

Virginia Traditions



Virginia Work Songs



No state can boast of longer-lasting and more varied folk traditions than Virginia. Many of her material traditions — such as barns, houses and plows — remain as permanent, unchanged documents of her early settlers' life style. Her performance traditions — songs, tales and fiddle tunes — also help us understand something of the everyday social life and beliefs of Virginia's people. These performance traditions, however, because they have been continually changing and developing from the moment of their creation, are difficult to identify and document accurately. The BLUE RIDGE INSTITUTE of FERRUM COLLEGE exists to seek out and document both the material and performance traditions found in Virginia.

The Afro-American tradition of singing to accompany work is the focus of this album. Since the earliest days of slavery, songs have been sung to set the rhythm of labor and to fill long hours of monotonous work. Fishing, farming, oyster shucking, crab picking, peanut harvesting, boat caulking and tobacco factory working were the settings for these songs which have been captured all too rarely in field recordings, beginning in the 1930's. The growing mechanization of these tasks has all but eliminated the group work crews and thus the work song tradition they carried on, but this album brings together some fine contemporary examples along with vintage performances from the last forty years.

Virginia Work Songs presents yet another aspect of Black musical tradition to compliment earlier releases by the Blue Ridge Institute — BRI 001: Non-Blues Secular Black Music; BRI 003: Western Piedmont Blues; and BRI 006: Tidewater Blues.

★ A BOOKLET OF FULL DESCRIPTIVE AND ANALYTIC NOTES IS ENCLOSED ★

***Front Cover — The crew of the *Margaret* pulling in fishing nets, courtesy the Mariner Museum, Newport News, Virginia

***Back Cover — Cultivating peanuts in Tidewater, Virginia, courtesy Hamblin Studio, Suffolk, Virginia

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SIDE 1

1. ON A MONDAY - John Williams and Group 3:32
2. OH LORD, THEY DON'T 'LOW ME TO BEAT 'EM - Willie Williams 2:29
3. BITING SPIDER - Willie Williams and Group 2:29
4. THE MAN WAS BURNING - Joe Lee 1:13
5. CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM - James Wilson, R. Ramsay, George Goram, R. Brown, J. Kirby, Lemuel Jones, C. Meekins, and Ed Lewis 1:47

6. THE NEWBURYING GROUND - Willie Williams and Group 3:11
7. EVALINA - Crew of the "Charles J. Colonna" 3:16
8. DRINKING OF THE WINE - Walter Kegler and the Crew of the "Barnegat" 1:50
9. EVERY MAIL DAY - William Thompson, John Ball, William Carter, E.B. Chewning, Capt. Matthew Gaskins, Aurelius Henderson, William Johnson, Eddie Laws, Benjamin Smith, and William Smith 2:36

SIDE 2

1. LAZARUS - William Thompson, John Ball, William Carter, E.B. Chewning, Capt. Matthew Gaskins, Aurelius Henderson, William Johnson, Eddie Laws, Benjamin Smith and William Smith 3:00
2. SLEEP ON - Lena Thompson, Lucy Scott, and Lucy Smith 2:25
3. COME ALONG DOWN - John Mantley, Raleigh Griffin, Ernest Johnson, Lee Wynn, and William Wynn 1:55
4. I'M NOT PAYING FOR THEM SINGING - Lee Wynn 1:40
5. ON MY WAY TO NEW ORLEANS - Lee Wynn and John Mantley 2:29
6. WADE IN THE WATER - Rev. Timothy Hayes, Beulah Brown, Ruth Coston, Nathaniel McKelvin, Everett Ware, and Rosa Wilson 3:17
7. I DON'T WANT NOBODY STUMBLING OVER ME - Creola Johnson and Audrey Davis and Group 3:49
8. SITDOWN SERVANT - Rev. Timothy Hayes, Beulah Brown, Ruth Cotson, Nathaniel McKelvin, Everett Ware, and Rosa Wilson 3:03



VIRGINIA TRADITIONS

BRI 007



Virginia Work Songs

The crew of the *Margaret* pulling in its nets.

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

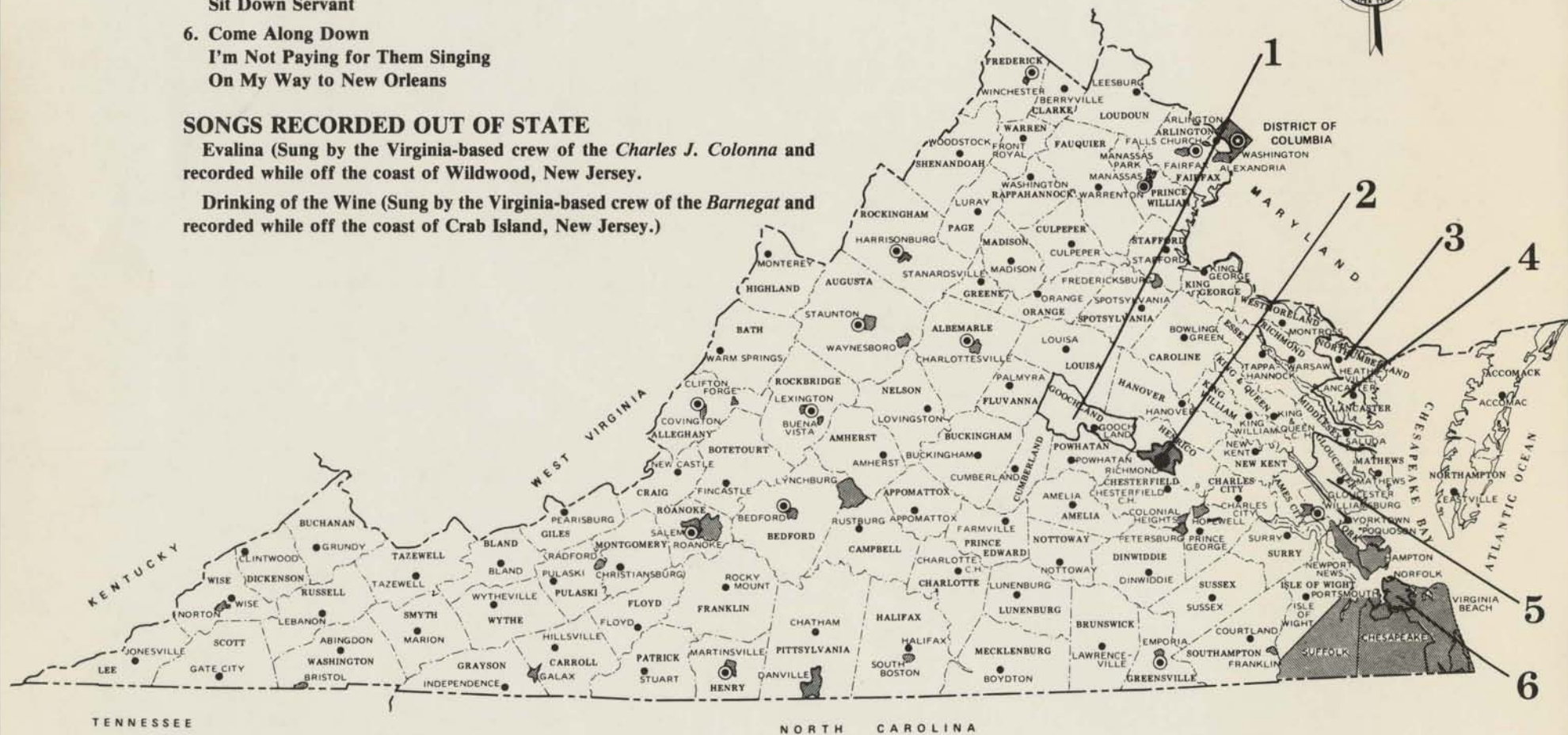
RECORDING SITES

1. The Man Was Burning
2. On a Monday
Oh, Lord, They Don't 'Low Me to Beat 'Em
Biting Spider
Can't You Line 'Em
The New Burying Ground
3. Sleep On
4. Every Mail Day
Lazarus
5. Wade in the Water
I Don't Want Nobody Stumbling Over Me
Sit Down Servant
6. Come Along Down
I'm Not Paying for Them Singing
On My Way to New Orleans

SONGS RECORDED OUT OF STATE

Evalina (Sung by the Virginia-based crew of the *Charles J. Colonna* and recorded while off the coast of Wildwood, New Jersey.)

Drinking of the Wine (Sung by the Virginia-based crew of the *Barnegat* and recorded while off the coast of Crab Island, New Jersey.)



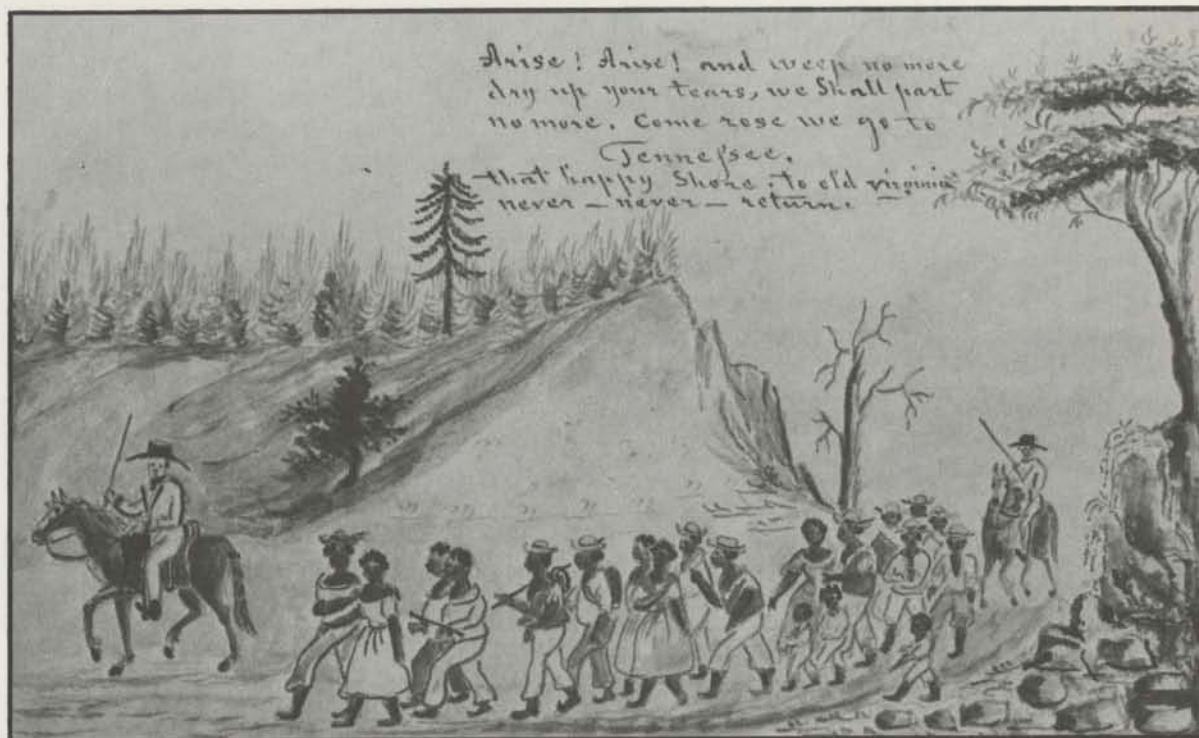
Virginia Worksongs

"With that singing, you keep the group together, keep your mind together. It does something. It's what they say, it's soothing to the ear, very soothing. And you working 'long, and you work 'long, this fella down there singing — if you just caulking, he there horsing — but it makes you work. It makes you kind of hit on, you know. But it's a lost art, a lost art."

—John Mantley
Norfolk, Virginia
November 15, 1980

In 1842, Charles Dickens visited a Richmond tobacco factory whose work force was comprised almost entirely of male slaves "hired out" to the company by their owners. As Dickens observed the workers processing tobacco, a group of them broke into song. "Some twenty sang a hymn in parts," he later recounted, "and sang it by no means ill, pursuing their work meanwhile."¹ Almost a hundred years later, in 1936, a reporter for *Fortune* magazine penned his impressions of a modern Richmond tobacco plant. The stemming room, he noted, employed 150 black women who "chant exciting ad lib harmonies while working," manually removing the stems from cured tobacco leaves.² Though a century had passed, the Afro-American tradition of singing while working had persisted virtually unchanged.

Africans carried as slaves to the New World brought with them a cultural understanding of the functional nature of song which was radically different from that of the Anglo-European tradition. In Africa, song was perceived as an integral part of daily life, an activity which could not be abstracted from the regular course of events. It was a vehicle for expressing community values, for relating local histories, for praising and placating natural spirits and deities, and for setting the rhythms by which one worked; furthermore, song was a culturally sanctioned form for voicing criticism and social commentary which could otherwise not be verbalized.³ Most importantly, song served many or all of



When visiting the commonwealth in 1853, the Pennsylvania artist Lewis Miller witnessed this coffle of chained slaves marching south, singing a familiar spiritual to synchronize their steps.

these functions simultaneously. Thus, the lyrics of a single cadent worksong might praise a local hero, comment on some recent event, brag about one's own prowess, and ridicule the overseer of the work at hand. This perception of song's functions was prevalent throughout West Africa; in this country it was to play a critical role in the development of the Afro-American worksong tradition.

Worksongs were a vital form of Black musical expression in Virginia from the earliest days of slavery until the middle of this century. They were heard across the state wherever Blacks worked together: on the coast with fishermen hauling in bulging menhaden or herring nets; in the Tidewater with farmworkers picking peanuts from the dried vines or sorting them in factories; in the Piedmont with sharecroppers hoeing long rows of tobacco or shucking barnfuls of corn; and in the mountains with laborers swinging picks and wielding shovels in the quarries and mines. Although the tradition is still found in a few selected industries, as evinced by the recordings on this album from oyster shucking and crab picking establishments, there is little question that its days are numbered. Sophisticated machinery is increasingly being

utilized in jobs once employing large crews of Afro-American workers, and younger Blacks, associating worksongs with their forebears' perceived subservient acceptance of repressive working conditions, no longer sing while working. "I don't go for that old-timey slavery shit," remarked one young crab picker with whom I spoke about the singing of her fellow workers. "I don't want no part of it."

Used to accompany a variety of activities from churning butter to unloading ships, worksongs assumed myriad forms. By defining this genre as including any song sung to accompany one's work, we can divide worksongs into two basic categories: 1) those which establish a rhythm for labor, supplying a tempo which paces the activity and directs bodily movements; 2) those which do not set a pace, being sung to accompany activities wherein coordinated timing is unessential. These latter songs function primarily to alleviate tedium and make time pass more quickly. "Sometimes I get kind of bored," notes the oyster shucker Rev. Timothy Hayes, "and I strike up a song, and begin to sing it. It kind of relieves me and I get a joy out of singing."

¹Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1842), pg. 52.

²"Phillip Morris & Co.," *Fortune*, March 1936, p. 110.

³Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 8-15.

Each of these two classes could in turn be subdivided into solo and group songs. The latter are sung either in a call and response pattern or altogether by a work crew. "Call and response" refers to antiphonal singing in which the song leader cries out a line to which the group responds with some directed action (perhaps with the attendant sound of striking tools) and/or a sung phrase. Thus, among the first category of pace-setting songs we would include a) solo pieces like butter churning chants with b) rhythmic group worksongs such as the hammering chants of those "horsing" the seams in wooden vessels or driving spikes into railroad cross ties. In the second class of non-pacing songs we would place a) the solo field hollers of farm hands and the cries of oyster tongers working in the Chesapeake alongside b) the untimed group worksongs intoned by tobacco workers stemming leaves or crab pickers cracking crabs and extracting the meat.

Worksongs and the Historical Record

The earliest accounts of Afro-American worksongs in Virginia appear in the letters and commentaries of travelers visiting the Commonwealth in the early 1800s. Probably the first such reference is an 1816 account describing the singing of a gang of chained slaves marching from Portsmouth to Carolina, led by a slave driver who had recently purchased them. "A group of about thirty Negroes, of different ages and sizes were following a rough looking white man," recounted George Tucker in his *Letters from Virginia*. "They came along singing a little wild hymn of sweet and mournful melody."⁴ The slaves in such coffles were chained together and had to march in unison to prevent the rough iron shackle from tearing their flesh. The song thus served to set an even pace as well as to divert the slaves' minds from the horror of being wrenched away from family and friends. A sketch of such a coffle, with the lyrics of a spiritual penned above the heads of the marchers, was made by the Pennsylvania artist Lewis Miller while visiting the

Old Dominion in 1853.⁵

Only a year after Tucker's account, James Paulding wrote of a similar scene involving Virginia slaves consigned for sale further South. Traveling by river rather than by road, these slaves sang chants whose tempo served to coordinate the motion of their oars. The use of song to regulate rowing is a tradition directly traceable to Africa and is extensively documented throughout the antebellum South. The words intoned by this group poignantly expressed their emotions:

Going away to Georgia, ho, heave, O!
Massa sell poor negro, ho, heave, O!
Leave poor wife and children, ho, heave, O!⁶

More than two decades later the Frenchman Eugene A. Vail published the lyrics to

another rowing chant in a collection of Afro-American songs and tales drawn from the recollections of Thomas Jefferson's daughter, Martha Randolph.⁷

Probably the most widely recognized type of worksong in the Nineteenth Century was the corn-husking song. Corn was a staple crop in the Commonwealth's agrarian economy, and the annual shuckings where groups of slaves (or in later years, Black farm families) gathered together to prepare the corn for winter storage were often colorful, festive occasions. George Tucker's 1824 novel of plantation life, *The Valley of Shenandoah*, provides the earliest known report of singing at corn shuckings. Twelve years later an article in *The Family Magazine* graphically described a Virginia shucking and included the lyrics to a corn song. The author noted the song's improvisatory character and call and response



The stemming process has always been performed by Blacks in Virginia tobacco factories, with laborers paid by the pound for stems pulled from the gummy leaves. This photo is from a Richmond factory, c. 1912.

Photo by Cook, Courtesy Valentine Museum

⁴George Tucker, *Letters from Virginia, Translated from the French* (Baltimore: F. Lucas, 1816), cited by Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), p. 177.

⁵Lewis Miller, Virginia State Library Manuscript Collections, Richmond, Va.

⁶[James Kirk Paulding], *Letters from the South Written During an Excursion in the Summer of 1816*, Vol. 1 (New York: James Eastburn & Co., 1817; reprint ed., New York: AMS Press, 1973), pp. 126-27.

⁷From *De la Litterature et des Hommes de Lettres des Etats-Unis d'Amerique* (Paris: C. Gosselin, 1841), cited in Elizabeth Langhorne, "Black Music and Tales from Jefferson's Monticello," *Folklore and Folklife in Virginia 1* (1979), p. 64.

structure. Eugene Vail's publication of Martha Randolph's Monticello reminiscences also contains the text to a corn husking chant.⁸

Charles Dickens' portrayal of singing in a Richmond tobacco factory was the first of many such descriptions. William Cullen Bryant wrote of a similar experience on his 1834 visit to Richmond, quoting the brother of the proprietor of the factory as saying, "We encourage their singing as much as we can . . . we encourage it as much as we can, for the boys work better while singing." A third account was published six years later by Henry Box Brown, who presented a vivid firsthand portrait of his work as a slave in a Richmond factory prior to his escape to the North.⁹

As is apparent from these citations, most of the early descriptions of Afro-American worksongs appear as scattered references throughout memoirs, collections of letters, and travel accounts. The first serious attempt to collect these songs and document the tradition in a systematic manner was undertaken in the 1870's by Hampton Institute, a state-supported school founded to provide education for Afro- and Native Americans. In 1872, four years after its founding, Hampton established a department of music and began training a group of singers to embark upon a concert tour of the North to raise money for the school. Modeled after the highly successful Fisk Jubilee Singers, the Hampton Singers began their first tour early the following year, presenting their somewhat refined versions of "plantation melodies" to Northern white audiences.¹⁰ Whereas these early concerts were almost certainly comprised entirely of religious songs, there is some indication that the students began including worksongs soon thereafter. In an account written by one of the school's teachers in 1874, we find her questioning a local Hampton resident as follows: "Mr. Jarvis, we won't keep you up any longer now, but we are anxious to get hold of some plantation songs of a different kind from the spirituals; some of those you used to sing at your work, you know; at corn huskings or on the water. . .



Photo from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper

This 1885 engraving depicts a banjo player leading workers in song as they pick peanuts off the vines. The insert shows farm hands revolving a slatted winnowing drum to sift dust and trash from the peanuts.

can you sing us some?"¹¹ Such songs were probably being collected to broaden the repertoire of the Hampton Singers.

In late 1893, *The Southern Workman and Hampton Student Record* announced the formation of the Hampton Folk-Lore Society and the creation of a regular column dedicated to the publication of reports from folklore fieldworkers. An open letter to Hampton graduates called for the collection of a variety of folklore genres, including songs of work and play. The following year a group of Hampton students presented a paper on "Negro Folk-Songs" to the American Folklore Society. They divided Black songs into three categories — corn songs, dance songs, and shouts or spirituals — illustrating each type with selections sung by a quartette. Included was the following corn shucking song:

What in de worl is de marter here
Oh - - - oh, ho,
What in de worl is de marter here
Oh - - - oh, ho.

Fall out here and shuck dis corn
Oh - - - oh ho.
Bigges pile ever seen sence I was born

Oh - - - oh ho.

Marster's niggers is fat and slick
Oh - - - oh ho,
Case dey gits enough to eat
Oh - - - oh ho.

Jones'es niggers is mighty po
Oh - - - oh ho,
Don't know whedder dey gets enough er no
Oh - - - oh ho.

I loves ol' marster an' mistis too
Oh - - - oh ho.
Case deys rich an' kin an' true
Oh - - - oh ho.

Po white trash I does despise
Oh - - - oh ho.
Case deys always tellin lies
Oh - - - oh ho.

Shuck dis corn dis very night
Oh - - - oh ho,
While de stars is shinin' bright,
Oh - - - oh ho.¹²

By this time, the Hampton Singers had developed into the "Hampton Negro and Indian Folk-Lore Concert" and toured the North with elaborate programs comprised of

⁸George Tucker, *The Valley of Shenandoah; or, Memoirs of the Graysons* (New York: C. Wiley, 1824), pp. 116-18; "Visit to a Negro Cabin in Virginia," *The Family Magazine* 3 (1836): 242-45. The Vail text is cited in Langhorne, pp. 63-4.

⁹William Cullen Bryant, *Letters of a Traveller; or, Notes of Things Seen in Europe and America* (London: Richard Bentley, 1850), pp. 74-5; Henry Box Brown, *Narrative of Henry Box Brown . . .* (Boston: Brown and Stearns, 1849), pp. 41-3.

¹⁰Mrs. M.F. Armstrong and Helen W. Ludlow, *Hampton and its Students. By Two of its Teachers . . . With Fifty Cabin and Plantation Songs*, arr. by Thomas P. Fenner (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1874), pp. 128-29.

