn.
6. Gentlemen and ladies, I'll bid you farewell,  
Gentlemen and ladies, I'll bid you farewell,  
For killin' pretty Polly will send my soul to  
Hell.

#### A6—THE RICH OLD FARMER.

**Sung by Mrs. Pearl Borusky at Antigo, Wisconsin, 1941. Recorded by Charles Draves.**

"The girl I left behind me"—would she prove faithful or false? This question was terribly important for the men who came to America and for the men who went out alone into the American wilderness. The pattern expresses itself in two types of ballad themes: the ballad in which the young lady remains faithful through long years, and the ballad in which the adventurer receives a letter telling him that his love has married another man. For western singers this

latter theme has been dominant. There are many versions of this tale in the repertoires of western singers, and one somehow has the impression that the male protagonist feels rather sorrier for himself than for losing his true love to another man.

The ballad is an adaptation of an eighteenth-century British broadside piece, known as "The Girl I Left Behind Me." The singer came originally from Kentucky.

For a note giving other versions of this ballad, see pages 198 ff. of Belden, *Ballads and Songs*.

1. There was a rich old farmer  
Lived in the country nigh.  
He had an only daughter  
On whom I cast my eye.  
She was so tall and slender,  
So delicate and so fair;  
No other girl in the country  
With her I could compare.
2. I asked her if it made any difference  
If I crossed over the plains.  
She said it made no difference  
If I'd come back again.  
She promised she'd be true to me  
Until death's parting time;  
So we kissed, shook hands, and parted,  
And I left my girl behind.
3. Straightway to old Missouri,  
To Pikesville I did go,  
Where work and money were plentiful  
And the whiskey it did flow,  
Where work and money was plentiful  
And the girls all treated me kind;  
But the girl I left behind me  
Was always on my mind.
4. One day while I was out walking  
Down by the public square,  
The mail-boat had arrived  
And the postman met me there.  
He handed me a letter  
Which gave me to understand  
That the girl I left behind me  
Was married to another man.
5. I advanced a few steps forward,  
Full knowing these words to be true.  
My mind being bent on rambling,  
I didn't know what to do,

My mind being bent on rambling,  
This wide world to see o'er—  
I left my dear old parents,  
Perhaps to see no more.

#### A7—THE DEVIL'S NINE QUESTIONS.

#### A8—OLD KIMBALL.

Sung by Mrs. Texas Gladden at Salem,  
Virginia, 1941. Recorded by Alan and  
Elizabeth Lomax through the courtesy  
of Miss Alfreda Peel.

Pioneers everywhere have the advantage of a fresh start. They may cherish their cultural past, revise it, or reject it. Part of their heritage of song is left aside and forgotten. Other songs get a fresh start, just as the people themselves do, while still others are recast to fit the needs of a new environment. In remolding their old songs or making new ones, the people choose the handiest and hardiest material available. These two songs provide a contrast which aptly illustrates these points.

The first song is an ancient riddling ballad, sung with great purity of style, the text being in a fine state of preservation; it is undoubtedly one of the most ancient ballads in the entire British ballad tradition. It was discovered far back in the Virginia mountains in the possession of a mountain woman whose ideas and language were colored by her heritage from Elizabethan England.

The second song represents a type of cultural intermingling out of which has come much of what is distinctive and beautiful in the cultures of both Americas. When Negroes and whites encountered each other in the American wilderness and worked side by side, they had to share ideas, no matter what barriers of prejudice may have existed. This song is the result of such a process of pioneer swapping.

Its point of origin is a long English broadside ballad about a famous racehorse named Skew Bald. That ballad must have been very popular among the whites at one time, because collectors have found a Negro work song version of it in every part of the South. This work song, in which the horse's name has become Stewball, might be said to be one of the two or three best known of Negro work songs. Mrs.

Gladden's version, in which the hero horse appears as Old Kimball, was learned as a Negro work song: her pause after each of the short lines allows time for a pick to be driven home. Yet of the scores of versions I have recorded, Mrs. Gladden's has much the loveliest air.

For other versions of A7 (Child No. 1), see Arthur Kyle Davis, Jr., *Traditional Ballads of Virginia* (Harvard University Press, 1929). For references and background material on A8, see pages 61 ff. of Dorothy Scarborough, *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs* (Harvard University Press, 1925); also, John A. and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1934).