¹¹Armstrong and Ludlow, p. 113.

¹²"Folklore and Ethnology," *The Southern Workman and Hampton Student Record* 22 (December 1893): 180-81; 24 (February 1895), pp. 30-1.

short plays, lectures, and folksong concerts whose content ranged from corn shucking and "road-making" chants to game songs.¹³ In 1912 they took the "Open-Air Folk Festival" on the road, presenting, as is illustrated in the accompanying photograph, elaborate tableaux to more faithfully replicate the context of the songs.

The northern concerts seem to have ended during the First World War, at which point Hampton Institute's participation in the collection and presentation of Afro-American folklore largely ceased. At approximately the same time the Institute published a series of four short songbooks of Black folksongs. Collected and notated by Natalie Curtis-Burlin, they included texts for two corn shucking songs, a peanut picking song, and a hammering chant from the mines in western Virginia.¹⁴

Although Hampton Institute had pioneered the systematic collection of Afro-American

worksongs in Virginia, there were few willing to follow its lead. Little work was done in the field until the mid-1930's, when John Lomax, working under the auspices of the Archive of Folk Song of the Library of Congress, made two weekend recording trips to the Virginia State Penitentiary in Richmond and the Powhatan Prison Farm at State Farm, Virginia. In four days Lomax was able to record seventy-five pieces, including worksongs, blues, gospel songs, spirituals, and pre-blues reels. None of the worksongs were recorded while the inmates were actually working; rather, in order to assure the best possible sound quality, Lomax asked individuals and groups to re-create their worksongs as if they were on the job. The initial six songs on the first side of this album are taken from these recordings.

During the 1930's, the field researcher Lawrence Gellert was also traveling across the South recording a remarkable collection of

Afro-American songs which expressed themes of protest and social criticism. Many of these were worksongs obtained from inmates in jails and prisons as well as on chain gangs; others were from "free labor" work crews. Although Gellert traveled in Virginia during this period, none of the songs in the fragment of his collection that has been made public are from this state; it can probably be assumed, however, that his recordings include Virginia material.¹⁵

A number of worksong texts, many with accompanying contextual descriptions, were collected under the auspices of two Federal Writers' Project programs in Virginia between 1936 and 1942. The first program, directed by Roscoe Lewis of Hampton Institute, was a systematic effort to interview ex-slaves in the Old Dominion, documenting as fully as possible their life histories. In the course of less than a year, a team of fieldworkers interviewed more than 300 elderly Afro-Americans and collected information on topics ranging from plantation agricultural techniques to the slaves' recreational activities. Included in these accounts are numerous references to and texts of worksongs sung to accompany such diverse tasks as winding thread, hoeing potatoes, cutting wheat, and chopping wood.¹⁶ In the year following the termination of this undertaking, a second program, this one under the direction of the W.P.A.'s National Folklore Project, was instituted to collect the traditional lore and songs of Virginia. Over the course of four years, thousands of ballads, lyric songs, religious songs, and worksongs were recorded (in written form only) from Black and White informants across the state. Numerous Afro-American worksongs, many of which are versions of those appearing on this album, were collected by the W.P.A. fieldworkers, both in their occupational contexts and as recalled by those who remembered hearing or singing them. The complete collection of these songs as well as the concomitant corpus of traditional tales, personal narratives, folk beliefs, and other lore is currently housed in the Alderman Library at the University of Virginia.¹⁷



Courtesy Archives, Hampton Institute

The Hampton Students utilized elaborate tableaux to provide a sense of context for the songs they presented. This 1912 tour poster depicts a road construction scene.

¹³"The Folk-Lore Concert," *The Southern Workman* 31 (April 1902) p. 184.

¹⁴Natalie Curtis-Burlin, ed., *Hampton Series of Negro Folk-Songs, Books I - IV* (New York: G. Shirmer, Inc., 1918-1919).

¹⁵Lawrence Gellert, "Negro Songs of Protest," Notes to Rounder LP 4004.

¹⁶All extant slave narratives have been published in the volume *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*, edited by Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden and Robert K. Phillips (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976). For texts or accounts of worksongs, see pp. 39 (wood chopping chant), 70 (thread-winding song), 106 (hoeing song), 279 (corn husking chant), 304 (wheat cutting songs) and 319-20 (field hollers).

¹⁷An index of the song titles in this collection, compiled by Bruce A. Rosenberg, has been published as *The Folksongs of Virginia: A Checklist of the W.P.A. Holdings, Alderman Library, University of Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969).



Photo Courtesy Bill Jenkins

Shucking clams in Gloucester, Virginia during the mid-1950's.

The sound recordings of Lomax (and possibly Gellert) and the written texts gathered by W.P.A. fieldworkers marked the last efforts to document a contemporaneous *land-based* tradition of secular Black worksongs in the Old Dominion. No further documentation was carried out until many years later, when recordings were made of the chanty singing of crews on menhaden fishing

boats, many of which operated out of Virginia. In 1950 the National Broadcasting Company took a recording crew on board one such vessel working off the coast of Crab Point, New Jersey, and produced a radio documentary on the menhaden industry and its chanting tradition. The crew of this steamer, the *Barnegat*, came primarily from Virginia and North Carolina. Ten years later

Alan Lomax traveled to the Eastern Shore and recorded a series of chanties sung by the Bright Light Quartet, all of whose members were menhaden fishermen. Many of these songs were subsequently released on LP albums in the Prestige-International series, "Southern Journey—A Collection of Field Recordings from the South."¹⁸ In 1967, after the menhaden chanting tradition had died because manual net-raising was replaced by the hydraulic power of mechanical blocks, Robert Witte re-recorded the chanties of the Bright Light Quartet and deposited the tape at the Library of Congress (AFS 15,574). No further documentation of Virginia chanting was carried out until fieldworkers from the Blue Ridge Institute of Ferrum College recorded a series of worksongs recollected by groups of menhaden fishermen from the Eastern Shore. Two of these chants are included on this album.

Worksongs in Agricultural Settings

Any historical discussion of the Afro-American worksong tradition in Virginia must necessarily be incomplete, for not only has the documentation been sparse and oftentimes sketchy, but a full discussion of all the contexts for such songs would include a description of dozens, if not hundreds, of different occupations. I have chosen to focus on those aspects of the tradition which are the most well-documented either in written or aural form. To this end, the remainder of this essay examines worksongs in agricultural, mainland industrial, prison, and maritime settings.

Whether working alone or in groups, Afro-American farmers have perennially accompanied their labor with song. In antebellum days Blacks working the fields of large plantations sang both secular and sacred selections to relieve the tedium of the seemingly endless cycle of planting, hoeing, harvesting, and chopping. The ex-slave Georgia Gibbs recalled how oftentimes an entire field of workers would labor to the cadences of songs intoned by a "lead man": "We'd all be hoein' pertaters 'long behindst Charlie, an' he would be prancin' an' singin' chunes for us to chop by . . . An' keep it up puttin' in words an' kickin' de clods in step. An' sometimes

¹⁸Deep South . . . Sacred and Sinful, Prestige-International (33 1/3 rpm). LP DS-25005; *The Eastern Shores*, DS-25008; *Bad Man Ballads*, DS-25009.

dey take it up all over de fiel', jus' . . . chop-pin' right in chune,'" (dialect as transcribed by W.P.A. fieldworker).¹⁹ After the Civil War, Afro-Americans continued to work communally in the fields laboring as sharecroppers or tenant farmers in what often amounted to a thinly-disguised form of slavery.

Songs accompanied all phases of crop work but were probably most often heard at harvest season. In the peanut-growing areas of the southern Tidewater, worksongs were commonly sung at peanut picking time when dried legumes were pulled from vines stacked in tall shocks to afford maximum exposure to the sun and avoid contact with the moist soil. Men, women and children all participated, picking the nuts while sitting on the ground around small fires which warded off the autumn chill. In the post-bellum years, farm families would join with others for "peanut pickings," communal work gatherings at which the group accomplished in a day what would have taken an individual family a week or more to complete. In this manner community members would move from farm to farm until all the "peas" had been picked and bagged. It was one such peanut picking that J.E. Davis witnessed in 1903: "Sometimes in the busy season the picking continues at night and the fires, shining out here and there in the darkness, heighten the picturesque effect which is added to also by the snatches of weird plantation songs that reach the ear."²⁰

Equally important during the fall months were corn shuckings where farmers gathered at each other's houses to shuck the mounds of dried corn piled in front of the cribs. These were usually festive occasions with sometimes as many as a hundred people gathered around the piles, deftly pulling brittle husks from the corn and tossing the ears into separate heaps. Often one of the shuckers, selected for his loud voice and skill in improvisation, would be asked to sit atop the hill of unhusked corn and lead the workers in song; in a rapid chant he would call out lead lines to which the workers would respond with a chorus. The extant texts of such worksongs clearly reveal their improvisatory character and the tenden-

cy of the singers to employ them as vehicles for commentary and satire. In one recorded instance, for example, a group of slaves used a corn song to ridicule their master, a minister who had made them set out tobacco plants on a Sunday in order to take advantage of a recent rainfall:

- L. *The parson say his prayers in church.*
C. *It rain boys, it rain.*
L. *Then deliver a fine sermon.*
C. *It rain boys, it rain.*
L. *He cut the matter short my friends.*
C. *It rain boys, &c.*
L. *He say the blessed Lord send it.*
C. *It rain boys, &c.*
L. *Now's the time for planting bacco.*
C. *It rain, &c.*
L. *Come my negroes get you home.*
C. *It rain, &c.*
L. *Jim, Jack and Joe and Tom.*
C. *It rain, &c.*
L. *Go draw your plants and set them out.*
C. *It rain, &c.*
L. *Don't you stop a moment boys.*
C. *It rain, &c.*

- L. *'Twas on a blessed Sabbath day.*
C. *It rain, &c.*
L. *Here's a pretty preacher for you.*
C. *It rain, &c.*²¹

Another type of communal work gathering where songs were sung was the "wood chopping" or "cutting frolic." When new ground needed to be cleared for planting or wood obtained for building, heating, or cooking, or curing tobacco, groups of Blacks would labor together to fell trees and split timber. Often working with two to four men per tree, they would sing metrically fast songs to coordinate precisely the striking of their axes, thus keeping a quick pace while minimizing the danger of haphazardly flying steel. The ex-slave Fannie Berry recalled the lyrics to one such tree-felling chant:

*A col' frosty mo'nin',
De niggers mighty good,
Take yo' ax upon yo' shoulder,
Nigger, TALK to de wood.*



When Black families gathered at corn shuckings, the improvised chants of songleaders drowned out the sound of brittle husks being pulled from the corn.

¹⁹Cited in Perdue, p. 106.

²⁰J.E. Davis, "The Peanut Industry in Virginia," *Southern Workman* 32 (November 1903), p. 540.

²¹Rev. T.C. Thornton, *An Inquiry Into the History of Slavery* . . . (Washington, D.C.: William M. Morrison, 1841), p. 122. For descriptions of Virginia corn shuckings, each with worksong lyrics, see Mary A. Livermore, *The Story of My Life, or, The Sunshine and Shadow of Seventy Years* (Hartford, Conn.: A.D. Worthington & Co., 1897), pp. 336-41; Perdue, p. 279; "Visit to a Negro Cabin in Virginia," p. 242; and Booker T. Washington, *The Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery*, Vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1909), pp. 158-60.



Photo by Cook, Courtesy Valentine Museum

Logging crews often stayed for weeks in the deep woods, sleeping in roughly constructed bunkhouses. They chanted worksongs to pace the chopping of their axes and the pounding of their mauls.

“An’ de woods jes’ ringin’ wid dis song,” she remembered. “Dey be lined up to a tree, an’ dey sing dis song to mark de blows. Fust de one chop, den his pardner, an’ when dey sing TALK dey all chop together; an’ pretty soon dey git de tree ready to fall . . .”²² As with corn shuckings and pea pickings, “cuttings” persisted in some rural Virginia communities well into the third decade of this century. The tradition of wood-chopping chants continued virtually unchanged at such gatherings, as it did also among Black sawmill crews and work gangs of inmates “hired out” to logging and railroad companies by the Virginia Department of Corrections.

The solo songs of the fieldhands, the so-called “hollers,” were also heard echoing across Virginia farmlands. These chant-like songs, often embellished with falsetto phrases and swift twists and turns of the voice,

were the farmer’s means of escaping the monotony of long hours spent bent over a slowly-drawn plow. They borrowed lyrics freely from the entire spectrum of traditional Afro-American songs, combining them with improvised lines to form highly personal statements. A.G. Bradley in his *Sketches from Old Virginia* (1897) recalls clearly hearing the hollers of Black farm hands working in fields fully three-quarters of a mile distant.²³

Worksongs in Mainland Industrial Settings

That worksongs were not limited to outdoor labor has already been illustrated in accounts of singing in Virginia tobacco factories. The ample documentation of this tradition comes as no surprise when one ex-

amines the history of tobacco manufacturing. Evidence from early accounts reveals that Black labor has been utilized for processing tobacco since the initial establishment of Southern factories in the early 1800’s. By 1860, 12,843 Black factory hands were working in Virginia-North Carolina tobacco plants. Over half of these laborers were employed in Richmond, Petersburg, and Lynchburg, and most of them were hired slaves.²⁴ They worked in all four of the major processes in the preparation of chewing tobacco (the most popular tobacco product in the mid-1800’s): stemming; flavoring; lumping, or molding the tobacco into plugs; and prizing, the procedure whereby the plugs were pressed into molds by large screw presses.²⁵ Each operation was accompanied with song. Rhythmically light melodies were rendered by the stemmers, each of whom worked at his/her own tempo; regularly-paced cadences were chorused by those pressing the leaves into wooden forms with a constant seesaw motion; and slow chants were intoned by the prizers who turned the massive presses. Is it any wonder that visitors to the factories were impressed by the “psalmody running through the sable assembly”?²⁶

Although accounts of tobacco factory singing rarely included texts, they do give us an idea of the songs’ form. One visitor to a Richmond plant in 1888 provides an excellent definition of the call and response structure in his description of the factory singing: “The music is generally a monotonous recitative by a single voice, followed by a grand chorus of a hundred or more voices, each perfect in its part.”²⁷ A search of the Virginia W.P.A. collection of folksongs yielded two songs which are marked “tobacco worksongs”; both are variants of spirituals with a few added lines making them relevant to the work at hand. One reads in part:

Shine alon’, shine alon’
My home is over Jordan.
One o’ dese mornin’s bright an’ fair,
We goin’ shine mos’ much in de air.

²²Cited in Perdue, p. 39. Carl Sandburg included a call and response woodchopping chant from the Lynchburg area in *The American Songbag* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1927), p. 386. The most complete description of the logging worksong tradition, with extensive song texts, appears in Bruce Johnson’s *Wake Up Dead Man: Afro-American Worksongs from Texas Prisons* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), esp. pp. 31-3, 167-75. See also the LP album of the same name, Rounder 2013.

²³A.G. Bradley, *Sketches from Old Virginia* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), p. 260.

²⁴Joseph Clarke Robert, *The Tobacco Kingdom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1938), p. 197.

²⁵Joseph Clarke Robert, *The Story of Tobacco in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), pp. 83-5.

²⁶William Cullen Bryant, p. 74.

²⁷Kirk Munroe, “Richmond, Virginia,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 15 January 1887, p. 47.

Shine alon', shine alon',
 My 'bacca, my 'bacca,
 I goin' stem alon',
 One o' dese mornin's bright an' fair,
 We goin' shine mos' much in de air.²⁸

The interest the singing held for the general public was not lost on tobacco factory owners. At the Virginia Agricultural, Mechanical, and Tobacco Exposition of 1888, rival factories brought their finest singers to attract the crowds to their exhibits. *The Richmond Whig* reported on the activities at two booths:

The exhibit of P. Whitlock, manufacturer of the Old Virginia cheroots, continues to be a point of general interest. Yesterday while the rain was pattering on the roof, groups were constantly watching the making of the cheroots and listening to the good music by the colored quartet.

*The eight vocalists at the exhibit of R.A. Patterson & Co., tobacco manufacturers, also entertained many people during the day. Their rendition of "Roll, Jordan, Roll," in the old-time style, while at work, generally catches the applause.*²⁹

Almost forty years later the folksong collector Dorothy Scarborough wrote of a concert given by 175 Afro-American employees of Richmond's P. Lorillard Tobacco Company, noting that "Roll, Jordan, Roll" was even then "among the numbers they gave with best effect."³⁰

As tobacco plants became increasingly mechanized, fewer laborers were needed, and the roar of machinery soon began silencing the harmonies of the workers. The stemmers were the last group doing handwork and carrying on the tobacco worksong tradition. They were largely replaced by stemming machines in the late 1930's and early 1940's.

A parallel worksong tradition has been documented in the peanut factories of the southern Tidewater. One turn-of-the-century report mentions that the Black women sorting



Though most oyster shuckers are now women, little else has changed in the shucking industry since this photo was taken in the early 1900's.

thousands of peanuts passing before them on conveyer belts frequently sang while they worked.³¹ This tradition has also disappeared.

The sole industries where worksongs are still prevalent are the shellfish and fish processing operations on the coast. Perhaps the most important of these is the oyster shucking industry in which Black laborers open by hand virtually all Virginia oysters reaching the American market. The industry has changed remarkably little since the turn of the century, and until a satisfactory mechanical method of cracking and opening oysters is developed, it will probably endure in its present form.

Oyster shucking houses are usually low, block buildings constructed on the waterfront so that the oyster "buy boats" and dredges can discharge their precious cargo easily. These vessels unload in the evening, piling the oysters in huge mounds in the house's storage room. The shuckers, exclusively Black men

and women, begin arriving at approximately three o'clock in the morning. Within an hour the oysters have been loaded into wheelbarrows and carried into the shucking room. There they are shoveled onto the long cement table at which the shuckers stand.

The shuckers work deftly, rapidly removing the meat from the muddy shells. They hold each oyster against a small wooden block with one hand. With the other they crack the shell and skillfully insert a knife, cutting the muscle and prying the bivalve open in one adroit motion. The meat is quickly scooped out and dropped into one of the two buckets containing oysters of different sizes, and the empty shells are stuffed into holes in the table which lead outside the shucking house. The entire procedure, from the moment the oyster is grabbed to the point where the shell is discarded, takes only a few seconds.

Up until the Second World War, oyster

²⁸W.P.A. Folksong Collection #1267 B, Rosenberg, p. 113.

²⁹"A Rainy Day's Record," *The Richmond Whig*, 12 October 1888, p. 1.

³⁰Dorothy Scarborough, *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1925; reprint ed., Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1963), p. 31.

³¹Davis, p. 540.

shuckers were predominantly Black males, although in some of the larger shucking houses (especially those in Hampton and Norfolk which employed two to five hundred shuckers) women also plied the trade. By the 1950's, the ratio of men to women had reversed, and now women comprise the majority of the work force. The song repertoire seems to have undergone a change at approximately the same time. Early accounts indicate that the shuckers sang spirituals, blues, and popular songs while they worked; now they chorus almost exclusively religious pieces.³²

Oyster shucking songs serve not only to relieve the boredom but also to set a rhythm. The rhythm, however, is not one which controls joint oyster-cracking movements; rather, the melodies help each individual shucker establish his/her own work pace. Creola Johnson, a shucker whose singing appears on this record, explains this most eloquently:

If you're feeling bad and drowsy and can't get yourself together, you're not going to work as fast; you just hit it slowly. But we have what you call the

"oyster rock"—your body moves backwards and forwards. And as you gets to singing, well, then you begin to work—you don't even know you've picked up speed, you know, and you're just moving and just hitting it and going—and when you know anything your bucket is full.

Although the process of shucking oysters has changed little over the years, the times have, and singing is becoming less and less popular. Many of the establishments which I visited have portable radios blaring popular and gospel songs over the din of cracking oysters. In others the younger shuckers want no part of a singing tradition associated in their minds with a slavery mentality. "The young people here don't like singing," says Creola Johnson of the new shucking house where she recently began working. "They told me they didn't like it—say they don't like that hollering. So I just hum to myself."

Crab picking is another industry long noted for its worksong tradition. The Chesapeake Bay provides more crabs for the market than

any other body of water in the world; for years the center of this trade has been Virginia's Eastern Shore. Here in scattered crab picking houses Black women rapidly remove the top shells of steamed blue crabs and dexterously extract the valuable meat, dropping it into cans which are sealed and shipped that same day. The processes of steaming and picking are almost identical to those found in many of the same establishments at the turn of the century.³³ Repertoires of singers in the crab picking houses where singing is still done have also seen little change. From the early 1900's, crab-pickers have been predominantly Black women. Oldtimers, some of whom have picked crabs for more than sixty years, say that they have always sung hymns and spirituals. As in the oyster shucking houses, however, this tradition is rapidly dying. The proprietor of one crab picking establishment stated the reason succinctly: "The older heads are the ones that do the singing, and we have less and less of them."³⁴

Certainly the most visible industries associated with Afro-American worksongs have been outdoor occupations which require manual labor. Laying and straightening steel railroad tracks, loading and unloading heavy cargoes of seagoing ships, lifting and breaking stones in quarries, and building roads have all been associated with the rhythmic chants of Black workmen. One such class of occupational song which heretofore has never been documented consists of the "horsing" chants of Afro-American boat caulkers, a hammer song tradition which disappeared in the late 1930's.

Until the last few decades wooden seagoing vessels were common along Virginia's coastline. Such boats and barges required periodic overhauls, especially to replace the caulking which kept seawater from penetrating the seams between the planking. When such reconditioning was needed, the vessels were moved into shipyards where they were maneuvered onto marine railways and hauled out of the water for reparation.

Teams of caulkers began working on the lower hull as soon as the ship cleared the water. Twenty to forty caulkers, depending



Photo by Flournoy, Courtesy the Virginia State Library

For generations, crab-picking houses have drawn upon Afro-American women for their work force. To see how little the industry has changed, compare this photo, c. 1915, with that of the crab pickers at Rappahannock Oyster Co.

³²"Eastern Shore Oyster Workers' Voices Rise in Song, But Their Job Far From Pleasant," *Richmond Ledger-Dispatch*, 12 April 1945, n.p., "Oysters" File, Norfolk Public Library Collection, Norfolk, Va.; J. E. Davis, "Oystering in Hampton Roads," *Southern Workman* 32 (March 1903): 161-62; "Virginia Oyster, Queen of Seafoods, Once More Graces the Festive Board," *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, 5 September 1906, sec. 4, p. 1.