### A7 THE DEVIL'S NINE QUESTIONS

1. "Oh, you must answer my questions nine,  
Sing ninety-nine and ninety,  
Or you're not God's, you're one of mine,  
And you are the weaver's bonny.
2. "What is whiter than the milk?  
Sing ninety-nine and ninety,  
And what is softer than the silk?  
And you are the weaver's bonny."
3. "Snow is whiter than the milk,  
Sing ninety-nine and ninety,  
And down is softer than the silk,  
And I am the weaver's bonny."
4. "O what is higher than a tree?  
And what is deeper than the sea?"
5. "Heaven's higher than a tree,  
And Hell is deeper than the sea."
6. "What is louder than a horn?  
And what is sharper than a thorn?"
7. "Thunder's louder than a horn,  
And death is sharper than a thorn."
8. "What's more innocent than a lamb?  
And what is meaner than womankind?"
9. "A babe's more innocent than a lamb,  
And the devil is meaner than womankind."
10. "O you have answered my questions nine,  
And you are God's, you're none of mine."

### A8—OLD KIMBALL

1. Old Kimball  
Was a gray nag,  
Old Nellie  
Was a brown;  
Old Kimball  
Beat Old Nellie  
On the very  
First go-round.

#### CHORUS:

And I see,  
And I see,  
And I see on the  
fourth day  
Of July.

2. His bridle  
Made of silver,  
His saddle  
Made of gold;  
And the value  
Of his harness  
It has never  
Yet been told.

#### CHORUS

3. I'll get up  
In my buggy  
With my lines  
In my hand.  
"Good morning,  
Young lady."  
"Good morning,  
Young man."
4. I often  
Have wondered  
What makes women  
Love men,  
Then looked back  
And wondered  
What makes men  
Love them.

#### CHORUS

5. They'll cause you  
Hard labor  
They'll cause you  
Downfall  
They'll cause you  
Hard labor  
All behind the  
Old jail wall.

CHORUS

**A9—ONE MORNING IN MAY.**

Sung by Mrs. Texas Gladden at Salem, Virginia, 1941. Recorded by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax.

The Irish ballad of the bacchanalian funeral of the unfortunate soldier who died from the effects of his riotous life has been a popular, if censored, theme among American singers. Out of it the cowboys developed "The Cowboy's Lament" and the Negroes made "St. James' Infirmary Blues." Eastern singers in New England and the South, however, for reasons of their own have changed the sex of the central character and moralize about an *unfortunate maiden*. The cause for her demise usually remains obscure, the theme being the general one of "sin is death."

For further material on this ballad see pages 392 ff. of Belden, *Ballads and Songs*.

1. "When I was a young girl, I used to see  
pleasure,  
When I was a young girl, I used to drink ale;  
Out of a alehouse and into a jailhouse,  
Right out of a barroom and down to my  
grave.
2. "Come, papa, come, mama, and sit you down  
by me,  
Come sit you down by me and pity my case;  
My poor head is aching, my sad heart is  
breaking,  
My body's salivated and I'm bound to die.
3. "Oh, send for the preacher to come and pray  
for me,  
And send for the doctor to heal up my  
wounds;  
My poor head is aching, my sad heart is  
breaking,  
My body's salivated and Hell is my doom.

4. "I want three young ladies to bear up my  
coffin,  
I want four young ladies to carry me on;  
And each of them carry a bunch of wild roses  
To lay on my coffin as I pass along."
5. One morning, one morning, one morning in  
May  
I spied this young lady all wrapped in white  
linen,  
All wrapped in white linen and cold as the  
clay.

**B1—THE LITTLE BROWN BULLS.**

Sung by Emery DeNoyer at Rhineland, Wisconsin, 1941. Recorded by Charles Draves.

The American lumber industry began in the north woods of Maine, followed the spruce and pine forests across the northern part of the United States into Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and, finally, into the great sky-reaching forests of the Northwest. It was a wasteful industry, stripping the land, destroying millions of dollars of natural resources as it produced millions of feet of timber—lumber for an expanding American economy. The man who did the work in the woods was a heroic pioneer type—the old-time lumberjack, the shanty boy. His dress, his habits, his ballads, and his profanity were all equally distinctive. He spent his winters isolated in the forest, chopping down the trees and hauling them on sleds to the edge of the frozen rivers. When the spring thaw came, the woods' crew sent their winter's accumulation of logs down the foaming rivers to the sawmill. The lumberjacks were then paid off and often spent their winter's pay in a huge spree of drinking and carousing.

The men, living together all winter in the same cabin far from towns and outside contacts, were dependent on themselves for amusement. Like other men in the same situation, they made ballads and told stories about their work and their way of life. The lumberjack ballads, tragic or comic, are always literal and factual. They were honest workmen, and their highest praise for a song was "that song is as true as steel." Most of their ballads were constructed along

the lines and with the melodies of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British broadside ballads. "The Little Brown Bulls" tells the story of a contest between two teams of oxen in hauling (skidding) logs out of the woods to the riverbank. The singer's interest is in the *story*, not the melody. His style is, I believe, fairly representative of the way the old-time lumberjacks liked to sing.

For further material on this ballad, see pages 92 ff. of E. C. Beck, *Songs of the Michigan Lumberjacks* (University of Michigan Press, 1941).

1. Not a thing on the river McCluskey did fear  
As he swung his gored stick o'er his big spotted steers;  
They were round, plump, and handsome,  
girdin' eight foot and three;  
Said McCluskey, the Scotchman, "They're the laddies for me."
2. Then along came Bold Gordon,<sup>3</sup> whose skidding was full,  
As he hollered "Whoa, hush!" to his little brown bulls,  
Short-legged and shaggy, girdin' six foot and nine;  
"Too light," said McCluskey, "to handle our pine."
3. "For it's three to the thousand our contract doth call;  
Our skidding is good and our timber is tall."  
McCluskey he swore that he'd make the day full,  
And he'd skid three to one of the little brown bulls.
4. "O no," says Bold Gordon, "that you cannot do,  
Although your big steers are the pets of the crew.  
I tell you, McCluskey, you will have your hands full  
When you skid one more log than my little brown bulls."
5. So the day was appointed and soon did draw night,<sup>1</sup>  
For twenty-five dollars their fortune to try,  
All eager and anxious next morning was found,  
The judge and the scaler appeared on the ground.

6. With a 'hoop and a yell came McCluskey in view  
As with his big spotted steers, the pets of the crew,  
He says, "Chew your cud, boys, and keep your mouth full,  
For we easily can beat them, the little brown bulls."
7. Then along came Bold Gordon with his pipe in his jaw;  
To his little brown bulls he hollers, "Whoa, haw!"  
He says, "Chew your cud, boys, you'd need never fear,  
For we will not be beat by the big spotted steers."
8. Says McCluskey to Sandy, "We'll take off their skins,  
We'll dig them a hole and we'll tumble them in.  
We'll mix up a dish and we'll feed it to them hot,  
We will learn them damn Yankees to face the bold Scot."
9. After supper was over McCluskey appeared  
With a belt ready made for his big spotted steers;  
To make it he tore up his best mackinaw,  
He was bound to conduct it according to law.
10. When up stepped the scaler saying, "Hold ye a while,  
Your big spotted steers are behind just one mile;  
You skidded one hundred and ten and no more  
Whilst Bold Gordon has beat you by ten and a score."
11. All the boys then all laughed and McCluskey did swear,  
As he tore out by hands full his long yellow hair.  
He says to Bold Gordon, "My dollars I'll pull  
And you take the belt for your little brown bulls."

12. O it's here's to Bold Gordon and Sandberry  
 John,  
 For the biggest day's work on the river is  
 done.  
 It's fill up your glass, boys, and fill them  
 up full  
 And we'll drink to the health of the little  
 brown bulls.

<sup>2</sup> Surely that is Bull Gordon?

<sup>1</sup> Nigh.

## B2—THE SIOUX INDIANS.

Sung by Alex Moore at Austin, Texas,  
 1940. Recorded by John A. and Bess  
 Lomax.