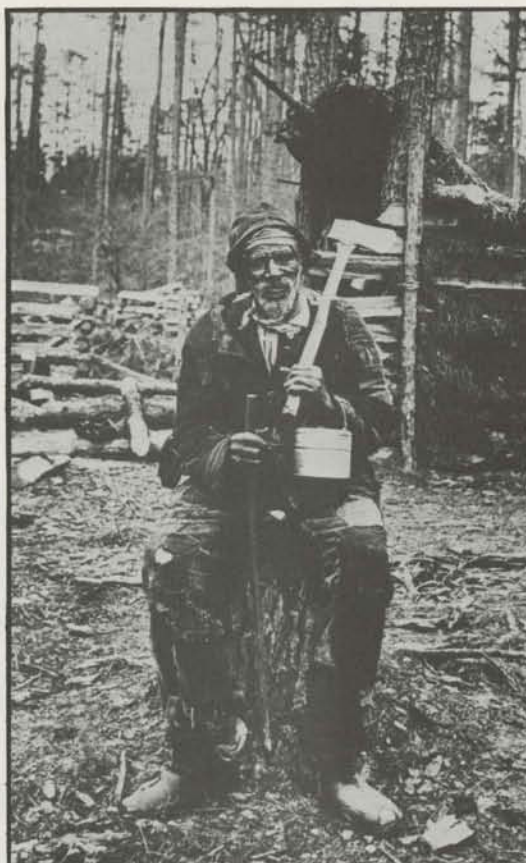
³³William W. Warner, *Beautiful Swimmers: Watermen, Crabs and the Chesapeake Bay* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), pp. 187-90.

³⁴Copied from field notes of a conversation with Linda Atkins, Rappahannock Oyster Company, Bluff Point, Va., 5 November 1980.

upon the size of the vessel, would begin “reefing” the seams, cleaning them of pitch and old oakum (hemp fiber commonly used in caulking). Their chisel-like “reefing irons” were knocked into the seams with long, tapered caulker’s mallets. When the frayed oakum and its coating of pitch were largely removed, the caulkers divided into groups of twos and began “horsing,” driving the remaining cotton and oakum far back into the seams. The horsing both tightened the seams and made room for additional sealant.

In order to ram the old oakum as far into the hull as possible, each caulking team used a long, hardwood mallet (called a “beetle”) and a three-foot long iron with a flat head (called a “horsing iron”). As one worker laid the iron in the seam, the other struck it with the beetle; on the backswing, the man with the iron inched it forward between the planks. “They would sing when they were horsing,” recalls Lee Wynn, a caulker who has worked for Norfolk’s Colonna’s Shipyard for forty-eight years. “One fellow would have the long horsing iron and one would have the beetle. The one with the iron would be singing to the one with the beetle to keep time going. And they had a certain rhythm; just like the fellows on the railroad would have a rhythm when they were spiking, they had a rhythm when they were hitting with the beetle.” Every caulker learned to chant early in his apprenticeship, for the man not chanting was the one wielding the heavy beetle. Rather than having chant leaders, as were found in so many other occupational song traditions, horsing was marked by egalitarianism. “You alternate it; you don’t just steady one man horse,” states the caulker John Mantley. “If there’s two seams, you horse one and I’ll horse one. You sing for one seam and I’ll sing for the other.”

When horsing was completed, the caulkers individually took up smaller irons and mallets and began filling the seams first with cotton and then with oakum. As they finished each section, boiling pitch was brushed over the seam to assure a waterproof seal. As soon as the lower hull of the vessel was fully caulked, the boat was drawn off the railway and lowered back into the water. Here the caulkers began anew, horsing and caulking the upper sides and, if necessary, the deck.



This well-worn laborer posed with the tools of his trade in front of a lumber camp shack.

Photo by Cook, Courtesy Valentine Museum

The men worked from small wooden floats, or “lighters.” The entire process of caulking a 125 foot menhaden steamer might take a crew of twenty men two weeks. When working on a 320 foot coal barge, the time was proportionately longer.

The chants of the caulkers not only borrowed from the vast store of Afro-American worksong lyrics but at times drew upon the spiritual and gospel traditions. “Some would be songs where you wouldn’t want no ladies to hear, and some would be religious songs,” asserts Lee Wynn. “When they’d be singing the religious songs, most of the time they would have a quartet, singing right ‘long with them when they’re horsing. Some of the time we would have four-part harmony.”

In order to facilitate the recording of the horsing chants included on this album, Colonna’s Shipyard hauled an old wooden lighter onto the railway and gathered together five caulkers, all over sixty years of age. None had chanted with the beetle and iron for over forty years, though in minutes they were horsing and singing as if they had never stopped. The

work had been hard, they all agreed, but they sure knew how to make the best of it.

Convict Labor and the Worksong Tradition

Many of the accounts related above, especially those set in agricultural contexts, have dealt with the worksong tradition in antebellum times when groups of slaves were forced to work together at common tasks for the benefit of their owners. Though formally abolished in 1863, the *institution* of slavery persisted well into this century in the guise of a system legislated by the state and maintained as what often amounted to a tool of subjugation—the penal system. Virginia’s jails, road camps, and penitentiary imprisoned a disproportionately high number of Afro-Americans, many serving time for “crimes” ultimately traceable to the color of their skin. Whatever the offense, the length of a Black man’s sentence was invariably longer than that assigned to a white for an analogous transgression. Both factors—the racist adjudgement of “crime” and the concomitant extended sentences—assured that the state’s correctional facilities housed a majority of Afro-Americans, a vast body of inmates whom the penal officials were enjoined to assign “the hardest labor suitable to their sex and fitness.”³⁵

After sentencing, all inmates of the state were transferred to the Penitentiary in Richmond, where they were assigned to work on the roads, in prison farms, at lime plants, in the central prison, or with private contractors for whom the state had agreed to furnish convict labor. Though the prisoners were racially segregated at all times—both in their living quarters and on the work gangs—the wardens and guards were always white. These prison “bossmen” possessed absolute authority over the inmates and often wielded their power cruelly in an attempt to control both the thoughts and actions of the prisoners. In response to these repressive conditions, Black inmates created a penal counterculture, an alternative system of social and communicative structures hidden from and free of the control of the penal authorities. Central to this covert system were a variety of traditional Afro-American expressive forms which were developed and perpetuated among successive

³⁵Factual data for this section was taken from the 1919 through 1936 editions of *The Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Penitentiary* (Richmond: Division of Purchase and Printing); *A Compilation of Laws Relating to the Virginia Penitentiary*, Dec. 20th, 1904 (Richmond: Williams Printing Company, 1905); R.M. Johnson, ed., *The State Convict Road Force and the State Press* (Richmond: Richmond Press, Inc., 1908); and conversations with employees of the Va. State Corrections Department.

generations of Black inmates; one such communicative tool was the prison work song.

Most of the work assigned to Afro-American prisoners was back-breaking manual labor to be performed by gangs of inmates toiling together. The tasks and the work songs which accompanied them varied according to the penal facility. One of the state's largest institutions was the Powhatan State Farm, a 2,500 acre grange where tobacco, corn, and a variety of foodstuffs were raised. Crews of inmates worked the land in scenes that must have mirrored antebellum plantation days—planting, hoeing, and harvesting for long hours under the watchful eyes of shotgun-bearing prison guards. Work in the forests replaced field labor in the winter months as gangs felled trees and chopped wood in the bitter cold. Throughout the year rhythmic work chants paced the steady rise and fall of hoes, the slashing of corn knives, and the swinging of axes.

More evident to the public eye were the chain gangs, groups of prisoners whose duty was the maintenance and construction of roads. Since the late 1800's, the state had fur-

nished petitioning counties with teams of inmates to work on locally-maintained roadways. With the passage of the Lassiter-Withers road law shortly after the turn of the century, the state established a permanent convict road force to tend Virginia's primary highways. From this time forward, prisoners assigned to roadwork were sent to one of the state's regional labor camps; seventeen of the thirty-one such camps in the early 1930's were all-Black. Every day, the prisoners were carried from these facilities (each of which housed an average of ninety inmates in tents or semi-permanent tin structures) to work on roads in need of filling, leveling, grading, and ditching. As a rule, inmates were chained together to discourage escape attempts and by moving to the cadences of work songs, prisoners achieved the careful coordination necessitated by this enforced proximity. In a shovel crew, for example, laborers not working in unison would slash each other's arms as one dug while another heaved the dirt; when paced by a chant, all of the shovels would rise and fall in concert. The song lyrics, intoned under the gaze of armed guards, often made

biting reference to the work and the oppressive conditions under which the prisoners toiled:

*Told my captain my han's was cold.
"God damn yo' hands, let the wheelers roll!"*

*Well, captain, captain you mus' be blin';
Look at yo' watch! See ain't it quittin' time?*

*Well if I had my weight in lime,
I'd whip my captain till I went stone-blind.³⁶*

The inmates were also responsible for breaking the stone used in laying the macadamized roads; to this end, many of them labored with sledge hammers in road camp quarries. As on the road crews, these prisoners paced their blows with song. Each evening the laborers, exhausted from the roads and rock piles, returned to the camp where they were fed a rough meal (often consisting of no more than coarse bread, butter, molasses and coffee) and chained to their beds. At 3:30 or 4 o'clock the next morning, they were awakened by a "rise-up" chant, beginning the thankless cycle once again. This schedule of long hours and rough labor continued six days a week for months on end, broken only when the camps relocated (as they did an average of twice a year) or a prisoner's time on the chain gang terminated.

Perhaps the harshest conditions under which inmates labored were those prevailing on jobs supervised by private companies rather than the government. Until outlawed by federal decree in the early 1930's, many states including Virginia contracted prison laborers to businesses for work on projects adjudged beneficial to the state's "internal improvement". In the Old Dominion such jobs included laying and maintaining railroad tracks, mining for coal, and lumbering. As with the roadwork chain gangs, these labor crews often worked in shackles and chanted songs to regulate their activity. Unlike the road camp inmates, however, these prisoners were supervised by overseers answerable solely to the company. These guards, rarely trained in this capacity, were charged with maintaining order by using any means and weapons deemed necessary. This mandate, coupled with a lax state inspection schedule, often resulted in cruel abuses of power, as evidenced in the statements of ex-prisoners



Photo from The State Convict Road Force and the State Press

The sound of sledge-hammers and the slow chants of those who wielded them rose from road camp quarries across the state. The striped inmate uniforms, still in use in this 1907 photo, were abolished in 1920.

³⁶From "Grade Song," cited in Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs: A Study of Typical Negro Songs in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1925), pp. 252-53.

and the mute testimony offered by the statistics of those killed or crippled on contract labor jobs.

Three clear functions can be identified for the work chants of prisoners in the Old Dominion. These songs: 1) eased the tedium of the incessant hard labor, taking inmates' thoughts away from the immediate tasks at hand; 2) paced work activities by establishing the rhythms by which movements were regulated; and 3) engendered a sense of solidarity and affirmed self-value through the creation of an expressive realm over which Black prisoners exerted complete control. A fourth, equally important function—one little recognized by students of worksong traditions—becomes apparent only when we realize that inmates were prohibited by law from speaking to each other. The Penal Code of 1887, section 4126, reads: "Social intercourse, conversation, and acquaintance between the convicts shall be prevented as far as may be, and silence constantly observed by them, as far as possible." Violation of this regulation, which remained in effect until the mid-1930's, resulted in such punishments as the assignment of a coarser diet or solitary confinement. Worksongs, however, were exempt from this ruling, for they were viewed by prison officials as conducive to labor. As a result, these chants assumed an important role as communicative tools. Their loose structure and improvisatory nature made them ideal vehicles for the transfer of information, the expression of which would otherwise pose some danger to the inmates.

The first six songs on this album were recorded in 1936 by John Lomax at the Virginia State Penitentiary and Powhatan State Farm. Ranging from group chants to solo hollers, they represent a variety of song forms and point to an equal diversity of contexts. The song "Can't You Line 'Em," for example, is a chant intoned by a railroad section gang while straightening steel rails; another lyric mentions the prisoner's assignment to contract labor in a coal mine; yet a third is addressed to the mules pulling a plow across a prison farm field. Such work chants continued to be sung in Virginia prison settings well into the 1940's when the nature of penal labor began to change with the in-

creased use of machinery. Long after the tradition had died in these facilities, rhythmically strong worksongs were still being chanted by Black fishermen off the Commonwealth's coast. Indeed, two of the prison songs recorded by Lomax, "Every Mail Day" and "Lazarus," appear on this record in almost identical form as sea chanties. It is to this final worksong tradition that we shall now turn.

Worksongs in Maritime Industrial Settings

Just as worksongs were heard accompanying the swinging of picks by sweating miners, the rolling of gummy tobacco leaves by factory hands, and the cracking of oysters by shuckers, they were also found on the waters of the Chesapeake and the Atlantic, chorused by boatloads of brawny fishermen pulling bulging fish nets. Until the early 1960's, chan-

ties were an integral part of Virginia's largest fishing industry—the catching and processing of menhaden.

Menhaden, or as they are perhaps more commonly known, bunkers or porgies, are plankton-feeding fish which average twelve to fifteen inches in length and weigh approximately a pound each. In the spring and summer months they appear in immense schools in the Chesapeake and along the Atlantic coast, swimming close to the surface in clearly defined masses. Valued as a source of fish oil and as an ingredient in fertilizer, menhaden were being caught in large seines off the New England coast in the early 1800's. By the 1870's, a number of pioneers in the industry moved their operations to Virginia, hoping to capitalize on the vast schools reported in the Chesapeake. Their foresight paid off, and within twenty years the Commonwealth was the hub of the menhaden industry.³⁷

Menhaden vessels in the first half of this century were slim, highly maneuverable wooden steamers, each of which carried two



Dining and sleeping quarters were combined in the cramped space of a 1940's menhaden fishing boat.

Photo Courtesy Bill Jenkins

³⁷This data and much of the ensuing discussion are based on materials found in John Frye, *The Men All Singing: The Story of Menhaden Fishing* (Norfolk: Donning Company, Publishers, 1978).



Courtesy of The Mariners Museum

For huge sets of menhaden, purse boat crews from two steamers would work together to harden the net, with up to three score fishermen chanting as they pulled the bunkers to the water's surface.

shallow-draft purse boats and a smaller, round-bottomed *driver* or *striker* boat. When a school of menhaden was spotted from the steamer's crow's-nest, the crew immediately mobilized and headed for the boats. Within seconds the driver was in the water, the striker-man standing as he rowed to the school's far end. Meanwhile the purse boats were rapidly being lowered, with sixteen to twenty crewmen jumping into each the minute it hit the water. The purse boat crews, which were responsible for pulling in the fish, consisted primarily of Afro-Americans. The strikerman kept an eye on the movement of the school of menhaden, signaling to the adjacent purse boats the moment they should separate and commence playing out the purse net. The crews rowed fully around the school, laying the net the entire while, until they rejoined at the far end of the circle. At this point a heavy tom was dropped overboard, pulling the bottoms of the net together (thus the term "pursing") and effectively trapping

the school of fish.

Once the menhaden were caught, the real work of bringing them to the surface and transferring them to the ship's hold began. As the purse crews began hauling in excess seine netting, the steamer maneuvered up to the boats' angled sterns, forming a triangle with the fish in the center. The crew kept pulling in the nets, forcing the fish into a hardened mass into which a large dip net from the steamer could be lowered. If the "set" was a small one, perhaps fifty to seventy thousand menhaden, the nets could be "hardened" with little difficulty. If, however, the set was two hundred thousand fish or more, the muscles of the purse boat men were strained to their limit. At times such as these, one of the men would strike up a chanty, calling out a familiar line and setting a rhythm to coordinate the crew's arduous pulling.

Menhaden fishermen were paid on a share basis; the more bunkers the steamer carried to the factory, the higher the crewman's income.

Thus, there was an extra incentive to labor hard with the net and get the fish from the sea to the menhaden ship's cavernous hold. Describing a large set, one menhaden fisherman commented, "you see your money jumping," noting that the size of the netted school was certainly inspiration for song.³⁸

At times the set was so large—half a million or more menhaden—that the captain knew his crew could not harden the net without the risk of capsizing the purse boats and losing the fish. On such occasions, he would signal another menhaden vessel in the vicinity for assistance; this steamer would lower its purse boats and lash them onto those of the first ship, the second crew helping to harden the net. "Then there'd be about sixty men in there," notes Captain Hudnall Haynie, a menhaden captain for twenty-eight years, "all doing the chanty. Now that was it! That was something you could hear all over the Chesapeake Bay!"³⁹

Unlike other tempo-setting chants found in the Afro-American worksong tradition, the chanties of the menhaden fishermen proceeded with a broken rhythm. The chanty leader sang the initial phrase of each line with the remainder of the crew chorusing in to carry the line to its completion. At this point the crew pulled on the net, struggling with it for a few seconds. They called out to each other, alternately scolding, encouraging, and cursing. Only after this chatter did the leader line out the next verse in the chanty. The chanting continued in this manner until enough bunkers had been dipped out of the purse seine so that it could be hardened with little exertion.

The mid-1950's saw the introduction of hydraulic power blocks on purse boats, an innovation which made the pursing process more efficient and sounded the death knell for the chanty tradition. Increasingly captains of menhaden vessels converted to the power blocks, relying on mechanical rather than manual means of drawing in the seine. As a result, large crews of purse boatmen were no longer needed nor were the chanties that helped with the pulling of the bunkers to the water's surface. By the beginning of the following decade, America's last sea chanty tradition had disappeared.

The menhaden season, which commences

³⁸Unidentified Member of the Bright Light Quartet, Robert Witte tape, Archive of Folk Culture AFS 14,574, Library of Congress.

³⁹Interview with Captain Hudnall Haynie, Reedville, Va., 21 April 1979.

in late May, is immediately preceded by the spawning run of herring into the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. For a two-month period many of those who will later be employed on menhaden steamers work on the smaller herring boats, collecting herring caught in the Bay's numerous pound nets.

These nets are actually large stationary fish traps formed from netting hung on tall stakes driven into the bottom of the Bay and adjacent rivers. Long, straight rows of netting funnel fish through a narrow opening into the heart of the trap where netting surrounds the catch on bottom and sides. Most of the fish, unable to find the small aperture through which they entered, are helplessly trapped in this enclosure.

Each herring boat, manned by a crew of seven, carries a short, flat-bottomed skiff, or bateau. As the vessel nears the pound net, six men enter the bateau, row it to the heart, and position it on a side near the aperture. They begin raising the net to the water's surface, forcing the entrapped fish into a constantly shrinking pouch of netting as they move

across the heart. When the skiff finally reaches the pound boat at the far end, the fishermen must harden the net so that the herring can be dipped into the hold. This process is very similar to the hardening of the menhaden nets though both the set and the crew are significantly smaller. Nonetheless, these laborers often sang chanties to pace their pulling.⁴⁰ With the demise of the menhaden chanting tradition, however, these songs also ceased to be sung.

Some Concluding Remarks

The singing of chanties commonly associated with the menhaden fishery while lifting nets of herring provides an indication of the interrelated nature of the Black worksong tradition. None of these types of song existed in isolation; rather, they all drew upon the vast storehouse of traditional Afro-American metaphors, symbols, song lines, couplets, and entire stanzas which combine and recombine freely to structure unique stories and express different emotions.

Just as the same images seem to wander

through the various worksong traditions, respecting neither sacred nor secular boundaries, so many of the laborers moved from occupation to occupation, ever adapting their songs to new environments. One of the singers on this album, Creola Johnson, sang the same songs in a Danville tobacco factory that she remembered hearing her grandmother sing while toiling in the fields. When she moved to the coast and began working as an oyster shucker, Ms. Johnson continued to sing those same songs. Oyster shucking itself is a seasonal occupation, and many of those working in the shucking houses during the winter take other jobs in the warmer months. Rev. Timothy Hayes, for example, who has shucked oysters for forty years, spent fifteen summers as a purse boat man in a menhaden crew.

The Afro-American worksong tradition, however, is now rapidly dying. It is increasingly difficult to locate even oyster shucking or crab picking establishments where the laborers still sing. Greater mechanization, the radio, and an attitude among younger Afro-Americans associating worksongs with "slavery days" have all contributed to the tradition's demise. And the older singers do not believe it will ever come back. "This young bunch came in and, when these older fellows started dying out, they didn't pay it no mind," laments the eighty-one year old caulker John Mantley. "That's why it went out. I don't think it's been no singing around here, I guess, for hardly fifty years. Cause the young bunch is not taking it up . . . it's a lost art, a lost art."

Preceding the headnotes to each selection on this album is a list of song variants, citing alternate versions of the song (or important verses) in published collections. Each such citation notes the name of the author/editor, date of publication, page numbers on which the variant appears, title given the song and, when available, the state in which the piece was recorded. A bibliography of all sources utilized is printed at the end of this booklet.

Transcriptions of lyrics follow the headnotes to each selection. When the lyrics are printed in upper-case letters, that indicates that they are being sung by a group rather than an individual. In the few instances where verses were unintelligible, question marks stand instead of the lyrics.



Menhaden fishermen "pulling the line" c. late 1940's.

Photo Courtesy Bill Jenkins

⁴⁰Based on information gathered from a conversation with John Frye, Hampton, Va., 16 November 1980.

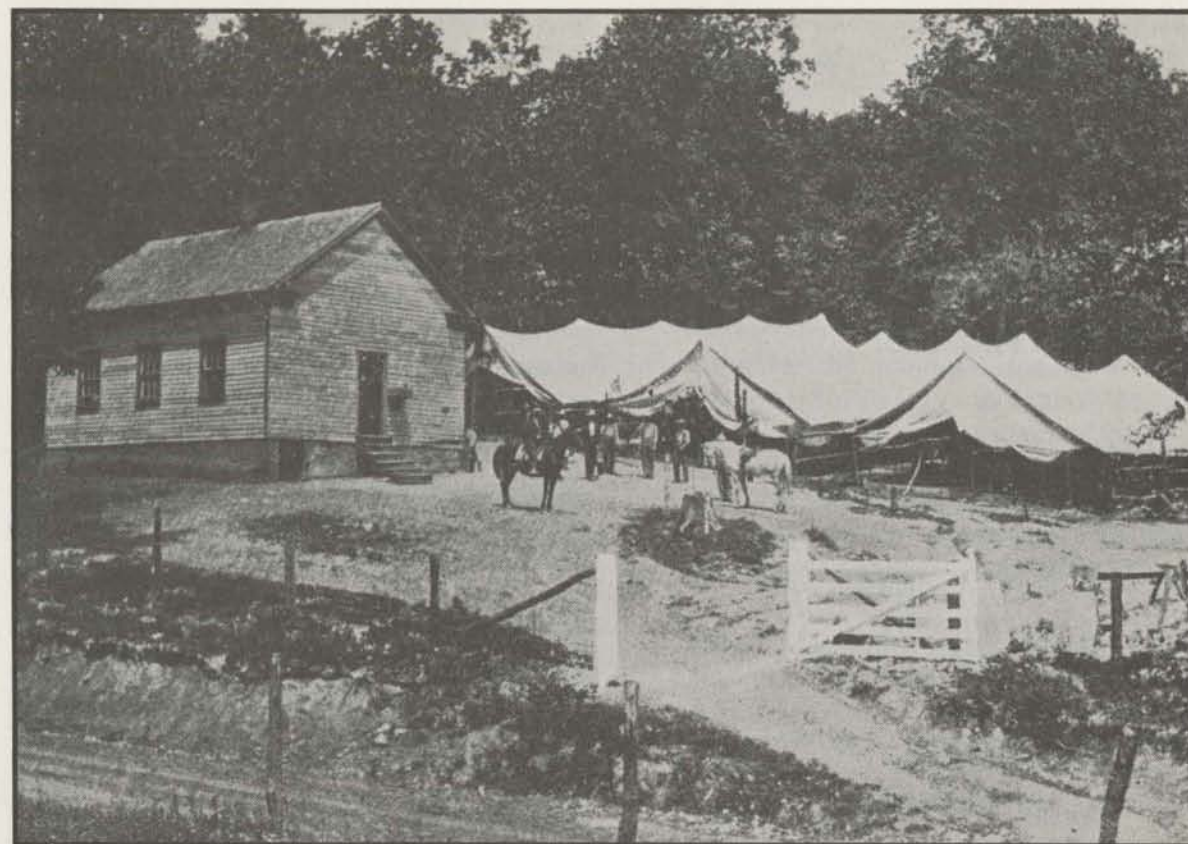
Side 1

1. ON A MONDAY (AFS 727A)—John Williams and Group. Recorded at the Virginia State Penitentiary, Richmond, Va., on 30 May 1936 by John and Alan Lomax, 3:32.