The cowboys inherited the folk song stocks of both the North and the South, adapting them and blending them in a new environment to produce the songs that are peculiarly western. They sang on horseback, usually about their work, its hardships, accidents and pleasures. They were never, according to their own testimony, very sweet singers; any sort of a voice would do to quiet cattle or to amuse a bunch of bored and weary men after months on the trail. Alex Moore's performance of "The Sioux Indians" with its pauses, its irregularities and its strident nasality can be considered fairly typical of their singing. In the sententious style of the 18th century broadside, it tells the story of an attack by the Sioux Indians on an emigrant train crossing the plains to the West. Nevertheless the ballad effectively evokes the tough and heroic character of the white adventurers who sallied out across the vast desert of the plains in their clumsy, white-covered wagons. Alex Moore has retired from cowpunching and is now riding herd on an ice-cream wagon in Austin, Texas. He knows a hundred or more folk songs, all the way from "Lord Randall" to "The Battleship Maine."

For a version of this among other cowboy songs, see pages 344 ff. of John A. and Alan Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938).

1. I'll sing you a song and it'll be a sad one  
 Of our trials and our trouble and how they  
 begun.  
 We left our dear kindred, our friends and  
 our home,  
 And we crossed the wide districts and  
 mountains to roam.

2. We crossed the Missouri and joined a large  
 train,  
 Which carried us over mountains, through  
 valleys and plain;  
 And often of a evening a-huntin' we'd go  
 To shoot the fleet antelope and the wild  
 buffalo.

3. We heard of Sioux Indians all out on the  
 plains,  
 A-killing poor drivers and burning their  
 trains,  
 A-killing poor drivers with arrows and bows;  
 When captured by Indians no mercy they'd  
 show.

4. We travelled three weeks till we come to the  
 Platte,  
 A-pitching our tents at the head of the flat;  
 We spread down our blankets on a green  
 shady ground  
 Where the mules and the horses were grazing  
 around.

5. While we're taking our refreshment we  
 hheard<sup>5</sup> a loud yell:  
 The 'hoop of Sioux Indians come up from the  
 drill.<sup>6</sup>  
 We sprang to our rifles with a flash in each  
 eye,  
 And says our brave leader, "Boys, we'll fight  
 till we die."

6. They made a bold dash and they come near  
 our train;  
 The arrows fell around us like showers of  
 rain,  
 But with our long rifles we fed 'em hot lead  
 Till a many a brave warrior around us lie  
 dead.

7. We shot the bold chief at the head of their  
 band;  
 He died like a warrior with a bow in his hand.  
 And when they saw the brave chief lie dead  
 in his gore,  
 They 'hooped and they yelled and we saw  
 them no more.

8. In our little band there were just twenty-four,  
And of the Sioux Indians five hundred or  
more.  
We fought them with courage, we spoke not  
a word;  
The 'hoop of Sioux Indians was all could be  
heard.
9. We hooked up our horses, we started our  
train:  
Three more bloody battles, this trip on the  
plain.  
And in our last battle three of the brave boys  
fell,  
And we left them to rest in the green shady  
drill.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Heard.

<sup>6</sup> Dell.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

### B3—THE LADY OF CARLISLE (Ballad).

Sung with guitar by Basil May at Salyersville, Kentucky, 1937. Recorded by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax.

The traditional ballad of our southern mountains was sung, until fairly recently, without accompaniment.<sup>8</sup> This song, and the one following, illustrate how mountain ballad airs have been adapted to two accompanying instruments, the banjo and guitar. The guitar accompaniment of *The Lady of Carlisle* is modern; the antiquity of its theme is revealed in the following account: "I have heard the story told, of the court of olden times, of one of the ladies of the court, who was mistress of the late M. de Lorge (François de Montgomery), a man who, in his youth, was one of the bravest and most renowned infantry captains of his day. Many stories had been told her about his great bravery, and one day, when King François Ier, surrounded by his court, was amusing himself by watching a lion fight, she, to prove the truth of the stories she had heard, dropped one of her gloves into the lion's den, at a moment when the beasts were greatly enraged. She then begged M. de Lorge to fetch it for her, if he really loved her as much as he said. He, without betraying any astonishment, wrapped his cape round his arm and, sword in hand, strode with confident air towards the lions. In this, fortune favoured him; for, bearing himself with the ut-

most coolness, and pointing his sword towards the lions, they did not dare to attack him. Having recovered the glove, he returned to his mistress and gave it to her. She and all who were present accounted this well done; but it is related that M. de Lorge scornfully turned his back upon her, because of the way she had sought to make a pastime of him and of his valour. It is even said that he tossed the glove in her face; for that he would rather a hundred times she ordered him to attack a battalion of infantry—a thing that he well understood—than fight wild beasts, a combat out of which but little glory was to be gained."<sup>9</sup>