Brewer (1968, 196f) "Sweet Mamie Chadman" (N.C.); Cash (1970, 138f) "I Got Stripes"; Gellert (1939, 23f) "Well On a Monday"; Lomax (1941, 386ff) "Lord, It's Almost Done" (Ala.), also in Lomax (1947, 324f); Odum & Johnson (1925, 204) "Looking For That Bully of This Town," and (228ff) "Lilly"; Odum & Johnson (1926, 75f) "If I Can Git to Georgia Line."

One of the most compelling of prison worksongs, "On a Monday" relates the story of the rapid trial and sentencing of a Black man charged with an unnamed crime. The short period between his arrest and consignment to hard labor (apparently on a contract work situation since he is sent to the coal mines) dramatizes the injustice of a racist judicial system. Afro-Americans frequently asserted that such expedited sentencing indicated that the inmate population was too low to meet the demands for convict labor; to rectify this situation, they claimed, police officers and court officials cooperated in sentencing Blacks to work gangs on the basis of exaggerated or fabricated charges. The negative response of the "hard-hearted governor" in this lyric to the prisoner's plea for leniency serves to further confirm this perception of powerlessness in the face of a white-dominated power structure.

After the basic narrative is related, these singers add a set of floating verses found throughout the Afro-American worksong tradition. The first of these, "Some on the right of way . . .," catalogs the fate of various inmates who were sentenced to work on the roads, at the prison farm, or on the chain gang. This verse closes by mentioning those who have "gone home," an ambiguous designation referring either to the completion of one's sentence or, in a figurative sense, to one's death and journey to his "eternal home." (The phrase "going home" commonly appears with this latter connotation in



Road camps relocated an average of twice a year; those which moved more often housed inmates in large tents, as in this 1907 photo.

Photo from The State Convict Road Force and the State Press

Afro-American religious singing.) A parallel stanza which even more explicitly addresses the destiny of the prisoners was recorded by John Lomax from a group of Texas inmates:

*Some in de buildin' an some on de farm
Some in de graveyard, some goin' home. (Lomax,
(Lomax, 1934, 58f)*

Following the "Don't you talk about it" refrain is a second familiar verse, this one commonly associated with the "Evalina" complex (see the song notes to "Evalina," side A, band 7). A closely related variant in which the singer's sweetheart "runs a whorehouse on the water" has been collected twice from railroad section gangs in Alabama (T.C.I. Section Crew, Paramount 12478, 1927; and White, 1928, 263f, where the probably bowdlerized version reads "boarding house") and from a menhaden crew in Florida (Cornwall, 1940). Judging from this stanza's third line, "lighthouse" may well be a euphemism for that same institution.

As with all of the prison recordings made by Lomax in Virginia, virtually nothing is known about this group of singers. That they were in the Penitentiary rather than one of the state's other penal institutions indicates that

these inmates were considered hardened criminals too dangerous to put on the farm or road. This in turn suggests the possibility that some of them had been returned to the central prison from such facilities after escape attempts or recurrent instances of "insubordination." At least one inmate in this recording session clearly states this in the spoken introduction to his song. The singing of track-lining and farming songs, neither of which kinds of labor was undertaken at the Penitentiary, offers further confirmation of this supposition.

While most of these chants disappeared with the demise of the worksong tradition, a version of "On a Monday" crossed over musical genres and achieved some popularity in the realm of country-western music. In 1959 Johnny Cash recorded a song entitled "I Got Stripes" with lyrics following the same day-by-day progression found in the earlier work chant; the words to this piece were adapted from a text of "On a Monday" published in one of the Lomaxes' folksong compilations. Since the late 1950's, many country-western and bluegrass musicians have recorded Cash's version of this song, probably unaware of its Afro-American roots.

Johnny Cash, "I Got Stripes," Columbia 4-41427, 1959; Columbia CS-9639 (LP), 1968.

Leadbelly, "On a Monday," Asch 343-3 (LP); Folkways FA 2104 & FA 2488 (LPs); Olympic OL 7103 (LP); Stinson 17 (LP), n.d.

Unidentified, "On a Monday," rec. by Lawrence Gellert, probably in S.C., Rounder 4004 (LP), c. 1935.

*Was on a Monday,
MONDAY I WAS 'RESTED,
Great Lordy, and on a TUESDAY,
A TUESDAY I WAS TRIED.
And on a WEDNESDAY,
A WEDNESDAY I GOT MY SENTENCE,
Great Lordy, and on a THURSDAY,
I HUNG DOWN MY HEAD AND CRIED.*

*But it's too late to WEEP AND,
Buddy, AND IT'S TOO LATE TO MOAN.
That old judge got a HEART LIKE,
LORD, LIKE A MARBLE STONE.*

*Boys, I'm GOING DOWN,
GOING DOWN ABOUT OLD RALEIGH.
Great Lord, I'm gonna FALL DOWN,
FALL DOWN ON MY KNEES.
I'm gonna BEG THAT,
BEG THAT HARD-HEARTED GOVERNOR,
"High governor, won't you PARDON ME,
PARDON ME IF YOU PLEASE."*

*Said, "There's no pardon FOR YOU,
BOY, YOU GOT TO MAKE YOUR TIME,
With a pick and a SHOVEL,
DOWN IN THE OLD ROCK MINE."
Say that picking in the coal mine,
COAL MINE PICKING IN THREE,
When you wake up in the MORNING,
BOSSMAN PICKING ON ME.*

*Now don't you talk ABOUT IT,
ABOUT IT, IF YOU DO I'LL CRY,
Cause I got such a LONG TIME,
LORD, I BELIEVE I'LL DIE.*

*Some on the right OF WAY,
RIGHT OF WAY, SOME ON THE FARM,
Some on the CHAIN GANG,
LORD, AND SOME GONE HOME.*

*Now don't you talk ABOUT IT,
ABOUT IT, IF YOU DO I'LL CRY,
Cause I got such a LONG TIME,
LORD, I BELIEVE I'LL DIE.*

*I got a WOMAN,
A WOMAN, A PRETTY LITTLE WOMAN.
Great Lord, she runs a LIGHTHOUSE,
A LIGHTHOUSE ON THE SEA.*

*Every TIME SHE,
TIME SHE MAKE A HUNDRED DOLLARS,
Great Lord, she come SAILING,
HAILING BACK TO ME.*

*Darling, don't you talk ABOUT IT,
ABOUT IT, IF YOU DO I'LL CRY,
Cause I got such a LONG TIME,
LORD, I BELIEVE I'LL DIE.*

2. OH LORD, THEY DON'T 'LOW ME TO BEAT 'EM (AFS 726 A1)—Willie Williams. Recorded at the Virginia State Penitentiary, Richmond, Va., on 30 May 1936 by John and Alan Lomax, 2:29.

Variants of the pistol verse are found in Jackson (1972, 81f) "Mack's Blues" (Tx.), (148ff) "No More Good Time in the World for Me" (Tx.) (153f) "Too Much Time for the Crime I Done" (Tx.) and (157ff) "Ever Since I Been a Man Full Grown" (Tx.); Lomax (1934, 50ff) "Levee Camp Holler"; Odum & Johnson (1926, 105f) "Don't You Give Me No Cornbread"; Rosenberg (1969, 14) "Can't You Line It" (Va.)

The oppressive atmosphere of the prison farm, where inmates were forced to toil in the fields for a harvest from which they would not benefit, is vividly evoked in this solo holler by Willie Williams. Asked to sing as he would when working the land, Williams closed his eyes and intoned this remarkable chant full of vocal slides and blue notes. Interspersed between the verses are a series of yells directed at the two mules, Rhody and Dempsey, pulling his imaginary plow; the frustration evident in these interjections—as when Williams threatens to knock one of the beasts to its knees—is magnified in the holler's opening line, for the driver is forbidden from striking animals belonging to the state. Implied also in the introductory verse is the cruel irony of this penal regulation, for although the inmates may not beat the dumb beasts, they themselves are not so protected from brutal treatment at the hands of prison guards.

Throughout this holler Williams expresses his intense desire to escape from the prison farm, using violence if necessary (hence the reference to his "shooter" and "box of balls"). The verses are obviously improvised

with little attention paid to rhyme or consistent line length, and they do not follow a narrative sequence. Of all the stanzas the penultimate one, opening with "Oh Lord, captain got a pistol," is perhaps the most common, being a variant of a couplet found throughout the worksong tradition. A group of prisoners sang a closely related set of lines in the chant "Take This Hammer" (AFS 726 B1) only minutes after William recorded his holler:

*The captain got a pistol, he try to play bad, (3X)
Go'n take it in the morning, if he makes me mad.*

An identical stanza appears in the Virginia W.P.A. transcript of an Afro-American track lining song (Rosenberg, #165, p. 14), and a parallel couplet is found in the menhaden chanty repertoire, where the reference to the "captain" alludes to the shipmaster of a fishing steamer rather than the "bossman" of a work crew. When the Bright Light Quartet sang this verse in a chanty recorded in 1967 (AFS 14, 574 A10), they opened it with the line: "Captain got a luger, and the mate got a .45 . . ."

Leadbelly, "It Was Soon One Morning," Folkways FT 31030 (LP), n.d.
Unidentified, "Camp Hollers," recorded by Alan Lomax, Lewis Jones, & John Work in Mississippi, Library of Congress L 59 (LP), 1941.

*Oh Lord, they don't 'low me to beat 'em,
Got to drag 'em 'long.
Get up Rhody! Gee back there Dempsey! I don't want to kill you this morning!
Oh Lord, they don't 'low me to beat 'em,
Got to drag 'em 'long.
Tighten up a little bit!
Oh Lord, if my good woman had of been here, good partner,
Lord, I wouldn't have been here,
Stumbling and falling, trying to make it back home.
Get up out of that mud there! Look out there! I'll knock you to your knees directly!
Oh Lord, I'm going back, good partner,
One day 'fore long.
I don't need no telling,
Already know.
Look out Dempsey!
I got a whole heap to tell you, good partner,
Oh Lord, when I get home.
Lord, I been stumbling and falling,
Trying to get away.
Look out mule! Get up there!*

Oh Lord, if my woman had of been here, good partner,
 Lord, I'd have done been gone.
 She'd have brought my shooter, good partner,
 And a box of balls.
 Look out Rhody! Get up Jerry! Look out there
 Pearl! I don't want to kill one of you this morning!
 Oh Lord, captain got a pistol,
 And he want to be bad.
 Must have been the first one
 That he ever had.
 Look out there Jerry!
 Oh Lord, I got a high-ball wheeler, good partner.
 In a Western turn,
 Gonna stick it in the bottom, boys,
 If it breaks my arm.

3. BITING SPIDER (AFS 729 B2)—Willie Williams and Group. Recorded at the Virginia State Penitentiary, Richmond, Va., on 31 May 1936 by John and Alan Lomax, 2:29.

Frye (1978, 185), Va.; Gellert (1939, 23f) "Well On a Monday"; Odum & Johnson (1925, 260) "The Day I Lef' My Home"; Odum & Johnson (1926, 111) "This Ol' Hammer"; Wharton (1957, 64). Hiking Jerry verse

in Odum & Johnson (1926, 90f) "'Free Labor' Gang Song." Coal Black and cornbread verses in Hurston (1935, 275f) "Mule on de Mount (Fla.). Cornbread verses in Odum & Johnson (1926, 105f) "Don't You Give Me No Cornbread" and (114) "I Don't Want No Cornbread"; Rosenberg (1969, 84) "Mule on de Mount" (Va.).

As is common in Black worksongs, "Biting Spider" is comprised of a series of stanzas either loosely associated in groups of two (as in this chant's opening verses and the ones beginning with "I don't want no . . .") or completely unrelated to each other. Drawing from the vast repertoire of floating lyrics, the songleader inserts stanzas where he sees fit, structuring the chant as it progresses. For that reason many of the verses in this number reappear in other worksongs recorded during the same session. Most have been documented in various worksong contexts throughout the South.

The title stanza with its reference to a "biting spider" seems to be one limited to the

southeastern seaboard region, having been collected from work gangs and menhaden crews solely in that area. Many versions frame the spider allusion in a boast, as in: "Bitin' spider, goin' round bitin' everybody:/But he didn't bite me" (see the Frye and Wharton citations above); others pose the same question as this one, asking where the "spider" left a loved one. Given these two variants, we might interpret the imagery in a number of ways. On the one hand, the spider may be a metaphor for death or in light of the feminine names always used at the end of the question, for a man who took advantage of the singer's extended absence (in prison or on the water) to "steal" his wife or girlfriend. (In this sense the spider would be parallel to the Jody figure in Afro-American folklore.) Thus the boasting verse becomes a statement of one's elusion of death or of the faithfulness of his partner. On the other hand, the "biting spider" could be a satiric reference to the size of the insects teeming in the often filthy living quarters provided for inmates. A verse recorded by Gellert mentions "biting spiders" in this context:

*Wake up this mornin, chinchies all hanging 'round my bed;
 Covered with bedbud, from my feet to my head.
 Biting spiders, marching up and down the floor;
 Others a-waiting, to push right through the door.*

Other verses in this worksong make further reference to the prison setting, citing the restriction of drinking water and the desire to return home where water is to be had for the asking. Perhaps the most telling stanza, however, is the sixth with its mention of the prison diet. According to the Virginia Penal Code of 1887, section 4127, "The convicts shall be fed on bread of Indian meal, or other coarse bread, and have one meal a day of coarse meat." In the mid-1930's when this song was recorded, that regulation was still in effect though a menu book for one of the road camps of that period reveals that often the meat was omitted altogether. Inmates were served beans and cornbread as often as seven times a week; a common alternate replaced the cornbread with white bread and substituted molasses for beans. It comes as no surprise that the prisoners, who were expected to toil at hard labor throughout the daylight hours, complained about the food.

The original cylinder recording of this song



Road work was one of the occasions where work songs were sung by prison labor crews.

Photo Courtesy Virginia State Library

was severely distorted, with greatly varying volume levels and extremely poor fidelity. Despite these problems, we felt that this piece represented an important theme in the southeastern worksong tradition. Through filtration and careful editing, some of the auditory problems have been significantly remedied; others, impossible to correct without altering the song, remain. For time considerations the final three verses of the original chant were edited out. Two of them, "Every mail day" and "No ready-made money," are repeated in the menhaden chanty appearing as the last selection of this album's first side.

Bright Light Quartet, "Menhaden Chanties," recorded by Alan Lomax in Weems, Va., Prestige-International DS 25008 (LP), 1960.

Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, "Cornbread, Meat and Molasses," Everest FS 206 (LP), c. 1952; "Cornbread, Peas and Black Molasses," Nixa NJL 18 & NJE 1074 (LP), 1958; "Cornbread and Peas," Fantasy 3317 (LP), c. 1960. Other versions by this oft-recorded duo probably exist.

Sonny Terry, Alec Seward & Woody Guthrie, "Cornbread, Meat and Molasses," Stinson 7 (LP), c. 1953.

Oh biting SPIDER, WHERE DID YOU LEAVE TROTTIN' LIZA?

Oh biting SPIDER, WHERE DID YOU LEAVE TROTTIN' LIZA?

In BIRMINGHAM, buddy, OH LORD, IN BIRMINGHAM.

When I seen her, seen her when she LEFT THE MOUNTAIN,

Oh Lord, I SEED HER, SEED HER WHEN SHE LEFT THE MOUNTAIN,

Oh she didn't STOP, buddy, LORD, LORD, SHE DIDN'T STOP.

Old hiking JERRY, hiking DOWN THE MAIN LINE SOUTHERN,

Old hiking JERRY, HIKING DOWN THE MAN LINE SOUTHERN,

Oh, dead on TIME, buddy, LORD, LORD, DEAD ON TIME.

Didn't stop here, Lord, to give NO COLD DRINK OF WATER,

Didn't stop HERE, LORD, TO GIVE NO COLD DRINK OF WATER,

She kept on BY, honey, LORD, LORD, KEPT ON BY.

I don't want no coal-BLACK WOMAN FOR MY REGULAR,

I don't want NO COAL-BLACK WOMAN FOR MY REGULAR,

Too low down, buddy, LORD, LORD, TOO LOW DOWN.

I don't want no peas, CORNBREAD, NEITHER MOLASSES,

I don't WANT NO PEAS, CORNBREAD AND MOLASSES,

It hurts my PRIDE, buddy, LORD, LORD, IT HURTS MY PRIDE.

I'm going back to, BACK TO THE GOOD WATER??

I'm going BACK TO, BACK TO THE GOOD WATER??

Lord, that's my HOME, BUDDY, LORD, LORD, THAT'S MY HOME.

4. THE MAN WAS BURNING (AFS 835 B2)—Joe Lee. Recorded at the Powhatan State Farm, State Farm, Virginia, on 14 June 1936 by John Lomax and Harold Spivacke. 1:13.

Hyatt (1970, 31f) "Immobility" (Va.); Rosenberg (1969, 124) "That Man Was Burning" (Va.).

This compelling religious ballad was sung by Joe Lee, a seventy-one-year-old inmate at the State Prison Farm. Although neither a group worksong nor a metrically regulatory chant, it is representative of the solo sacred songs intoned by many Afro-Americans as they toiled alone in the fields, bending over slowly drawn plows; as such, it serves as the religious counterpart to the secular field holler included earlier. The ballad's singer, Joe Lee, performed eleven selections for Lomax, all of them sacred pieces sung with the same intensity and depth of feeling evinced on this number. The violently dramatic narrative and vivid imagery of this ballad, however, cause it to stand out from the others, marking it as a classic in its genre.

The central theme of this song, that of supernatural punishment of a blasphemer, is rather unusual in the Black spiritual and gospel traditions though it is more common in the realm of Afro-American folktales. The ballad itself seems to be quite rare, with only one other version ever having been collected; that variant, almost identical in structure and text to Lee's rendition, was transcribed in 1942 by a W.P.A. fieldworker from the singing of a Black informant in Pittsylvania



An inmate of the State Prison Farm, Joe Lee sang spirituals with an intensity that witnessed to his deep religious convictions.

County. The opening verse of this alternate version details the blasphemy for which the gambler was punished:

*That man was sitting down gambling,
He made his expression a brood,
He held his last dollar above his head,
He said if I loose it, I will curse God.*

Apparently the gambler lost his final hand, cursed the Lord, and immediately was engulfed in fire. Lee begins his narrative when the flames of hell burst from the face of the blasphemer.

During the same year that this recording was made, Harry Middleton Hyatt collected a narrative rendition of this story in coastal York County. In this recounting, the gambler, after losing his last dollar and curing

God, walked away from the gambling table and sat on a nearby log where he was struck immobile. Word of this bizarre turn of events soon reached three preachers, who came to investigate. When they tried cutting the log to free the man, it began dripping blood, forcing them to leave the blasphemer there to die. Unlike the two ballad versions, the gambler in this story was not consumed by flames. However, this tale's Black narrator did note that the incident occurred in Georgia. I have been unable to locate any variants or references to this ballad in any non-Virginia collections of Anglo- or Afro-American folklore.

Prior to singing this song, Joe Lee made the following comments to Lomax and Spivacke: "Gentlemen, I'm glad to say I heard the songs that I sing; I hope and trust you all will meet me on the other side of the river, where we can meet Jesus eye to eye and face to face. If it takes all this to make me solid gold, pin it on me here, because I want to go to the other side of the river without a spot or a wrinkle."

*People in the land of Georgia,
A little they cared about God,
But when the news got in the land,
The man was burning on the log.*

*He was sitting down gambling,
His friends 'came frightened and scared,
Flames of fire came out of his mouth,
Came through his nose and ears.*

*Let me tell you about the man, was burning,
Way down yonder in the land of Georgia,
That man was burning
for blaspheming the name of God.*

*People in the land of Georgia,
Prudent wouldn't not stay,
Then they sent for a saw,
Just to try to get him away.*

*When the saw did come,
Began to sawing the log,
And as the sawdust fell,
It commenced a-dripping blood.*

*Let me tell you about the man, was burning,
Way down yonder in the land of Georgia,
That man was burning,
For blaspheming the name of God.*

*Let me tell you about the man, was burning,
Way down yonder in the land of Georgia,
That man was burning,
For blaspheming the name of God.*

5. CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM (AFS 724 B1)—James Wilson, lead, with R. Ramsay, George Goram, R. Brown, J. Kirby, Lemuel Jones, C. Meekins, and Ed Lewis. Recorded at the Virginia State Penitentiary, Richmond, Va., on 31 May 1936 by John and Alan Lomax, 1:47.

Courlander (1963a, 95f) "The Captain Can't Read" (Ala.), also in (1963b, 81f); Hurston (1935, 270ff) "Can't You Line It" (Fla.); Lomax (1934, 15) "Tie Shuffling Chant"; Lomax (1941, 262ff) "Sis Joe" (Tx.); Lomax (1947, 274ff) "Can'cha Line 'Em" (La.); Manning (1966, 46f), Tenn.; Odum & Johnson (1925, 262) "Raise the Iron"; Rosenberg (1969, 14) "Can't You Line It" (Va.); White (1928, 263f), Ala. The cited "Jawbone" references are Davis (1949, 319) "Walk Jawbone," apparently a minstrel-derived version (Va.); Nathan (1962, 464) 1840 minstrel text of "De Old Jaw Bone"; Scarborough (1925, 103f) four texts including a Va. variant entitled "Lula Gal"; *Sketches and Eccentricities* (1833, 39), Tenn.