This incident, recounted as a fact by Brantome in his *Memoires de Messire Pierre de Bourdeille, Seigneur de Brantome* (1666), was used by Schiller for his poem *Der Handschuh* and by Robert Browning for *The Glove*; but in all three the theme is of the brave knight who despises the careless conceit of the lady who has thrust him into needless danger.

Our singer's version, however, follows the pattern of the folk as opposed to the literary tradition. In the folk ballad the lover straightforwardly proves his devotion by braving the lions for his lady's glove and immediately receives his reward. As Mr. May's version has it:

She threw herself upon his bosom  
Saying, "Here is the prize that you have won."

This folk ballad is apparently derived from an eighteenth-century broadside entitled, *The Distressed Lady, or A Trial of True Love. In Five Parts*. The trial in five parts lasts for fifty-five verses and it describes the condition of the two suitors as follows:

One brought a captain's commission,  
Under the brave Colonel Carr,  
The other was a first lieutenant  
In the Tyger man of war.<sup>10</sup>

A later British version makes them brothers and transforms the Lieutenant into a naval officer:

The oldest brother he was a captain,  
on board with the honored Captain Ker;  
The youngest brother he was a lieutenant,  
on board the Tyger-Man-of-War.<sup>11</sup>

A Kentucky version, collected in 1911, loses the rhyme and the Tyger, names the man of war after the Colonel:

One he was a bold lieutenant  
A man of honor and of high degree;  
The other was a brave sea-captain,  
Belonging to a ship called Karnel Call.<sup>12</sup>

The following version of *The Lady of Carlisle* was recorded by Basil May, of Salyersville, Kentucky, a young man in his twenties, and the style of performance represents a contemporary development. The guitar has invaded the mountains in the last twenty years and has become the dominant instrument. The tonic, dominant, subdominant chord pattern of rudimentary guitar playing has strongly affected the old melodies, forcing their conformity to the conventional major-minor patterns; the strict two-four and three-four rhythms of the accompaniments sometimes distort a ballad's cavalier form. Both these effects are evident in *The Lady of Carlisle*. Nevertheless, native folk styles of guitar playing and ballad singing have developed out of this apparent conflict; these styles, lumped uncritically under the invidious term *hill-billy*, are contributing greatly to our present-day folk music.

Down in Carlisle there lived a lady,  
Being most beautiful and gay;  
She was determined to live a lady,  
No man on earth could her betray,

Unless it was a man of honor,  
Man of honor and high degree;  
Then up rose two loving soldiers,  
This fair lady for to see;

One being a brave lieutenant,  
Brave lieutenant and a man of war,  
The other being a brave sea-captain,  
Captain on the ship that was Kong Kong Kar.

Up spoke this fair young lady,  
Saying, "I can't be but one man's bride;  
You two come back tomorrow morning  
And on this case we will decide."

She ordered her a span of horses  
Span of horses at her command,  
Down the road these three did travel  
Till they come to a lion's den.

There she stopped and there she halted,  
These two soldiers stood gazing around,  
And in the space of a half an hour  
This young lady lies speechless on the ground.

And when she did recover,  
Threw her fan down in the lion's den,  
Saying, "Which of you to gain a lady  
Will return my fan again?"

Then up stepped this brave lieutenant,  
Raised his voice both loud and clear,  
"I know I am a dear lover of women  
But I will not give my life for love."

Then up stepped this brave sea captain,  
Raised his voice both loud and high,  
"I know I am a dear lover of women,  
I will return her fan or die."

Down in the lion's den he boldly entered,  
Lions being both wild and fierce;  
He marched around and in among them,  
Safely returned her fan again.

And when she saw her true lover coming,  
Seeing no harm had been done to him,  
She threw herself against his bosom  
Saying, "Here is the prize that you have won."

<sup>9</sup> The body of this discussion is derived from H. G. Shearin, "The Glove and the Lions in Kentucky Folk Song," pp. 113-14; and G. L. Kittredge, "The Ballad of *The Den of Lions*," *Modern Language Notes*, XXVI: 167-69.

<sup>10</sup> From Cecil Sharp's *Folk Songs from Somerset*, 3rd ser. (London, 1906), pp. 71-72.

<sup>11</sup> Kittredge, "The Ballad," p. 168.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Shearin, "The Glove," p. 114.

#### **B4—PRETTY POLLY (Ballad).**

**Sung with five-string banjo by Pete Steele  
at Hamilton, Ohio, 1938. Recorded by  
Alan and Elizabeth Lomax.**

During the eighteenth century *Pretty Polly* was by all odds the most popular name for the English ballad heroine. *Pretty Polly* Oliver dressed herself in soldier's clothes to follow her true love to the wars. *Pretty Polly*, the king's daughter, hurled her false lover over a cliff into the sea when he sought to rob and murder her. Most often, however, *Pretty Polly* was a maiden betrayed and then heartlessly murdered by her lover; and such is the story of the young lady with whom our Kentucky mountain ballad singer

is concerned. Ballad scholars point out that the American "Pretty Polly" is derived from an English broadside ballad of "The Gosport Tragedy" wherein a sailor stabs his true love, flees on shipboard to be gruesomely confronted by her ghost. In one American version poor William, otherwise known as "the perjured ship's carpenter," sank to the bottom and paid his debt to the devil. Ordinarily, however, the American singer tends to censor his ballads of references to unmarried mothers and of the ghostly themes so popular in the old country. So in Pete Steele's version "Poor" Willie kills Pretty Polly to escape marrying her, kills her brutally, buries her quickly and leaves "nothing behind [but] the birds to mourn."

"Pretty Polly, pretty Polly, come and go with me,  
Pretty Polly, pretty Polly, come and go with me,  
Pretty Polly, pretty Polly, come and go with me,  
Before we get married, some pleasure to see."

"Pretty Willie, pretty Willie, I fear yo' way,  
Pretty Willie, pretty Willie, I fear yo' way,  
Pretty Willie, pretty Willie, I fear yo' way,  
You have taken my body all out astray."

He led her over the hills and the valleys so deep,  
He led her over the hills and the valleys so deep,  
He led her over the hills and the valleys so deep,  
And at last pretty Polly began to weep.

She threw her arms around him, she suffered no fear,  
She threw her arms around him, she suffered no fear,  
She threw her arms around him, she suffered no fear,  
"How can you kill a poor girl that loves you so dear?"

He stabbed her to the heart and the blood it did flow,  
He stabbed her to the heart and the blood it did flow,  
He stabbed her to the heart and the blood it did flow,  
And into the grave Pretty Polly did go.

He threw some dirt o'er her and turned to go home,  
He threw some dirt o'er her and turned to go home,  
He threw some dirt o'er her and turned to go home,  
Left nothing behind [but] the birds to mourn.

First listen to Pete Steele as he adapts the modal melody of *Pretty Polly* to the racing tempo of his banjo. This performance represents a period in southern white folksong which began after the Civil War when the Negro banjo became widely popular among the rural whites in the South. The Negroes and the blackface imitators had used it to accompany fast-stepping hoedowns and reels, and this tempo was not changed when the banjo was introduced into the mountains and used to accompany slow, modal ballad tunes. Mr. Steele, in traditional style, plays the melody over between each stanza. The singing is so true, so well adapted to the banjo accompaniment, that the beginning of the melody seems to mount the swift accompaniment like a trick rider leaping smoothly to the back of a galloping horse.

Pete Steele learned to play the banjo in Laurel County when he was a small boy and his father made one for him using a ground-hog skin for the banjo head and cat gut for the strings. When I met him, he and his family had just moved across the Ohio River to Hamilton, Ohio, and were living right across the road from the paper mill where he and his daughter both worked. Mrs. Steele shyly proved to be as good a singer as her husband; a towheaded son "picked" the guitar and five other children sat and admired their father as he played.