Perhaps the most widely recognized type of worksong is the chant of the Black section gang, the work crew responsible for laying and maintaining railroad tracks. Such teams preceded the railroad wherever it went throughout the South, setting down the heavy crossties and steel rails as they intoned a series of task-specific chants to pace their coordinated efforts. When laying new track, for example, the work crews chanted to accompany every step of the procedure—unloading the steel from the railway car; lifting the rails onto the ties; spiking the rails; straightening, or lining, the tracks; and tamping the gravel between the wooden crossties. Each job, performed in unison to the chants of a gang songleader, required a different pace and thus demanded a separate worksong. For those crews charged solely with track maintenance, the work was faster but no less burdensome. Traveling along in rails in handcars, they replaced rotten crossties and rusty spikes and constantly straightened the heavy steel forced out of line by harsh weather and rumbling trains. Earning the sobriquet "gandy dancers" for their synchronized movements, these section gangs lined the rails by inserting a set of long, hooked iron bars under the tracks and pulling in unison, thus inching the rails back to alignment.

From the late 1800's until the 1930's, the Virginia Corrections Department hired out convicts to the railroad companies. It is entirely conceivable, therefore, that the eight Penitentiary inmates who recorded this track-lining chant had worked on the rails at some time during their prison terms. The worksong itself, "Can't You Line 'Em," is probably the most common track-lining chant found in the South, having been documented in Virginia, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. This version is of particular interest for the range of song traditions from which its stanzas are drawn, accentuating the freely-structured form of Afro-American work chants.

The song's opening verse with its appeal to "Jack the rabbit" and "Jack the bear" is a standard beginning for this chant. It may well be a survival of an earlier lyric in which these figures played a more prominent role. (Indeed, one 1925 variant lists them as "Brother Rabbit" and "Brother Bear" [Odum & Johnson, 262], familiar characters in Afro-American folktales.) The second stanza following the refrain is a variant of a couplet whose triple negative appears repeatedly in Black worksongs. Usually verses taking this form are directed against the "captain," as in this verse of a Virginia track-lining chant transcribed by a W.P.A. fieldworker:

*De cap'n can't read, de cap'n can't write
How do you know the time is right?
Rosenberg, #165, p. 14)*

Although the "boys" are the subject of this lyric from the Penitentiary, this may well have been a substitution reserved for the ears of the penal authorities. When out of earshot of the guards, inmates could easily shift from "the boys" to "the boss," changing the verse to one critical of the prison overseers. For example, instead of "The boys can't eat and the boys can't sleep," this stanza might alternately be sung, "The boss can't read and the boss can't see."

The jawbone references in the third stanza hark back to a much older tradition. The earliest citation of similar lyrics is an 1833 transcription of a dance song played by a Black banjo player in Tennessee; six years later a Kentucky newspaper mentioned "Jawbone" as an Afro-American corn shuck-ing song. At least two minstrel compositions employing this theme, "De Ole Jaw Bone"

and "Walk Jaw Bone," were published in the 1840's, and indications are that the "jawbone walk and jawbone talk" verse became a standard rhyme in minstrel repertoires. Songs with related elements have been collected twice in Virginia—once from Richmond Blacks in 1925 and once from an Albermarle County white informant who related what seems to be a minstrel version in 1934 (see citations above).

The penultimate stanza, beginning with "Oh, it rained forty days," combines the Biblical stories of Noah and Jonah in a single narrative structure. The initial couplet most commonly appears in the old spiritual, "Didn't It Rain;" in this context, however, the adjoining lyrics are restricted to the story of the Flood. The only precedent for this merger of the two accounts—one which presages this combination but does not institute it—is a North Carolina fragment collected in 1919 which includes the line "Old Jonah got mad cause de rain kept a droppin'" in a version of "Didn't It Rain" (White, p. 141). Apparently the shared element of the storm provided sufficient grounds for the singer to shift from one story to the other.

Such narrative freedom is characteristic of Black worksongs.

Rich Amerson, "Railroad," recorded by Harold Courlander in Ala., Folkways FE 4471 (LP), 1950.

Arvella Gray, "Arvella's Work Song," Birch 60091 (LP), 1979.

Henry Hankins, "Lining Track," recorded by Herbert Halpert in Ala., Library of Congress L 61 (LP), 1939.

Leadbelly, "Line Em," Everest FS 202 (LP), Folkways FA 2034 (LP), Stinson 19 (LP), n.d. "Lining Track," Folkways FA 2488 (LP), n.d.

Allen Prothero, "Track Lining Song," recorded by John and Alan Lomax in Tenn., Library of Congress L 8 (LP), 1933.

T.C.I. Section Crew, "Track Linin'," Paramount 12478, 1927.

James Wilson and Group, "Can't You Line 'Em," an alternate version of this chant recorded in the same session as the selection on this album, Library of Congress L 52 (LP), 1936.

The "jawbone" verse in the context of a dance tune appears in Leadbelly, "Corn Bread Rough (Sukey Jump)," Folkways 31006 (LP), n.d.

*Jack the rabbit, Jack the bear,
Can't you line 'em up, just a hair?*

*Can't you line 'em?
Can't you chase 'em up?
Can't you line 'em
up just a hair?*

*Lord, the boys can't eat and the boys can't sleep,
The boys won't do just to sooth my feet.*

*Can't you line 'em?
Can't you chase 'em up?
Can't you line 'em,
just a hair?*

*Oh, jawbone walk and jawbone talk,
Jawbone eat with a knife and fork.
I was broke and the 'morrow flew,
How was I to get some too?*

*Can't you line 'em?
Can't you chase 'em up?
Can't you line 'em
just a hair?*

*I got a woman in the heart of town,
?? like a morning gown.*

*Ho, boys, CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM?
HO, BOYS, CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM?
HO, BOYS, CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM.
LINE 'EM UP, JUST A HAIR?*

*Oh, it rained forty days, forty nights without stopping,
Sinner got mad 'cause the rain kept a-dropping.
Jumped up into a belly of a whale,
Stand still, people, let me tell you this tale.*

*LORD, HO, BOYS, CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM?
HO, BOYS, CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM?
HO, BOYS, CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM,
LINE 'EM UP, JUST A HAIR.*

*Jack the rabbit, Jack the bear,
Can't you line 'em up, JUST A HAIR?*

*CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM UP?
CAN'T YOU CHASE 'EM UP?
CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM UP
JUST A HAIR?
Yeah!*

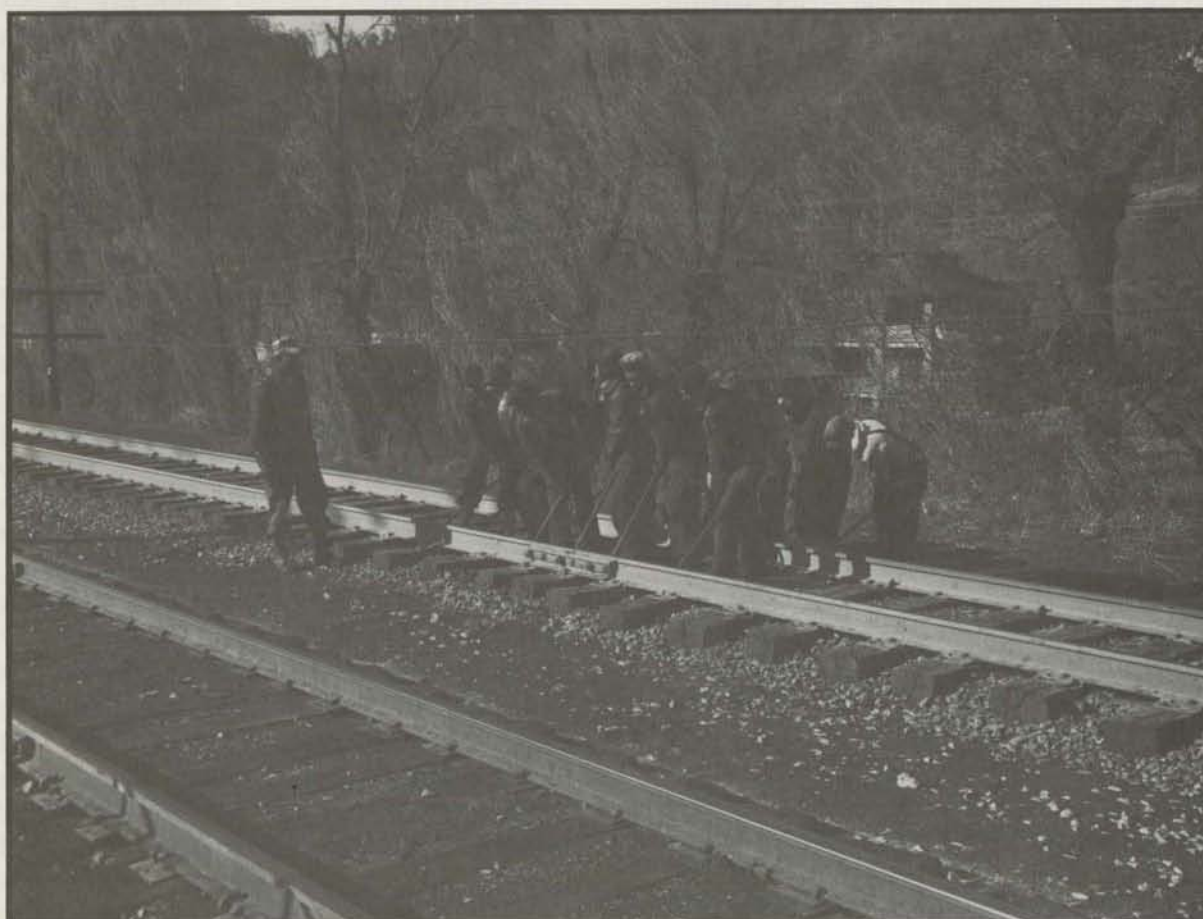


Photo Courtesy Norfolk Southern Corporation

Black section gangs chanted worksongs as they laid and maintained railroad track from the marine railways in coastal shipyards to the rail spurs in mountain mines.

6. THE NEW BURYING GROUND (AFS 725 A1)—Willie Williams and Group. Recorded at the Virginia State Penitentiary, Richmond, Va., on 31 May 1936 by John and Alan Lomax, 3:11.

Belden & Hudson (*N.C. Folklore*, 1952, 653ff) "The New Burying Ground (3 N.C. texts); Gellert (1936, 46f) "Let's Go To De Buryin"; Gordon (1927, 21) "Come On, Come On, Let's Go to Bury" (N.C.), also in (1938, 24); Rosenberg (1969, 132) "Way Over in the New Burying Ground" (Va.); Sandburg (1927, 473) "Way Over in the New Buryin' Groun" (N.C.). See also Work (1940, 116) "The Hammers Keep Ringing."

Not all of the group worksongs intoned by Afro-American prisoners functioned to pace unison activity, nor were all of these choruses of a secular nature. "The New Burying Ground," for example, is an old, rather uncommon spiritual performed here by a group of inmates led by Willie Williams. It is representative of those songs sung by prisoners working in close proximity at tasks which did not require coordinated efforts. Its purpose, thus, was more to relieve tedium and communicate information than to establish a common rhythm.

Judging from its lyrics and slow, mournful cadences, "The New Burying Ground" probably originated as a funeral song chorused at wakes and during solemn processions to the cemetery. In the brutal prison environment, however, where the deaths of inmates at the hands of penal guards were not uncommon, this song took on new meaning. The change is reflected in the lyrical shift from generalized observations (as on the sound of a coffin being sealed) to specific references to the deceased. This trend towards contextual localization (i.e., making the lyrics relevant to the prison setting) is evident both in this version and in one recorded by Lawrence Gellert under similar circumstances. The singers in Gellert's variant directly identify the dead man as well as his murderer:

*Cap'n kill my buddy, let's go to de buryin', (3X)
Way over in de new buryin' ground.*

These Virginia inmates are equally explicit in their references, citing the legendary "bad man" Lazarus as the unfortunate victim. According to Afro-American oral tradition, Lazarus was a Black laborer who defied his



When plowing the same field, Black farmers often passed time by chorusing favorite spirituals.

overseers and was ultimately gunned down by the "high sheriff" for his transgression. The story of this murder became the subject of a widely known Black narrative worksong, a version of which was recorded by Willie Williams and a group of inmates shortly after this spiritual was collected ("Po' Laz'rus," AFS 730 B1; another variant of this ballad appears as a menhaden chanty on side B, selection 1 of this album). Lazarus was a hero who dared to stand up to the white power structure, a proud act which cost him his life. The final verse in this rendition of "New Burying Ground," however, indicates that perhaps the incident did not end with the death of Lazarus. In citing the burying of the "captain"—a term commonly used in reference to white authority figures, especially penal guards—the singers imply either that Lazarus killed a lawman before he himself was shot or that a guard was slain in retribution for the Black man's murder. This closing stanza thus served to reaffirm that the singers, though in captivity, had been shorn neither of their pride nor their strength.

At least one other song in the Black spiritual/gospel tradition bears the title "New Burying Ground"; that piece shares only those words with this funerary chant, however, and is radically different in both structure and mood (see Barton in Jackson, 1967, pp. 306-09). As with "Biting Spider," this worksong seems to be limited to the southeastern seaboard region, having been collected only in Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia. Both of the gospel groups who have recorded this song for commercial release originally hail from the Carolinas.

Rev. A.G. Holly, "Let's Go to Bury," recorded by Robert Winslow Gordon in N.C., Library of Congress L 68 (LP), 1925. The Sensational Nightingales, "Burying Ground," Peacock 1756, Peacock PLP 137 (LP), c. 1954.

Shelby Gospel Four, "New Burying Ground," Decca 7471, 1938.

This selection also appears on the Library of Congress albums L 3 and, in excerpted form, L 52.

Courtesy Tom West, Birdsong Peanut Co., Suffolk, VA

*O come on, come on, and let's go to burying,
COME ON, COME ON, LET'S GO TO BURYING,
COME ON, COME ON, LET'S GO TO BURYING,
'WAY OVER, OVER ON THE NEW BURYING
GROUND.*

*O the hammer keep a-ringing on somebody's coffin,
HAMMER KEEP A-RINGING ON SOMEBODY'S
COFFIN,
HAMMER KEEP A-RINGING ON SOMEBODY'S
COFFIN
'WAY OVER, OVER ON THE NEW BURYING
GROUND.*

*O it must have been Lazarus, that the people was
burying,
O IT MUST HAVE BEEN LAZARUS, THAT THE
PEOPLE WAS BURYING,
MUST HAVE BEEN LAZARUS, THAT THE
PEOPLE WAS BURYING,
'WAY OVER, OVER ON THE NEW BURYING
GROUND.*

*O come on, come on, and let's go to burying,
COME ON, COME ON, LET'S GO TO BURYING,
COME ON, COME ON, LET'S GO TO BURYING,
'WAY OVER, OVER ON THE NEW BURYING
GROUND.*

*O it must have been my captain, that the people
was burying,
O IT MUST HAVE BEEN MY CAPTAIN, THAT
THE PEOPLE WAS BURYING,
MUST HAVE BEEN MY CAPTAIN, THAT THE
PEOPLE WAS BURYING,
'WAY OVER, OVER ON THE NEW BURYING
GROUND.*

7. EVALINA—Crew of the *Charles J. Colonna*. Recorded while off the coast of Wildwood, N.J., in 1955 by Benjamin O. Colonna, Jr., 3:16.

Evaline verses in Courlander (1963a, 94f) "Evalina" (Ala.), also in (1963b, 86f); Frye (1978, 185), Va.; Jackson (1972, 197f) "Hammer Ring" (Tx.); Lomax (1947, 274ff) "Can 'cha Line 'Em (La.); Odum & Johnson (1926, 105f) "Don't You Give Me No Cornbread." Together with "mule on the mount" verses in Cornwall (1940), Fla.; Hurston (1935, 275f) "Mule on de Mount" (Fla.); Rosenberg (1969, 84) "Mule on de Mount." Mule on the mount" verses also in Odum & Johnson (1926, 90f) "'Free Labor' Gang Song," (96ff) "I'm Goin' Back Home," (119) "Mule on the

Mountain," and (120f) "I Got a Mulie"; Work (1940, 235) "Hot Boilin' Sun Comin' Over."

One of the most common of the menhaden chanties, "Evalina" echoed over the waves from the Jersey coast to the Gulf waters of Louisiana and Mississippi and was chorused wherever brawny crews of Black fishermen hauled in bulging nets of bunkers. This rendition of the chant was recorded on board the Norfolk-based steamer *Charles J. Colonna* while its crew fished off the south Jersey coast, filling the vessel's hold with a cargo that would be delivered to a Wildwood, New Jersey, processing plant owned by Virginia's Reedville Oil and Guano Company (now the Zapata Haynie Corporation). The original tape was made by Benjamin Colonna, grandson of the man for whom the steamer was named, on a portable recorder held in one of the purse boats while the nets were being hardened. The lapping of waves against the sides of the wooden boat, the flapping of thousands of menhaden trapped in the taut net, and the roar of the engines on the parent ship are all audible in this recording, at times

masking the intelligibility of the lyrics cried out by the crew's lead songster and chorused by some two score voices.

The chanty begins when the lead chan-tyman recognizes the need for unison pulling—as determined by the size of the set—and calls out the familiar opening words of the chanty "Evalina." As the crew completes this and subsequent lines, they strain to draw the net further into the angled purse boats, bringing tons of fish closer to the water's surface and holding them steady as the steamer's dip net descends and scoops up the wriggling porgies. While the purse boatmen hold the net, one can hear them calling amongst themselves: "Alright boys, get together!" "Hold it right there!" "Keep it steady, boys!" As the load lightens and the necessity for synchronized activity lessens, the chatter slows and the chanty draws to a close.

This chanty is comprised of four stanzas loosely linked in groups of two. The initial set belongs to a large complex of Evalina verses found throughout the South and documented among railroad section gangs, logging crews, menhaden fishermen, and chain gangs. Most of these verses, which have countless permutations, link Evalina with money or



As the purse boat men of the steamer *Charles J. Colonna* harden the net, Benjamin Colonna, Jr., records their chanting of "Evalina," included on this album. The photo was taken by the master of the ship, Captain Gene Swift, in 1955.

Photo by Gene Swift

money-making activities. The opening stanza of this chanty, for example, has been collected in Virginia in a related form which identifies not the source of Evalina's riches but rather their location:

*I got a girl, she's got money 'cumulated, (2X)
In de bank, Lawd, Lawd, in de bank.
(Rosenberg, #937; see also Hurston)*

Another associated lyric, this one recorded from a Florida menhaden crew, sheds light on Evalina's activities:

*Evalina, she runs a whorehouse on the water, (2X)
In Birmin'ham, Lord, Lord, in Birmin'ham.
(Cornwall ms.)*

The initial line in this Florida stanza is parallel to those opening the penultimate verse in "On a Monday," this album's first selection; the final line is identical to that which closes the "Biting Spider" chorus.

Even more pervasive than the Evalina verses are those referring to a "mule on the mountain" or "hiking Jerry." This set of stanzas is found in a wide swath of Afro-American worksong contexts, a diversity which prompted one Virginia W.P.A. fieldworker to dub them the "best-known" of all traditional Black lyrics (W.P.A. transcript to Rosenberg #937). Fifteen years prior to this comment, the researchers Odum and Johnson had noted that the fluid worksong built around the "mule on the mount" verses was a "pick-and-shovel favorite repeated over and over with variations and exclamations" (1926, 120). Frequently stanzas from this complex will be sung in sets, relating a brief narrative which often includes an element of brag-gadocio; the verses in this chanty contain one such boast, as the singer claims that only he can move and ride the mule Jerry. In other worksongs such couplets appear alone, fleetingly referring to the implied story but not functioning as part of a narrative structure. Such isolated verses from the "mule on the mountain" complex are found in the selections "Biting Spider" and "Every Mail Day" on this album.

Oftentimes in these lyrics the word "muley" is used alongside or instead of "mule." This term refers to a hornless ox, a beast of burden whose role was similar to that of the mule in the agrarian South.

Rich Amerson, "Railroad," recorded by Harold Courlander in Ala., Folkways FE 4471 (LP), 1950
Bright Light Quartet, "Menhaden Chanties," recorded by Alan Lomax in Weems, Va., Prestige-International DS 25008 (LP), 1960.
T.C.I. Section Crew, "Track Linin'," Paramount 12478, 1927.

*O Evalina, O LORDY, SHE'S GOT A MONEY
'CUMULATOR,
chatter*

*O Evalina, O LORDY, SHE'S GOT A MONEY
'CUMULATOR,
chatter*

*She got it 'tween her legs, O LORDY,
LORD, LORD, SHE GOT IT 'TWEEN HER LEGS.
chatter*

*O my little baby, O LORD, SHE SHAKES LIKE
JELLY ALL OVER,
chatter*

*O my little BABY, O LORD, SHE SHAKES LIKE
JELLY ALL OVER,
chatter*

*From her hips on down, O LORDY,
LORD, LORD, FROM HER HIPS ON DOWN.
chatter*

*Lord, I got a muley, O LORD, A MULE ON THE
MOUNTAIN CALL HIM JERRY.*

*Lord, I got a muley, O LORD, GOT A MULE ON
THE MOUNTAIN CALL HIM JERRY.*

*I'm gonna bring him down, O LORDY,
LORD, LORD, I'M GONNA BRING HIM DOWN.*

*If I go bring him, O LORDY, Lordy WHO IN THE
WORLD IS GOING TO RIDE HIM?*

*If I go bring him, WHO IN THE WORLD IS GOING
TO RIDE HIM?*

chatter
*I'm going to ride him myself, O LORDY,
LORD, LORD, I'M GOING TO RIDE HIM
MYSELF.
chatter*

8. DRINKING OF THE WINE—Walter Kegler, lead, with the Crew of the *Barnegat*. Recorded while off the coast of Crab Island, N.J., on 8 August 1950 by an N.B.C. Radio crew, 1:50.

Beard (B.L. Lunsford Collection, 1959, 560)
"Drinking of the Wine" (N.C.); Belden &

Hudson (*N.C. Folklore*, 1952, 78) "Drinking Wine" (N.C.); Cornwall (1940), Fla.; Jackson (1972, 245ff) "Drinkin' That Wine" (Tx.); Odum & Johnson (1925, 136) "Drinkin' of the Wine"; Parrish (1942, 250f) "Drinkin' of the Wine" (Ga.); Rosenberg (1969, 28) "Drinkin' Wine" (Va.); Wharton (1957, 66).