#### **B5—IT MAKES A LONG TIME MAN FEEL BAD (Negro Work Song).**

**Sung by group at Cumins State Farm,  
Gould, Arkansas, 1934. Recorded by  
John A. Lomax.**

This song and the one following represent two phases of the Negro work song—the freely rhythmic "holler" from the levee camp and the rhythmic gang song from the wood yard. "As he made his work songs, the Negro cleared the land of the South, worked its plantations, built its railroads, raised its levees, and cut its roads. When he worked with a group of his fellows in a situation where a regular work

rhythm was possible, he sang simple, highly rhythmic songs, and every axe, pick, or hoe fell on the same beat. When he picked cotton or did some other form of work in which it was not possible to adhere to a regular rhythm, his songs rose and fell with the free and swinging movement of his breathing. The words of these songs were not designed for the ear of the Lord, nor for the ear of the white boss. In them the Negro was likely to speak his free and open mind.

Songs like these were formerly sung all over the South, wherever a gang of Negroes was at work. With the coming of machines, however, the work gangs were broken up. The songs then followed group labor into its last retreat, the road gang and the penitentiary. For the state, the most profitable way of handling convicts in the South is to use them for road repair and construction, or to have them pay for their own keep by farming large plantations. These men come together from every section of the state, bringing songs—both the “sinful songs” and the spirituals—current in their communities. Some of them have been singers, migratory workers, wandering guitar pickers in the free world. They make ready recruits for the men who work in groups, and their work goes more easily by adapting its rhythm to the rhythm of a song.

In the penitentiary, therefore, Negro “sinful” music (the term often applied to any secular song) has been concentrated and preserved as nowhere else. The men are lonely and dependent on themselves for amusement and consolation. These conditions in themselves are enough to produce and nurture songs. In our visits to all the large prison camps in the South, my father and I found songs in abundance—blues, ballads, gang songs, hollers—colored by the melancholy solitude of prison life.

The movement of these songs varies seemingly more in accord with the fast or slow rhythm of the work than with the moods of the singers. In driving a lazy mule team the song is likely to be mournful, while wood-cutting evokes spirited and gay tunes. And the Negro sings, even under the hard regime of penitentiary life. In fact some of the most notable of his folk songs seem to have grown there.

‘If you don’ sing, you sho’ git worried.’<sup>13</sup>

This record was cut in the woodyard of an Arkansas prison farm where a dozen men lifted their axes and brought them down together. The swift tempo of the song indicates that it is a “double-cut” axe song; that is, two groups alternate strokes of the axe on the log. The tremendous life-giving energy of the group joined in communal labor bursts up through the bitter and somber lines of the song. Such songs are a part of the Afro-American musical pattern wherever one encounters them.

... , she won’t write to po’ me,  
Alberta, she won’t write to po’ me,  
She won’t write me no letter,  
She won’t send me no word,  
It makes a long, oh, long-a time man,  
Oh Lawdy, feel bad.

Captain George,<sup>14</sup> he got the record and gone,  
Captain George, he got the record and gone,  
Captain George, he got the record and gone,  
Oh Lawdy, Lawdy,  
Captain George, Oh George, he got the record,  
Oh, Lawdy, and gone.

*Lawd, hit me with a brick!*

It makes a long time man feel bad,  
It makes a long time man feel bad,  
An’ it’s the worst old feelin’  
That I ever had,  
When I can’t, oh can’t-a get a letter,  
Oh Lawdy, from home.

*I know my baby don’t know where I’m at!*

My mother, she won’t write to po’ me,  
My mother, she won’t write to po’ me,  
She won’t write me no letter,  
She won’t send me no word,  
It makes a long, oh long-a time man,  
Oh Lawdy, feel bad.

Alberta, would you cry about a dime?  
Alberta, would you cry about a dime?  
If you cry about a nickel,  
You will die about a dime,  
Alberta, oh ‘Berta, would you cry,  
Oh Lawdy, ‘bout a dime?

*Lawd, have mercy!*

It makes a long time man feel bad,  
 It makes a long time man feel bad,  
 An' it's the worst old feelin'  
 That I ever had,  
 When I can't, oh can't-a get a letter,  
 Oh Lawdy, from home.

My uncle, he won't write to po' me,  
 My uncle, he won't write to po' me,  
 He won't write me no letter,  
 He won't send me no word,  
 It makes a long, oh long-a time man,  
 Oh Lawdy, feel bad.

My aunty, she won't write to po' me,  
 My aunty, she won't write to po' me,  
 She won't write me no letter,  
 She won't send me no word,  
 It makes a long oh long-a time man,  
 Oh Lawdy, feel bad.

It makes a long time man feel bad,  
 It makes a long time man feel bad,  
 An' it's the worst old feelin'  
 That I ever had,  
 When you can't, oh can't-a get a letter,  
 Oh Lawdy, from home.

<sup>10</sup> From "Our Singing Country," John A. and Alan Lomax.

<sup>11</sup> This also sounds like Doctor Jones.

## **B6—O LORD DON'T 'LOW ME TO BEAT 'EM (Negro Holler).**

**Sung by Willie Williams at State Penitentiary, Richmond, Virginia, 1936. Recorded by John A. Lomax.**

"Hollering songs" are a distinct type of Negro folk singing. Usually they consist of a two-line stanza in which the singer sometimes repeats the first verse two or three times and the last verse once—the whole introduced and followed by long drawn-out moaning or "yodling" or shouting in the tempo and mood of the tune he has been singing. They are sung with an open throat—shouted, howled, growled, or moaned in such a fashion that they will fill a stretch of country, satisfy the wild and lonely and brooding spirit of the worker. The holler is a musical platform from which the singer can freely state his individual woes, satirize enemies, and talk about his woman.

The country Negro worker lightens the tedium of his labor by these musical cries: a plowman, turning sandy furrows in the long cotton rows of a lonely swamp field; the mule skinner, driving his team, with trace chains clanking, up and down in the dust of a levee bank; a roustabout, shouting the beat for the feet of his companions as, like an endless chain, they stagger under a load up the gangplank, or, in double-time hurry down on the other side. The melodies are so free that it is impossible to give an adequate picture of them even by transcribing entire songs in musical notation. In mood they run the gamut of the worker's emotional life—his loves and sorrows, his hope and despair, his weariness, his resentment.<sup>15</sup>

Willie Williams of Richmond, Virginia, stood before the microphone in a bare room to record "O Lawd, they don't 'low me to beat 'em." We asked him to sing it just as he would out on the job. He closed his eyes, and, as he sang, he shouted at the two mules, Rhoady and Dempsey, imitating the popping of the whip, until the whole work scene was suggested in sound. The words reflect a chain gang atmosphere, in the reference to the captain and his pistol and in the bitter remark about the way things had gone at home in his absence—"I don't need no tellin', already know." The final stanza is pervaded with the feeling of the heroic common to all laborers.

Oh, Lawd, they don' 'low me to beat 'em;  
 Got-a beg along.

*Git up, Rhoady! Gee back there, Dempsey,  
 I don't want to kill you this mornin' . . .*

Oh, Lawd, they don' 'low me to beat 'em;  
 Got-a beg along.

*Tighten up a little bit!*

Oh, Lawd, if my good woman had-a been here,  
 good pardner,  
 I wouldn't a-been here stumblin' and fallin',  
 tryin' to make it back home.

*Git up out that mud there!  
 Look out there; I'll knock you to your knees  
 torectly!*

Oh, Lawd, I'm goin' back, good pardner, one  
 day 'fo' long,  
 I don't need no tellin', already know.

*Look out there, Dempsey!*

I got a whole heap to tell you, good pardner,  
Oh Lawd, when I get home,  
Lawd, I been stumblin' and fallin', tryin' to  
get away.

*Look out, mule! Get up there!*

Lawd, if my woman had-a-been here, good  
pardner, Lawd, I'd a-done been gone,  
She'd a-brought my shooter, good pardner, and  
a box of balls.

*Look out, Rhoady, Get up, Jerry, Look out  
there Pearl.*

*I don't want to kill one of you this mornin'.*

Oh Lawd, cap'n got a pistol and he want to  
be bad,  
Must-a been the first one he ever had.

*Look out there, Jerry!*

Oh Lawd, got a high ball wheeler, good pardner,  
and a western tongue,  
Gonna stick it in the bottom, boys, if it breaks  
my arm.

<sup>15</sup> From "Our Singing Country," John A. and Alan  
Lomax.



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