Though sometimes singing such frankly explicit lyrics as those in "Evalina," menhaden crewmembers also chanted the lines of favorite sprituals, their deep voices floating over the seas and creating, as one long-time fisherman expressed it, "a regular church on the water." The most popular sacred song adapted for menhaden chanting was "Drinking of the Wine," sung here by the crew of the menhaden steamer *Barnegat*, a vessel based in Beaufort, N.C., and manned by Carolina and Virginia fishermen. When the ship was fishing off the Jersey coast, slowly working its way south, it was boarded by a National Broadcasting Company radio crew which was producing a documentary program on the menhaden industry and its chanting tradition. The resultant radio show included a number of interviews with *Barnegat* crewmembers and the chanty "Drinking of the Wine," recorded from the side of the steamer while the purse boat men were hardening the net on a large set of bunkers. Broadcast on the 31st of August, 1950, this program gave national exposure to the last of America's chanting traditions. Unfortunately, except for a few rare private recordings (such as that of "Evalina"), no further effort was ever made to document the onboard singing of these chants. This selection was dubbed from a transcription of the radio documentary now in the possession of Benjamin Colonna, co-owner for many years of Norfolk's Colonna's Shipyard.

Perhaps originating as a communion hymn (hence the reference to wine), the song "Drinking of the Wine" takes its title from its refrain, the last line of which is repeated at the close of every verse. The core of each stanza is one of the numerous time-honored couplets found throughout the spiritual tradition, many of which are not linked with any particular song. Two such couplets are included in the abbreviated rendition of the chanty presented here though the crewmembers of

the *Barnegat* often sang others in their stead. When an N.B.C. interviewer asked the steamer's chanty leader, Walter Kegler, for the verses to the chanty, for example, Kegler responded with four couplets, only one of which he actually chanted when hardening the set documented by the radio crew. The other verses were built around the following lines:

*I got a mother in the Promised Land,
Bye and bye I'll shake her hand.*

*If you get there before I do,
Tell my mother I'm coming too.*

*Up on the mountain when Jehovah spoke,
Out of His mouth came fire and smoke.*

Many variants of "Drinking of the Wine," including this one, contain at least one verse of the "If my mother asks for me" form, with successive stanzas anaphorically repeating the couplet and replacing "mother" with other kinship terms. This lyrical set lends itself well for use in dangerous occupations where the singers labor far from their loved ones for extended periods of time. When relating how the plea should be answered, the singers invariably give a fatalistic response, indicating the uselessness of hoping to ever again see them alive. This rendition's reply of "tell her death done summon me" just as commonly appears as "tell her I'm gone to Galilee" (Jackson, 1972, 247) or "tell her that death has silenced me" (Beard, 1959, 560). When using this song as a work chant, the singers confront the ever-present possibility of death squarely, looking beyond to a heaven where wine flows as free as water.

As with many of the Black maritime chanties, "Drinking of the Wine" has been documented in a variety of land-based occupational contexts. It has been heard as a weed-chopping song intoned by Georgia road crews, as a logging and flatweeding chant sung by Texas convicts, and as a field worksong chorused by Alabama prison farm inmates. In many of these settings, the singers emphasized the drinking theme and added secular passages to the song, dramatically changing its character. Of the many renditions collected from menhaden fishermen, however, none depart from the sacred theme of the old spiritual.

Rev. Julius Cheeks, "Holy Wine," Peacock 1859, c. 1960/62.

Crew of the *Barnegat*; this same selection, recorded by the N.B.C. Radio crew, was released on a privately printed album entitled "If He Asks You, I Was Laughing," Legend Recordings, in the mid-1950's. Mitchell's Christian Singers, "Drinkin' of the Holy Wine," Vocalion 04844, 1938.

*Drinking of the WINE, WINE, WINE,
chatter*

*Drinking of the WINE, THE HOLY WINE,
chatter*

*You ought to been to HEAVEN TEN THOUSAND
YEARS,
DRINKING OF THE WINE.
chatter*

*Oh, if my MOTHER ASKS FOR ME,
chatter*

*Tell her that DEATH DONE SUMMON ME,
chatter,*

*You ought to been to HEAVEN TEN THOUSAND
YEARS,
DRINKING OF THE WINE.
chatter*

*Two white HORSES SIDE BY SIDE,
chatter*

*One of them HORSES I'M GOING TO RIDE,
chatter*

*You ought to been to HEAVEN TEN THOUSAND
YEARS,
DRINKING OF THE WINE.
chatter*

9. EVERY MAIL DAY—William Thompson, lead, with John Ball, William Carter, E.B. Chewning, Capt. Matthew Gaskins, Aurelius Henderson, William Johnson, Eddie Laws, Benjamin Smith, and William Smith. Recorded at Weems, Va., on 23 April 1980 by Glenn Hinson, 2:36.

Cornwall (1940) "Lord, Lord" (Fla.); Frye (1978, 184) Va.; Lomax (1934, 84ff) "Goin' Home"; Odum & Johnson (1926, 75f) "If I Can Git to Georgia Line," (82f) "I Got a Letter, Captain," (90f) "'Free Labor' Gang Song," (94ff) "O Captain, Captain," (121) "Lookin' Over in Georgia," and (123f) "Dupree's Jail Song"; Rosenberg (1969, 84) "Mule on De Mount" (Va.); Wharton (1957, 64); Work (1940, 234) "Convict Song (2)."

This forceful worksong vividly portrays the plight of a laborer working far from his loved ones and unable to return to them when summoned. For the convict it was the law and prison walls which kept him away from his home; for the logwoods laborer, railroad section hand, or menhaden fisherman, however, it was the necessity of making a living which carried him to isolated locations far from friends and family. Versions of this terse but eloquent worksong, with its characteristic opening two verses, were chanted in these and countless other occupational contexts throughout the South. This rendition was sung by a group of menhaden fishermen, all of whom learned the song while hauling in nets swollen with tens of thousands of bunkers.

Although the menhaden industry's chanty-ing tradition disappeared with the introduction of mechanical net-raising equipment in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the songs remain fresh in the memories of older purse boatmen. For this recording Captain Matthew Gaskins—the first Black captain of a menhaden vessel—convened ten such fishermen, most of whom had worked with each other at some point in their long careers. Gathering around the bedside of a companion no longer able to walk, these men opened the evening by telling stories of the "old days" when bunker schools were sighted from the crow's-nest and chantyleaders were hired as much for their skill at singing as for their ability to work. Within a short time the fishermen were chorusing the old chanties, each contributing favorite lead lines as they recalled struggling with the nets in the purse boats. "Evalina," "Mule on the Mountain," "Sweet Rosie Anna," and other songs echoed into the night. The chant most often repeated by this robust assemblage, however, was "Every Mail Day." All agreed that this chanty was a favorite learned by every menhaden crew member early in his apprenticeship. As they chanted the rendition included here, one of the fishermen became so absorbed in the exhilarating sensation of singing once again with a crew that he cried out to his fellows to "fall back" on the nets, recalling the chatter between the paced lines of menhaden chanties. When asked to consciously simulate such patter in the next song, the men found they



Photo by John Frye

Trapping herring in the heart of a Chesapeake pound net, these fishermen sang chanties to pace their pulling; after the herring season, many would join menhaden crews.

were unable to re-create that aspect of their chanting. "I can't do that 'less'n I got some music," asserted one of the fishermen. "I got to hear those bunkers jumping!"

The narrative core of this worksong rests in its initial three stanzas; the receipt of a letter preceeds the singer's lament that he hasn't

sufficient funds to return home and his resolution to work a few more days to earn that money. When John and Alan Lomax recorded worksongs in the Virginia State Penitentiary in 1936, a five-stanza rendition of "Every Mail Day" was one of the first songs they collected. The first three verses of

that piece were virtually identical to these taped fully forty-four years later. The fourth stanza in this chanty, a floating verse unrelated to the opening narrative, is from the "mule on the mountain/hiking Jerry" complex. The final verse, however, is not as common, having never been documented in the Virginia menhaden or land-based worksong traditions. Indeed, the fantasy of being able to see one's girl ("brown," of course, referring to "brownskin woman") all the way in Georgia seems an unlikely one to be entertained by fishermen in the low-riding purse boats. The closest variant of this stanza discovered is a pick-and-shovel worksong recorded by Odum and Johnson in the mid-1920's:

*Well I can stan', Lookin' 'way over in Georgia; (3X)
O-eh-he, Lawd, Lawd, She's burnin' down, Lawd,
she's burnin' down. (1926, 121)*

*Unidentified, "Mail Day I Gets a Letter," recorded by
Lawrence Gellert, probably in S.C., Rounder 4004 (LP),
c. 1935.*

*Oh, every mail day, O Lordy, MAIL DAY I GETS A
LETTER,
Oh, every mail day, O Lordy, MAIL DAY I GETS A
LETTER,
Said, "Daddy come home, O Lordy, LORD, LORD,
DADDY COME HOME.*

*Well, how can I go there, O Lordy, AIN'T GOT
NO 'READY MADE MONEY,
Well, how can I go there, O Lordy, AIN'T GOT
NO 'READY MADE MONEY,
Fall back on 'em, men, fall back!
To pay my way, O Lordy, LORD, LORD, TO PAY
MY WAY.*

*That's why I am got to roll here, O Lordy, ROLL
HERE A FEW DAYS LONGER,
That's why I'm got to roll here, O Lordy, ROLL
HERE A FEW DAYS LONGER,
Then I'm goin' home, O Lordy, LORD, LORD,
I'M GOIN' HOME.*

*Ol' hiking Jerry, O Lordy, HIKED TILL HIS FEET
START ROLLING,
Ol' hiking Jerry, O Lordy, HIKED TILL HIS FEET
START ROLLING,
Just like a wheel, O Lordy, LORD, LORD, JUST
LIKE A WHEEL.*

*I can stand here, O Lordy, LOOK IN A BARBER-
SHOP IN GEORGIA,
Well, I can stand here, O Lordy, LOOK IN A
BARBERSHOP IN GEORGIA,
And see my brown, LORD, LORD, SEE MY BROWN.*

Side 2

1. LAZARUS—William Thompson, lead, with John Ball, William Carter, E.B. Chewning, Capt. Matthew Gaskins, Aurelius Henderson, William Johnson, Eddie Laws, Benjamin Smith, and William Smith. Recorded in Weems, Va., on 23 April 1980 by Glenn Hinson. 3:00.

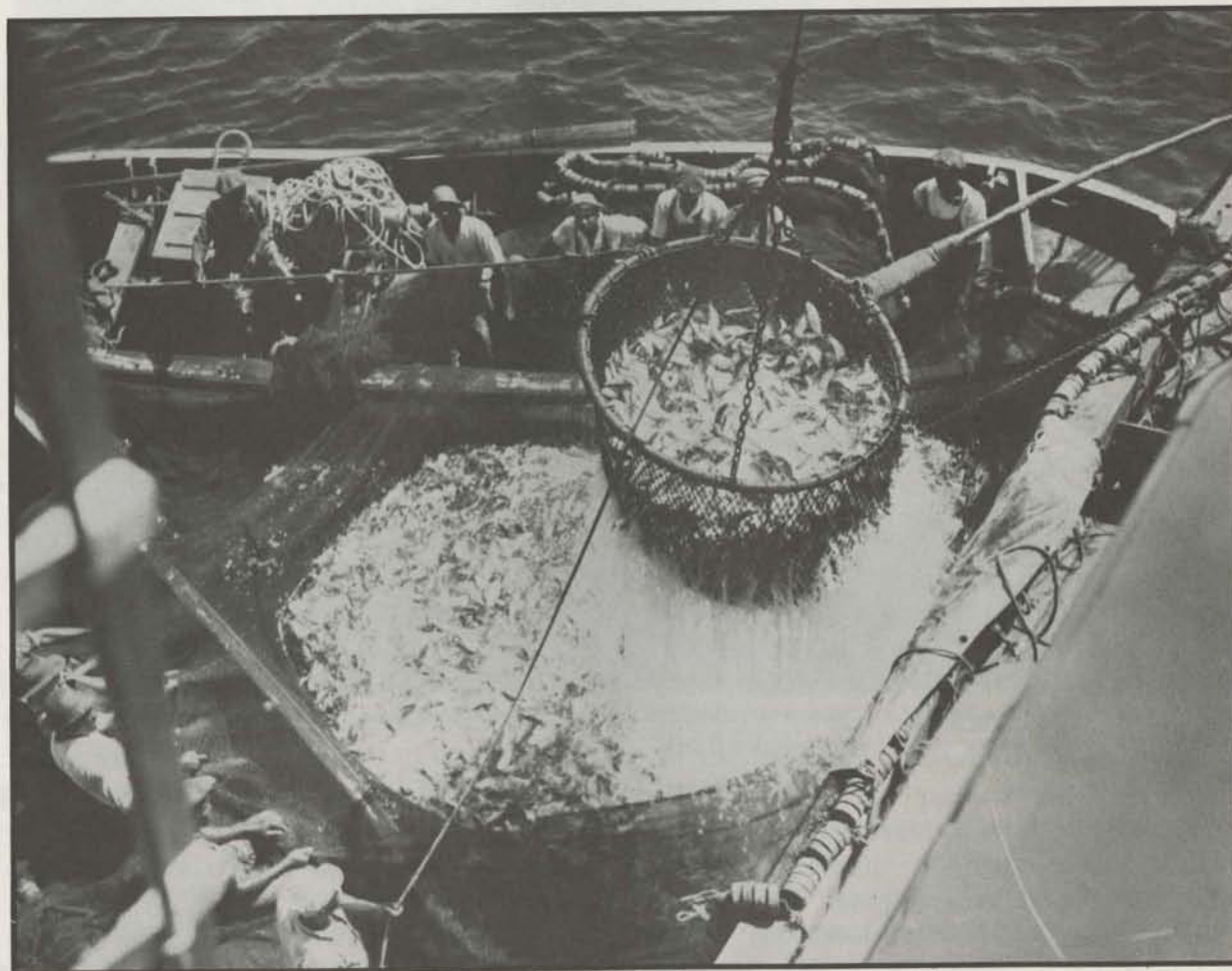
Cornwall (1940), Fla.; Frye (1978, 185), Va.; Laws (1964, 252); Lomax (1934, 91ff) "Po' Laz'us"; Lomax (1941, 342ff) "Po' Laz'us"; Lomax (1947, 308f) "Po' Laz'us"; Odum & Johnson (1926, 50ff) "Bad Man Lazarus" (Ga.) and (54f) "Billy Bob Russell" (N.C.); Work (1940, 239) "Po' Ol' Laz'rus."

One of the most common ballads in the Afro-American worksong repertoire is that recounting the story of the "bad man" Lazarus, a legendary figure who defied his white overseers and was ultimately murdered for his transgression. The Archive of Folk Culture in the Library of Congress has among its holdings more than eighteen versions of this song, most of which were collected from prison inmates in sites as far-ranging as Virginia, Florida, and Arkansas. Further, "Lazarus" seems to have been as popular on the water as it was on land; documentary evidence reveals that this ballad was chorused by menhaden crews from the eastern seaboard to the Gulf Coast. This robust rendition of "Lazarus" was performed by a group of menhaden fishermen who had gathered together for the express purpose of recording the chanties which had fallen into disuse more than two decades earlier. Remembered without difficulty, this ballad was one of the first which came to the minds of the assemblage, who joined in vigorously when the lead chantyman called out the initial phrase of each line. As in the performance of "Every Mail Day," one of the fishermen interjected net-hauling cries between the chanted lyrics, a distinguishing characteristic of these chanties.

Although the narrative of the ballad "Lazarus" remains relatively constant in its numerous documented versions, the opening verse, in which Lazarus' crime is recounted,

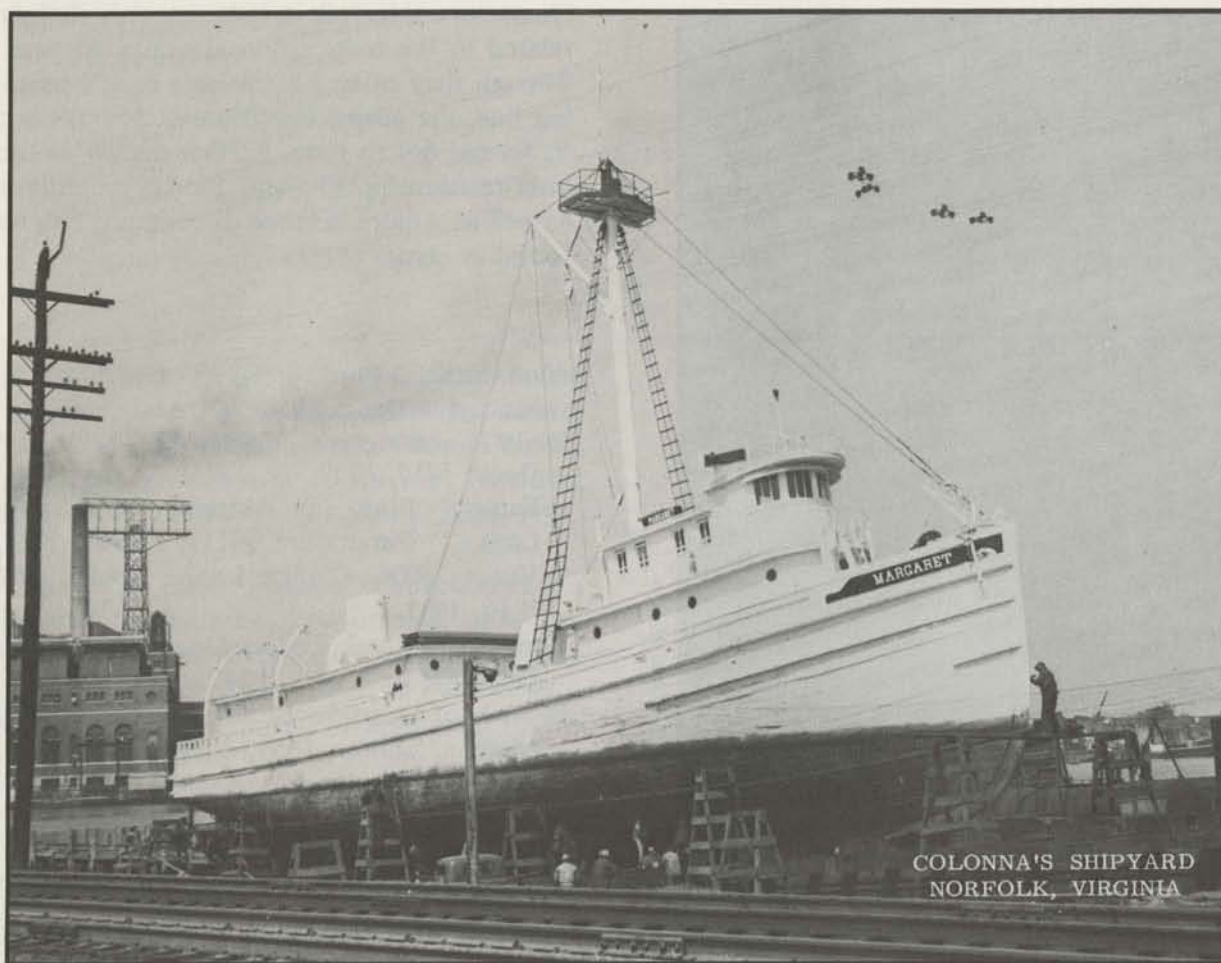
varies widely. In the earliest recorded variant, collected in the mid-1920's in Georgia, Lazarus robbed the "commissary" (the company store at a work camp or industry-owned settlement), thus incurring the wrath of the company and ultimately the sheriff (Odum & Johnson, 1926, 50ff). Closely related is a version reported by Lomax (1941, 342ff) in which Lazarus merely "walked on the commissary counter," an act of defiance which, though less serious than theft, nonetheless cost him his life. The inmates at the Virginia State Penitentiary provided yet a third reason for the protagonist's punishment, noting in a 1936 rendition that someone "take this hammer and carry it to the captain" because Lazarus had escaped from the chain gang (AFS 730 B1). Among menhaden fishermen, however, the most popular version of this ballad was apparently the one performed here in a slightly bowdlerized form. Although the chanty leader, now a staunch churchmember, clearly sings that Lazarus "sitted" on the

commissary counter, his associates add the missing "h" that follows the verb's first letter, clarifying the deed for which the hero was put to death. By defecating on the counter, Lazarus demonstrated his contempt for the bosses' system of low wages and controlled purchases in company-owned stores. That defecation was indeed the act in question was confirmed by this group of singers; further corroboration is provided by a similar chanty text recorded by W.P.A. workers off the Florida coast which opens with an almost identical stanza (Cornwall ms., 1940). In any case, whether Lazarus robbed the commissary, defecated on its counter, or fled from the chain gang, no justification was provided for his murder by the law (implicitly linked with the company for whom the protagonist worked). That Lazarus was slain without a trial even though he was found with "head hung down"—offering no resistance to the sheriff—makes this ballad a forceful indictment of the law enforcement system.



With a cry from the purse boats, the steamer's dip net ascends from the mass of wriggling bunkers, carrying the fish to the ship's hold.

Courtesy the North Carolina News Bureau



A lone caulker works on the hull of the menhaden steamer Margaret in this 1954 photo taken at Colonna's Shipyard.

Courtesy Colonna's Shipyard, Norfolk, VA

When Virginia Penitentiary inmates recorded this ballad for the Lomaxes in 1936, they followed the verse about Lazarus' mother with one concerning that hero's sister. Unlike other versions which simply changed the kinship title and perhaps substituted "screaming and crying" for "whooping and hollering," this variant borrowed its final stanza from the Evalina complex, resulting in the lines:

*Lazarus' sister, she had a forty dollar fortune, (2X)
Between her legs, Lord, Lord, between her legs.
(AFS 730 B1)*

Bright Light Quartet, "Po' Laz'rus," recorded by Alan Lomax in Weems, Va., Prestige-International DS 25009 (LP), 1960.

James Carter and Group, "Po' Laz'rus," recorded by Alan Lomax in Miss., Prestige-International DS 25009 (LP), 1960.

Henry Morrison, "Laz'rus," recorded by Alan Lomax in Ga., Prestige-International DS 25001 (LP), New World Records NW 278 (LP), 1961.

Booker T. Sapps, Roger Matthews, Willy Flowers, "Po' Laz'rus," recorded by Z.N. Hurston, A. Lomax & E. Barnicle in Fla., Flyright-Matchbox SDM 258 (LP), 1935.
T.C.I. Section Crew, "Section Gang Song," Paramount 12478, 1927.
Josh White and Sonny Terry, "Poor Lazarus," Asch A 432 (LP), n.d.

*Oh, old man Laz'rus, O Lordy, SIT ON THE COMMISSARY COUNTER,
Well, old man Laz'rus, O Lordy, SITTED ON THE COMMISSARY COUNTER,
He walked away, O Lordy, LORD, LORD, HE WALKED AWAY.*

*Judge told the high sheriff, O Lordy, GO AND BRING ME LAZ'RUS,
Well the judge told the high sheriff, O Lordy, GO AND BRING ME LAZ'RUS,
Dead or alive, O Lordy, LORD, LORD, DEAD OR ALIVE.
Let's get 'em in men, let's get 'em!*

*They found old Laz'rus, O Lordy, WAY DOWN 'TWEEN TWO MOUNTAINS,
They found old Laz'rus, O Lordy, WAY DOWN*

*'TWEEN TWO MOUNTAINS,
His head hanging down, Lord Lordy, LORD, LORD, HEAD HANGING DOWN.*

*They shot old Laz'rus, O Lordy, SHOT HIM WITH A GREAT BIG NUMBER,
They shot old Laz'rus, SHOT HIM WITH A GREAT BIG NUMBER,
Forty-fo', O Lordy, LORD, LORD, A FORTY-FO'.*

*Well, Laz'rus' mother, O Lordy, SHE COME SCREAMING AND A-HOLL'RING,
Get 'em men, get 'em!
Oh, Laz'rus' mother, O Lordy, SHE COME SCREAMING AND A-HOLL'RING,
"You shot my son, O Lordy, LORD, LORD, SHOT MY SON."*

*They buried old Laz'rus, O Lordy, BURIED HIM IN A BRAND NEW CASKET,
They buried old Laz'rus, O Lordy, BURIED HIM IN A BRAND NEW CASKET,
Down in his grave, O Lordy, LORD, LORD, IN HIS GRAVE.*

2. SLEEP ON—Lena Thompson, Lucy Scott and Lucy Smith. Recorded at the Rappahannock Oyster Company, Bluff Point, Va., on 5 November 1980 by Glenn Hinson. 2:25.

Rosenberg (1969, 118) "Sleep On" (Va.).

Until recently, choruses of spirituals and gospel songs could often be heard rising from crab-picking establishments on Virginia's Eastern Shore, sung by women workers who broke the early morning stillness with their close harmonies and impassioned tones. Grandmothers worked alongside their children and grandchildren, passing along not only techniques for rapidly cracking and gutting crabs but also songs such as "Sleep On," sung to relieve the tedium of the seemingly unceasing flow of shellfish. "That's one of the old, way-back songs—a spiritual with a long history in the crab houses," remembers crab picker Lucy Scott. This and other traditional numbers have remained popular in such establishments, keeping pace with a work process that has changed only slightly in the past eighty years. Although now supplemented with more contemporary gospel pieces, the time-honored spirituals and hymns still comprise the core of the crab pickers' repertoire.

Lena Thompson, Lucy Scott, and Lucy Smith, the three singers of this selection, have each worked at the Rappahannock Oyster Company for more than twenty-five years, a



Photo by Glenn Hinson

Lena Thompson, Lucy Smith, and Lucy Scott cracking steamed blue crabs at the Rappahannock Oyster Company.

period over which they have witnessed much change in that facility's operation. When established as an oyster shucking institution in 1946, Rappahannock Oyster included among its building a number of one-room shanties which served as housing for the Black laborers brought in each week to crack oysters. Since no Afro-Americans lived in the immediate vicinity, oystering and crabbing companies would bus Black workers to their worksites at the beginning of each week and return them to their homes on Friday. In the interim the laborers resided in the primitively furnished shanties provided by the company. In the early 1950's, the Rappahannock Oyster Company expanded to include a crab-picking operation, thus extending the facility's working season and keeping the shanties full almost year-round. Within a decade, however, workers were making daily trips to the house and the shacks were destroyed. Soon thereafter, the oystering operation was discontinued, leaving only crab pickers at Bluff Point. Their numbers, too, are decreasing. Where once the company regularly employed sixty workers, now they can find only twenty-five willing to engage in the manual drudgery of cracking the thousands of crabs which cross their tables daily. As the

work force diminishes and the older crab pickers retire, the worksong tradition is slowly disappearing, replaced now by the radios of the younger laborers.

"Sleep On" is a simply structured spiritual built around a single core stanza which can be repeated endlessly by changing the family member's title in each verse. This flexible format makes this piece particularly well-suited for use as a work song for it can be easily extended to help fill the tedious hours that plague mechanically repetitious labor. In addition to being a favorite in crab picking and oyster shucking establishments, "Sleep On" is widely chorused in Black churches throughout the southeastern states; it remains a standard in the repertoire of older church members just as it was for many of their parents. Further, this song remains popular among many of the area's older solo instrumentalists, especially guitarists, who play it in the traditional fingerpicked style of the Piedmont and Tidewater regions. Nonetheless, "Sleep On" has only rarely been documented in this form. The numerous songs bearing this title released by gospel quartets in the 1930's and '40's, many which seem to be derived from the immensely popular version recorded by the Silver Leaf

Quartette of Norfolk in 1928, are only slightly related to the older spiritual presented here. Though they often borrow this song's opening line, the gospel renditions follow neither its format nor its tune. Further details on the inter-relationship of these quartet recordings as well as a more detailed discography can be found in Seroff (1980).

Alphabetical Four, "Sleep On, Darling Mother," Decca 7854, 1941.

Dixie Hummingbirds, "Sleep On, Mother," Decca 7715, 1939.

Famous Blue Jay Singers, "Clanka-A-Lanka," Paramount 13119, Crown 3329, Varsity 6006, Clanka Lanka 144,001/002 (LP), 1931.

Lonnie McIntorsh, "Sleep On, Mother, Sleep On," Victor 21271, 1928.

Silver Leaf Quartette of Norfolk, "Sleep On, Mother," Okeh 8655, Velvet Tone 7068, Clarion 6060, Diva 5113, 1928.

Swanee Quintet, "Sleep On Mother," Nashboro 7000 (LP), c. 1955/60.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe, "Sleep On Mother," Decca 8657, c. 1943.

*Sleep on, mother, sleep on,
Lay down and take your rest.
Well, you got to lay your head
UPON MY SAVIOR'S BREAST,
I LOVE THE LORD,
MY SAVIOR AND MY GOD,
SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON.*

*Sleep on mother, sleep on,
Lay down and take your rest.
Well, you got to lay your head
UPON MY SAVIOR'S BREAST.
I LOVE THE LORD,
MY SAVIOR AND MY GOD,
SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON.*

*Sleep on, father, sleep on,
Lay down and take your rest.
Well, you got to lay your head
UPON MY SAVIOR'S BREAST.
I LOVE THE LORD,
MY SAVIOR AND MY GOD,
SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON.*

*Sleep on, sister, sleep on,
Lay down and take your rest.
Well, you got to lay your head
UPON MY SAVIOR'S BREAST.
I LOVE THE LORD,
MY SAVIOR AND MY GOD,
SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON.*

*Well, sleep on, brother, sleep on,
Lay down and take your rest.
Well, you got to lay your head
UPON MY SAVIOR'S BREAST.
I LOVE THE LORD,
MY SAVIOR AND MY GOD,
SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON, SLEEP ON.*

3. COME ALONG DOWN—John Mantley, lead, with Raleigh Griffin, Ernest Johnson, Lee Wynn, and William Wynn. Recorded at Colonna's Shipyard, Norfolk, Va., on 12 April 1980 by Glenn Hinson, 1:55.

As the oaken mallet thudded heavily against the long-handled horsing iron, the long-since silenced sound of a horsing chant echoed once again across Colonna's Shipyard. Slowly and deliberately John Mantley edged his iron up a seam in the lower hull of the wooden "lighter," crying out the rhythmic lines that paced the striker's blows. Mantley had not sung with the beetle and iron since 1920 when he left Norfolk and moved to New York. There he found a caulking force comprised mainly of first generation European immigrants who, unlike his Black co-workers in the South, did not sing as they swung the tapered mallets. Upon returning to the Norfolk shipyards twenty years later, Mantley discovered that the tradition of chanting with the horsing iron had become a victim of changing times and progressive technology. Cold steel was replacing pliant wood, and the caulkers' art was losing ground to that of the welder. With the decrease of the once-sizeable caulking crews came the demise of the worksong tradition. Nonetheless, when called upon to remember the lyrics he had chanted fully sixty years earlier, John Mantley fell to singing as if the intervening time was but weeks. The sound of the heavy beetle and the sight of the ancient lighter—a barge probably in use when he began working at Colonna's Shipyard in the second decade of this century—pulled onto the railway and brought the words of the chant streaming back into his consciousness. Without hesitation Mantley sang to the striker, urging him to "drive 'em down, buddy!"

Born in 1901, John Mantley began caulking when he was seventeen years old, choosing that occupation at the urging of a cousin who

followed the caulking trade. Caulking at that time was the best paying job available to Blacks in the Norfolk area, remitting as much as \$2.75 a day for first-class laborers. Mantley recalls how initially he was put to work swinging the beetle, laboring long hours to the regulatory worksongs of the older hands. As he gained experience, however, he began alternating horsing chores with his fellows, holding the horsing iron for one seam while striking with the mallet for another. When he graduated to manipulating the iron, Mantley was expected to be able to chant the words which told the hammerman when to bring down the beetle.

"Come Along Down" was one of the traditional horsing chants Mantley learned in the Norfolk shipyards. Comprised of a series of loosely structured quatrains, the song's lyrics are more directive than narrative, telling the hammerman when to strike rather than relating any kind of story. This type of chant, with its multiple repetitions and fluid verse structure (using both the *aaab* and *aabb* line patterns), would have been sung by a single horsing team rather than in unison by several teams working on the same vessel. In this recording the three caulkers not working on the lighter contribute responsorially to Mantley's chanted lines.

*Come along down, buddy,
Come along down, big boy.
Come along down, buddy,
Come along down, big boy.
Come along down, buddy,
Come along down, big boy.
Drive 'em down, buddy,
Drive 'em down, buddy.*

*That's the blow, buddy,
Makes him go, big boy.
That's the blow, buddy,
Makes him go, big boy.
That's the blow, buddy,
Makes him go, big boy.
All day long, buddy,
All day long, buddy.*

*Sally got great long bangs,
Hangs way down, buddy.
Sally got great long bangs,
Hangs way down, buddy.
Who gonna curl them bangs
After I'm gone, buddy?
Who gonna curl them bangs
After I'm gone, buddy?*

*One more time, buddy,
One more time, big boy.
One more time, buddy,
One more time, big boy.
Drive 'em down, buddy,
Drive 'em down, big boy.
Drive 'em down, buddy,
Drive 'em down, big boy.*

*One more time, buddy,
One more time, big boy.
One more time, buddy,
One more time, big boy.
One more time, buddy,
One more time, big boy.
That's all right, buddy,
That's all right, buddy.*

Sit down! Sit down one time!

4. I'M NOT PAYING FOR THEM SINGING—Lee Wynn. Recorded in Norfolk, Va., on 14 November 1980 by Glenn Hinson, 1:40.

Among Blacks for whom song was an intrinsic part of the work process stories such as this are common, recalling incidents when the laborers' chanting was mistakenly identified by their overseers as recreational activity which diverted the workers' attention from their jobs. When singing was forbidden, the work invariable suffered, and ultimately the supervisor was forced to ask the laborers to recommence singing so that the work could proceed as before. In this story, said to have taken place at Colonna's Shipyard sometime in the late 1920's or early 1930's, a barge captain complains about singing among the workers horsing his vessel. The owner of the shipyard, a man esteemed by the caulkers, tries to argue with the captain, but his efforts are futile. He finally directs the laborers to stop chanting. The captain gets his comeuppance quickly, however, for as the worksongs cease so does the coordination of the beetles and irons, thus forcing the caulkers to move at a slower, more deliberate pace. Interestingly, when relating the story, Lee Wynn used the musical phrase "off-key" to describe the unregulated hammering, underlining the close relationship perceived between the horsing process and the work chants. The captain finally pleads with Mr. Colonna to ask the caulkers to sing again, realizing that "if they don't sing they don't work." The accuracy of

this observation becomes apparent with the renewal of the chanting, for the work pace quickens as the beetles beat a steady rhythm on the irons. The story closes with the barge captain contentedly tapping his feet to these cadences, satisfied that song is as much a part of the work as the pounding of the oaken mallets.

On many separate occasions workers at Colonna's Shipyard told me this story, each time with essentially the same details. This version is related by Lee Wynn, a caulker who at the time of this recording had labored at that yard for forty-six of his sixty-three years. Following in the footsteps of his father, who worked as a dock laborer for the Colonna's, Lee joined the shipyard while a teenager, becoming a caulker during a time when more such workers were needed because three large barges had run aground. In those days each shipyard employed a full crew of caulkers to work the hulls and decks of the barges, menhaden steamers, oyster dredgers, and other wooden vessels built and maintained there. As the number of metal-hulled boats increased, however, job opportunities for caulkers decreased. Those who continued ply-

ing the trade became, as Wynn recalls, the "gypsies" of the shipyards, moving from one yard to another as work came available. "They didn't have no special home port," he remembers. "Wherever the caulking was, that's where they were." Lee Wynn, one of the few caulkers still working full-time for a major shipyard, is an exception to this rule. Yet when a large caulking job needs to be done, Wynn must be joined by other laborers called in by the shipyard. Such caulkers are becoming increasingly difficult to find. The caulkers' trade along with their chants and lore is slowly disappearing.

I'm still working Colonna Shipyard. I've been there . . . I've been there for forty-six year. And I was just thinking 'bout times when one of the barge captains was talking to Mr. Colonna. The fellas was singing and horsing, and he thought, I guess, they were goofing off, 'cause he ran up to the offices there and told Mr. Colonna, said, "Mr. Colonna, you go down there and stop them fellas from singing. I'm not paying for them singing, I'm paying this for them caulking." He said, "Well, I don't want to stop them because that's something like..."

"Well I want you to stop 'em! I want my boat so they can get it off the railway this evening." So Mr. Colonna went down there and stopped the fellas from singing. And the fella came 'round there, and didn't hear the mallets going, the fella was off-key horsing, and his boat looked like was getting behind time. He went up to the office running and told Mr. Colonna, "Please, Mr. Colonna, go there and tell the fellas to sing some more." Said, "Because I want my boat off the railway, and if they don't sing they don't work." So Mr. Colonna told him, "Well I told you, that the way they keep their momentum going, is by singing." So Mr. Colonna went up and told the fellas, said, "Fellas, y'all go ahead and horse like y'all were horsing." Said, "The man want his boat," said, "and give him a good job." So the fellas started singing and horsing, and looked like the man was kind of happy, he went back up on deck. Came back down there and the fella was singing our praise; I overlooked and he was patting his feet to it. So I guess he was satisfied with the way them fellas was working.



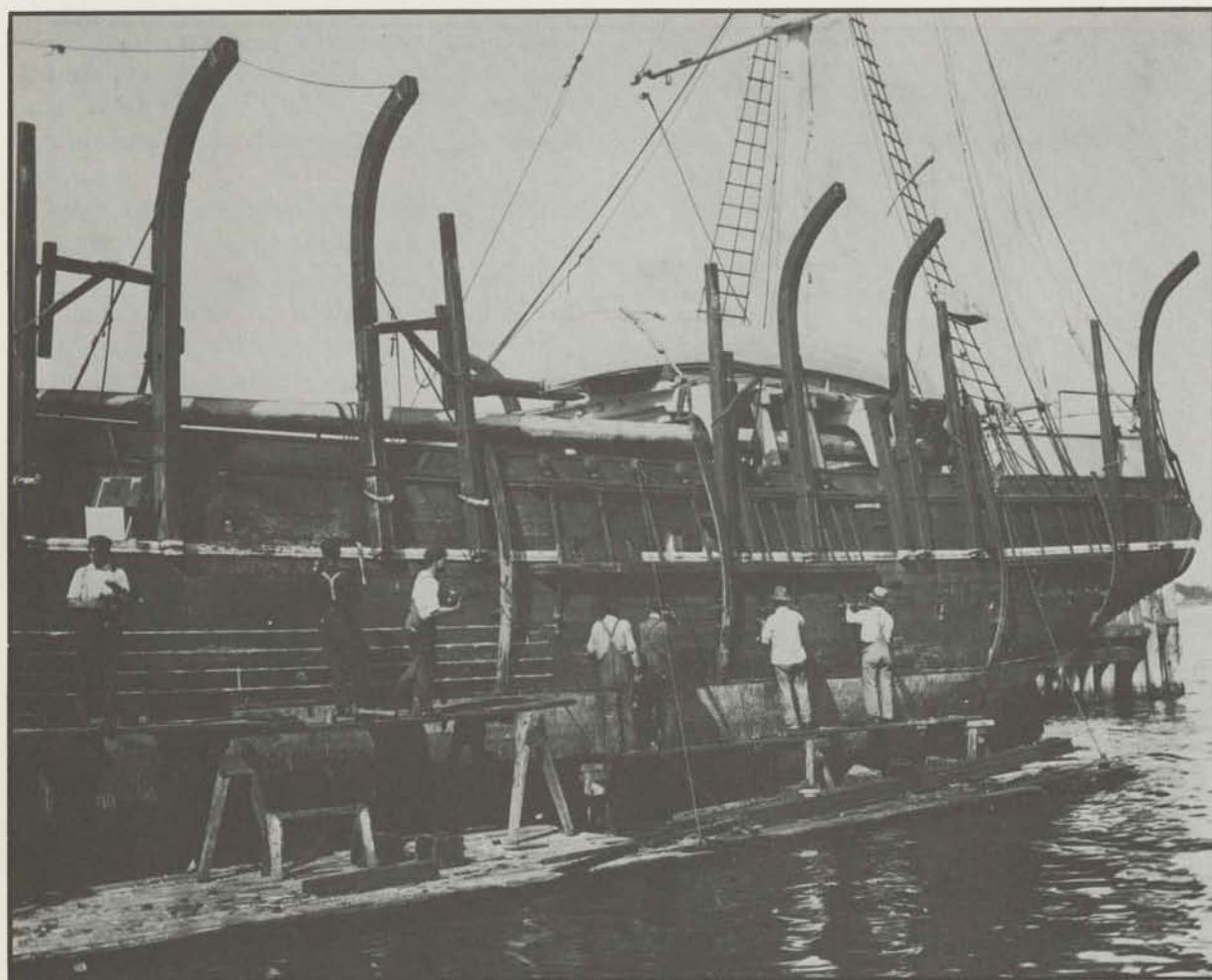
Returning from a successful day of fishing, the hold of this vessel is so full of bunkers that her deck is awash. The purse boats trail at the rear of the steamer.

Courtesy the North Carolina News Bureau

5. ON MY WAY TO NEW ORLEANS—Lee Wynn, lead, with John Mantley. Recorded at Colonna's Shipyard, Norfolk, Va., on 16 November 1980 by Glenn Hinson, 2:29.

Black cat verses in Scarborough (1925, 91) "Tom Cat" (Tx.); White (1928, 229). Sacred verses in worksong contexts in Gellert (1936, 18f) "Work All De Summer"; Lomax (1934, 58f) "Ain' No Mo' Cane on De Brazis" (Tx.), (195f) "Dink's Song" (Tx.); Odum & Johnson (1926, 100f) "Captain, I'll Be Gone" and (139) "Some o' Dese Days"; White (1928, 258), Ga.; Work (1940, 237) "Captain, O Captain." Jacksonville verses in Gellert (1936, 30f) "Wake Up Boys"; Manning (1966, 46f), Tenn.; Odum & Johnson (1926, 92f) "He-I-Heira"; Parrish (1942, 221) "Sangaree" (Ga.) See also White (1928, 309), Ala.

The cadent chants of shipyard caulkers, as those of railroad crews, road gangs, and menhaden fishermen, drew their lyrics from the vast repertory of traditional Afro-American verses in both the sacred and secular realms. In this horsing chant sung to



Courtesy of The Mariners Museum

A team of Black caulkers caulk seams in the lower hull of the Alice Knowles. In addition to singing pace-setting chants while horsing, such workers sang non-pacing worksongs while individually caulking a vessel.

the hammering of John Mantley, Lee Wynn links a series of time-honored couplets into eight quatrains, three of which are derived from the spiritual tradition. In explaining the insertion of religious lyrics in an otherwise secular worksong, Wynn noted that the horsing crews' repertoires were quite broad, including songs as diverse as favorite church pieces and chants learned from section gangs repairing the railway which ran through the shipyard. "Some was made up, and then some would be from the railroad," he said of the horsing chants, "anything that would keep rhythm with the hammer. Some would be songs where you wouldn't want no ladies to hear and then some would be religious songs." This selection seems to take its lyrics from all four of Wynn's categories.

The initial stanza of "On My Way to Jacksonville" belongs to a broader complex of worksong verses commenting on things which "ran so fast," many of which end with the rhyme expurgated here by Wynn, whose religious convictions prevented him from completing the line. This lyric has been

documented in the folksong collections of both White and Scarborough although neither compilation actually includes the words. Scarborough explains that the full verse would probably not "pass the censor" (Scarborough, 1925, 91). The missing word, of course, is "ass"—one of the milder terms the caulkers kept from the ears of women wandering onto the all-male shipyard.

Wynn follows this verse with two couplets from the spiritual tradition, both of which are thematically linked to verses in the fourth and seventh stanzas. Though often associated with the spiritual "Oh Mary Don't You Weep, Don't You Mourn," these lines also appear in a wide range of Afro-American sacred songs. Their inclusion in an otherwise secular work chant is readily explainable in light of their lyrical content. Each of these verses refers to leaving one's current situation by metaphorically flying away and "going home." In a religious setting, "home" would refer to heaven; in such a secular context, however, it more logically points to the singer's literal homeplace, expressed here

figuratively as Jacksonville, a site probably chosen more for its distance from the job location than for any intrinsic merit. These verses clearly express dissatisfaction with prevailing labor conditions, a sentiment certainly shared by all workers forced to do backbreaking labor for long hours at low pay. That these same lyrics recurrently appear in worksongs sung by chain gangs and labor crews thus should come as no surprise. Of the many secular variants born of these couplets, perhaps the most telling is the widely-sung worksong verse related to this chant's penultimate stanza:

*Some of these mornings, and 't won't be long,
Capt'n gwine ter call me, and I be gone. (White, 1928,
258)*

The set of Jacksonville verses, repeated twice in this chant, are floating couplets that reappear throughout the Afro-American worksong tradition. They have been recorded in pick-and-shovel songs (Odum & Johnson, 1926, 93), prison wake-up chants (Gellert, 1936, 30f), and track-lining worksongs (Manning, 1966, 47). The matter-of-fact reference to death is particularly significant in such worksong contexts, indicating the singer's recognition of the danger inherent in many of the jobs to which Black laborers were relegated. In the Georgia Sea Islands one of these Jacksonville verses has been recorded as part of a children's game song (Parrish, 1942, 99f), a musical genre from which this chant's sixth stanza is also drawn. Those verses are variations on the traditional "hambone" sequence, with the more common "bottle of wine" conclusion replaced here by "a five and dime." The final stanza of this chant is a directive sung by Wynn to his hammerman; it is almost identical to verses chanted by John Mantley in "Come Along Down."

*On my way/to New Orleans/
Black cat sitting/on the sewing machine/
Sewing machine/ran so fast/
Made ninety-nine stiches/in the po' cat's ---/*

*When I get up/on the mountaintop/
You hear my wings, boy/go flippety-flop/
One of these mornings/bright and fair/
Take my wings, boy/and try the air/*

*If I live, boy/don't get killed/
Make my home, boy/in Jacksonville/
Jacksonville/is a mighty good place/
Without shame/or disgrace/*

One of these mornings/I'm going home/
 You won't see me/I'm going home/
 One of these mornings/bright and fair/
 I'm gon' take my wings, boy/try the air/

If I live, boy/don't get killed/
 Make my home, boy/in Jacksonville/
 In Jacksonville, boy/mighty good place/
 Without shame, boy/or disgrace/

If I get up/in the morning/
 I'm gonna make me/a diamond ring/
 If that ring, boy/doesn't shine/
 I'm gonna get me/a five and dime/

One of these mornings/won't be long/
 You gonna look for me, boy/and I'll be gone/
 When I get to heaven/I'm gon' sing and shout/
 Won't be nobody/to turn me out/

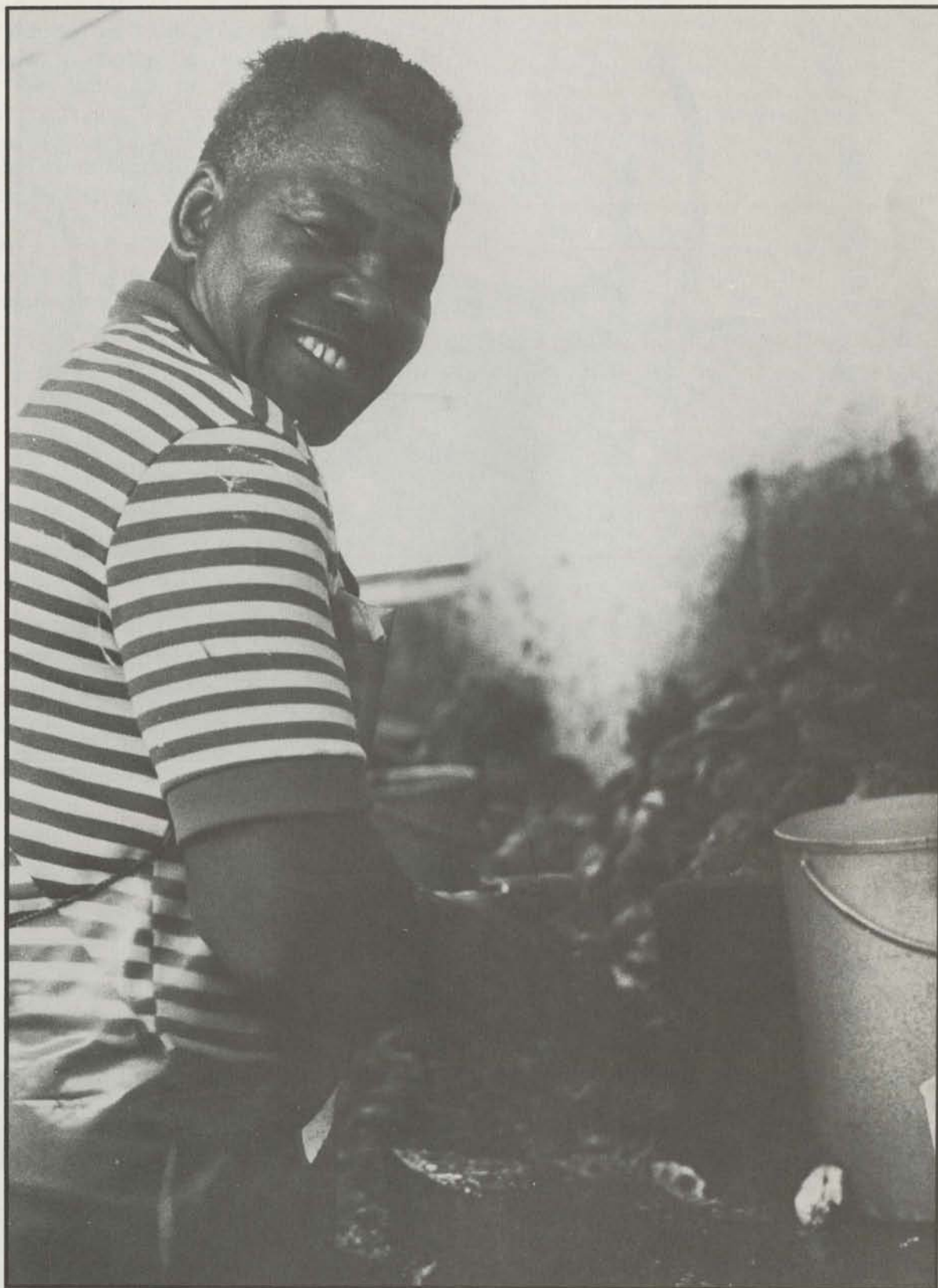
Mmmm, buddy/mmm, buddy/
 Mmmm, buddy/knock 'em down/
 Oh that's the blow, boy/that makes him go, boy/
 That's the blow, boy/that makes him go/

Sit down mate, sit down!
 Okay, I'm tired.

6. WADE IN THE WATER—Rev. Timothy Hayes, lead, with Beulah Brown, Ruth Coston, Nathaniel McKelvin, Everette Ware, and Rosa Wilson. Recorded at the Marshall Seafood Company, Glass, Va., on 28 February 1980 by Glenn Hinson, 3:17.

Johnson (1926, 84f) "God's A-Gwinter Trouble de Water"; Lomax (1960, 470f) "Wade in the Water"; Parrish (1942, 170) "Wade In Nuh Watuh Childun" (Ga.). Color rhymes in Fenner (1901, 113) "Go Mary, an' Toll de Bell" (Va.); Odum & Johnson (1925, 140) "I Heard the Angels Singin'"; White (1928, 135); Perow (1913, 156f) "Pharaoh's Army Got Drownded" (Tenn.).

That songs sung by the laborers in an industry whose work processes have remained virtually unchanged for the past century echo an early style of a cappella harmonizing should come as no surprise. At the Marshall Seafood Company, a small oyster shucking establishment in Gloucester County, Rev. Timothy Hayes frequently leads his fellow workers in choruses of traditional hymns, Afro-American spirituals, and old gospel songs, calling out lead lines just as Black songsters have done for



Rev. Timothy Hayes, song leader at Marshall Seafood, has shucked oysters for over forty-three years.

generations in church and other religious meetings. The shuckers working alongside Hayes at the concrete shucking table respond as a chorus, blending their voices with an ease that implies years of singing together. If the

day's oysters are large and easily opened, the shuckers' voices are likely to be heard long before dawn floating across the inlet waters and mingling with the cries of gulls and the sounds of oyster boats setting out for another day's

Photo by Glenn Hinson

work. It was on such a morning that the six shuckers at the Marshall Seafood Company sang "Wade in the Water," one of the most familiar and yet most compelling of the Black spirituals.

The acknowledged songleader in this oyster house is Rev. Timothy Hayes, a sixty-year-old shucker whose resonant voice has earned him the lead position in many of the shellfish establishments at which he has worked. Rev. Hayes began shucking commercially when he was seventeen years old and has continued in that occupation ever since, working at various other jobs (including menhaden fishing) in the off-season months. Long before he was called to preach, Rev. Hayes had been singing sacred songs in the shucking houses, often chorusing them alongside fellow workers who served as deacons or ministers in local churches. "Very seldom did you hear me sing what you call ragtime or jazz," he remarks. "I didn't care too much about that—never did." Instead, Rev. Hayes chose to sing the traditional religious songs of his elders, keeping alive a heritage long since forgotten in most such work settings.

This rendition of "Wade in the Water," sung in a call and response fashion, is structured so that traditional spiritual couplets can be inserted easily into the song, extending it as the singers deem appropriate. The first verse following the repeated refrain is one such couplet, a metaphorical admonition found in countless Black religious songs. The remaining stanzas are all linked by parallel references to the colors of the brethren's clothing. This set of verses, which often includes the color *blue* for "the children who told the truth" or who "just come through," is most commonly associated with "Wade in the Water" although it appears in other spirituals as well. (Odum and Johnson, for example, recorded three of these couplets as part of the song "I Heard the Angels Singin'" [1925, 140]; Thomas Fenner in a published collection of lyrics sung by the Hampton Students included the full complement of verses in the spiritual "Go Mary an' Toll de Bell" [1901, 113].) The shuckers' harmonies are chorused over the constant sound of cracking oysters, a sound which ceases only when the last of the day's maritime harvest is shucked and the workers depart for home.

"Wade in the Water" has been recorded dozens of times by soloists, quartets and

choirs. The following is a selected discography:

Birmingham Jubilee Singers, "Wade in the Water," Vocalion 1563, 1929.

The Dixieaires, "Wade in the Water," Sunrise 2117, c. 1948/50.

Golden Gate Quartet, "Wade in the Water," Columbia 37833, Columbia CL 6102, 1946.

Brother John Sellers, "Wade in the Water," Monitor 505 (LP), n.d.

Soul Stirrers, "Wade in the Water," Star 103, P 501, 1960; also an in-concert version on Checker 10051 (LP), 1968.

Sunset Four Jubilee Quartette, "Wade in the Water," Paramount 12273, 1925.

*Oh, wade in the water,
WADE IN THE WATER, CHILDREN,
WADE IN THE WATER,
GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*I said, WADE IN THE WATER,
OH, WADE IN THE WATER, CHILDREN,
WADE IN THE WATER,
WELL, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*Well, mind little child how you walk on the cross,
Well, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER,
Well, your foot might slip and your soul be lost,
WELL, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*I said, wade IN THE WATER,
Well, WADE IN THE WATER, CHILDREN,
WADE IN THE WATER,
GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*Well, who's that yonder dressed in red?
Well, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER,
Well, must be the children that Moses led,
Well, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*I said, WADE IN THE WATER,
OH, WADE IN THE WATER, CHILDREN,
WADE IN THE WATER,
WELL, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*Well now, who's that yonder all dressed in black?
Well, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER,
Well, must be the children that done turned back,
WELL, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*I said, wade IN THE WATER,
WADE IN THE WATER CHILDREN,
WADE IN THE WATER,
Well, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*Now, who's that yonder dressed in red?
Well, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER,
Yes, it must be the children that Moses led,
WELL, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*I said, wade IN THE WATER,
Well, WADE IN THE WATER CHILDREN,
WADE IN THE WATER,
Oh, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*Now, who's that yonder dressed in white?
Well, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER,
Well, must be the children of the Israelite,
Well, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*I said, wade IN THE WATER,
Well, WADE IN THE WATER CHILDREN,
WADE IN THE WATER,
Well, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

*I said, WADE IN THE WATER,
Oh, WADE IN THE WATER CHILDREN,
WADE IN THE WATER,
Well, GOD'S GONNA TROUBLE THE WATER.*

7. I DON'T WANT NOBODY STUMBLING OVER ME—Creola Johnson, lead, with Audrey Davis and Group. Recorded at C.C. Conway Seafood, Wicomico, Va., on 15 November 1979 by Glenn Hinson, 3:49.

Just as Rev. Hayes was the acknowledged songleader in the oyster house at which he worked, so also was Creola Johnson at C.C. Conway Seafood, a larger shucking establishment in the nearby community of Wicomico. When this selection was recorded, only a few shuckers at Conway's still sang while working. Nonetheless, Ms. Johnson and a handful of co-workers more than compensated for the others' non-involvement, singing with a spirited enthusiasm and emotional intensity which set all in the house to shouting out words of encouragement. Much of the power infusing Creola Johnson's singing is captured in this rendition of "I Don't Want Nobody Stumbling Over Me," a spiritual she introduced to this oyster house years earlier. As her voice rose above the din of cracking oysters and sliding shells, Ms. Johnson pressed her eyes shut, seemingly directing all her attention to the words she cried out yet continuing to adroitly shuck oysters as if the movements were so automatic they required no thought. Twenty-seven long years of handling the sharp mollusks and a lifetime of singing the Lord's praises had well prepared her for carrying on both activities simultaneously.

Born near Danville, Va., in 1927, Creola Johnson clearly recalls hearing her parents

and grandparents sing spirituals while toiling in the tobacco fields. That singing was an old-time tradition, she remembers her grandfather telling her, practiced by the slaves who worked that same land in his parents' days. Of the songs passed down from those earlier times, "I Don't Want Nobody Stumbling Over Me" was a favorite of the Johnson family and one which Creola learned while still a child. When she was seventeen, Creola secured employment in a Danville tobacco factory, feeding leaves into a stemming machine that had only recently replaced a full line of manual laborers. Despite the roar of machinery, she and her fellow workers sang while working, chorusing hymns and spirituals just as crews of hand stemmers had done for generations before them. Since the tobacco factory job was seasonal, Ms. Johnson also worked at a local textile mill where she continued the worksong tradition. "The machines was loud," she recalls, "but you could hear if you was singing. We always had loud voices, and that's what made us sing loud—by working where it's noise at." In the early 1950's, Ms. Johnson left the Piedmont and settled in Norfolk, where she quickly learned the shucking trade working in an establishment that hired over five hundred shuckers. As she had done elsewhere, she sang on the job, fitting easily into a local worksong tradition she hadn't even known existed prior to her move to the Tidewater.

A deeply religious woman, Creola Johnson sings only sacred songs, many of which she learned from her grandparents. "I Don't Want Nobody Stumbling Over Me" is one of her favorites, a piece she has carried from the bright leaf fields to the Danville tobacco and cotton factories to the coastal shucking houses. The song itself follows a straightforward lyrical sequence with a simple change in the title of the sinner distinguishing one verse from the next. To my knowledge, the only other recorded version of this song is a rendition collected by the Lomaxes in South Carolina in 1937 (AFS 1025 B2). A related gospel piece which utilizes this spiritual's opening stanza as a refrain was recorded in the mid-1950's by Prof. Charles Taylor and the Taylor Singers.

Prof. Charles Taylor and the Taylor Singers, "I'm Stumbling," Savoy 4094, c. 1955.



Photo by Glenn Hinson

Shuckers at Marshall Seafood prying open the day's harvest of oysters. From the left, they are Ruth Coston, Nathaniel McKelvin, Rev. Timothy Hayes and Everett Ware.

*I don't want nobody stumbling over me,
stumbling over me, stumbling over me,
I don't want nobody stumbling over me,
That is why I pray so hard.*

*I don't want that liar stumbling over me,
stumbling over me, stumbling over me.
I don't want that liar stumbling over me,
That is why I pray so hard.*

*I don't want that gambler stumbling over me,
stumbling over me, stumbling over me.
I don't want that gambler stumbling over me,
That is why I pray so hard.*

*I don't want nobody stumbling over me,
stumbling over me, stumbling over me.
I don't want nobody stumbling over me,
That is why I pray so hard.*

*I don't want that liar stumbling over me,
stumbling over me, stumbling over me,
I don't want that liar stumbling over me,
That is why I pray so hard.*

*I don't want that peace breaker stumbling over me,
stumbling over me, stumbling over me.
I don't want that peace breaker stumbling over me,
That is why I pray so hard.*

*I don't want nobody stumbling over me,
stumbling over me, stumbling over me.
I don't want nobody stumbling over me,
That is why I pray so hard.*

8. SIT DOWN SERVANT—Rev. Timothy Hayes, lead, with Beulah Brown, Ruth Coston, Nathaniel McKelvin, Everett Ware and Rosa Wilson. Recorded at the Marshall Seafood Company, Glass, Va., on 13 July 1979 by Glenn Hinson, 3:03.

Work (1940, 65) "Sit Down Servant, Sit Down."

Already shuckers had been at work for more than two hours though the sun had not yet crept over the still waters of Mobjack Bay. Hundreds of small, muddy oysters, harvested from private beds long after the public oyster-ing season had passed, were being shoveled onto the concrete shucking table. Very difficult to open, these mollusks yielded only disappointingly small pieces of meat to the shuckers' deftly moving knives. Since payment is determined by the gallons of oysters delivered for canning, such diminutive bivalves meant more work for less money. To make matters worse, the cargo delivered to Marshall Seafood the evening before was a relatively small one, signifying a shortened work day. The mood at the shucking house was thus understandably glum with few comments being exchanged among the workers as they labored at an almost mechanical pace. Suddenly, without lifting his eyes from the oyster in his hands, Rev. Hayes began to sing "Sit Down Servant," his sonorous voice echoing in the narrow cinder-block room. As he repeated the opening phrase, his words rang out more confidently. On the third repetition, Ruth Coston, a shucker standing to his left, joined in, and soon thereafter the entire house was singing, closing each line chanted by Rev. Hayes with the repeated phrase "sit down" and concluding each stanza with the full request to "sit down and rest a little while." They sang as they continued prying open oysters, never glancing away from the work at hand. When Rev. Hayes repeated the refrain, signalling the song's conclusion, everyone chorused the final line in its entirety. After that there was silence and the din of cracking oysters.

One of Rev. Hayes' favorite spirituals, "Sit Down Servant," has been sung in Virginia churches since long before the turn of the century. In this rendition, recorded in the setting described above, Rev. Hayes employs a style used by Afro-American preachers for genera-



Photo Courtesy Bill Jenkins

In contrast to the singing associated with railroad work, singing in oyster shucking houses was not intended to provide synchronized labor.

tions, calling out the opening words of each line to the chorused response of the congregation. As in many of the sacred songs on this album, "Sit Down Servant" includes a verse which allows for unlimited incremental addition accomplished by simply cataloging the sinful acts perpetrated on the blessed servant. To "talked about" and "lied on" could easily be added "cheated," "backbitten," and a host of other wicked deeds. The final stanza before the repeated refrains, where the singer notes "I know you've come a mighty long way," serves as a triumphant conclusion to the servant's spiritual journey. After standing steadfast through the trials recounted in earlier verses, the servant can finally rest for he has reached his celestial home.

The last time I visited Marshall Seafood, a portable radio was blaring from a corner in the shucking room. The personnel had not changed; Rev. Hayes and his five fellow workers still stood at the table, shucking as before. Yet contemporary gospel music had replaced the hymns and spirituals of the shuckers, and a distorted radio signal stood in

stead of their resonant harmonies. No, they still sang, Rev. Hayes assured me; but some of them also liked that rock-and-roll on the radio. And folks haven't been singing like they *used* to for years. Even here, the tradition is slowly dying, kept alive only by such stalwart singers as Rev. Timothy Hayes. The final question is obvious: will anyone replace them when they're gone?

Rev. J.C. Burnett and His Gospel Singers, "Sit Down, Servant," Columbia 14517-D, Matchbox SDX 207/208 (LP), 1929.

James Cleveland, "Sit Down Servant," Savoy 4176, c. 1960/62; with the Gospel Chimes, Savoy MG 14052 (LP), c. 1961.

Rev. J.M. Gates, "Sit Down, Servant, and Rest a Little While," Okeh 8398, 1926.

Gospel Light Jubilee Singers, "Sit Down, Child," Bluebird B8196, 1939.

The Staple Singers, "Sit Down Servant," VJ 5014 (LP), Stateside SL 10015 (LP), 1961.

Swanee Quintet, "Sit Down Servant," Nashboro 538, Nashboro 7000 (LP), c. 1954.

*Oh, sit down, servant, sit down,
sit down, servant, sit down,
SIT DOWN, SERVANT, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you SIT DOWN AND REST A LITTLE
WHILE?*

*I know you're tired, SIT DOWN,
I know you're tired, SIT DOWN,
I know you're tired, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you SIT DOWN AND REST A LITTLE
WHILE?*

*Oh, sit down servant, SIT DOWN,
Sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Oh, sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you SIT DOWN AND REST A LITTLE
WHILE?*

*I know you've been talked about, SIT DOWN,
I know you've been talked about, SIT DOWN,
I know you've been talked about, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you SIT DOWN AND REST A LITTLE
WHILE?*

*Oh, sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Oh, sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you SIT DOWN AND REST A LITTLE
WHILE?*

*I know you've been lied on, SIT DOWN,
I know you've been lied on, SIT DOWN,
Yes, I know you've been lied on, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you SIT DOWN AND REST A LITTLE
WHILE?*

*Oh, sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you SIT DOWN AND REST A LITTLE
WHILE?*

*Oh, you've come a mighty long way, SIT DOWN,
You've come a mighty long way, OH SIT DOWN,
Yes, you've come a, a long way, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you SIT DOWN AND REST A LITTLE
WHILE?*

*Oh, sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Why don't you SIT DOWN AND REST A LITTLE
WHILE?*

*Oh, sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Oh, sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
Oh, sit down, servant, SIT DOWN,
WHY DON'T YOU SIT DOWN AND REST A
LITTLE WHILE?*



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Workers stack peanut vines on "pea poles" until the peanuts can be separated from the vines.

Photo courtesy Tom West, Birdsong Peanut Co.



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No state can boast of longer-lasting and more varied folk traditions than Virginia. Many of her material traditions—such as barns, houses and plows—remain as permanent, unchanged documents of her early settlers' life style. Her performance traditions—songs, tales and fiddle tunes—also help us understand something of the everyday social life and beliefs of Virginia's people. These performance traditions, however, because they have been continually changing and developing from the moment of their creation, are difficult to identify and document accurately. The BLUE RIDGE INSTITUTE of FERRUM COLLEGE exists to seek out and document both the material and performance traditions found in Virginia.

The Afro-American tradition of singing to accompany work is the focus of this album. Since the earliest days of slavery, songs have been sung to set the rhythm of labor and to fill long hours of monotonous work. Fishing, farming, oyster shucking, crab picking, peanut harvesting, boat caulking and tobacco factory working were the settings for these songs which have been captured all too rarely in field recordings, beginning in the 1930's. The growing mechanization of these tasks has all but eliminated the group work crews and thus the work song tradition they carried on, but this album brings together some fine contemporary examples along with vintage performances from the last forty years.

Virginia Work Songs presents yet another aspect of Black musical tradition to compliment earlier releases by the Blue Ridge Institute—BRI 001: Non-Blues Secular Black Music; BRI 003: Western Piedmont Blues; and BRI 006: Tidewater Blues.

☆ A BOOKLET OF FULL DESCRIPTIVE AND ANALYTIC NOTES IS ENCLOSED ☆

***Front Cover—The crew of the Margaret pulling in fishing nets, courtesy the Mariner Museum, Newport News, Virginia.

***Back Cover—Cultivating peanuts in Tidewater, Virginia, courtesy Hamblin Studio, Suffolk, Virginia.

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SIDE 1

1. ON A MONDAY - John Williams and Group3:32
2. OH LORD, THEY DON'T 'LOW ME TO BEAT 'EM - Willie Williams2:29
3. BITING SPIDER - Willie Williams and Group2:29
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5. CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM - James Wilson, R. Ramsay, George Gorum, R. Brown, J. Kirby, Lemuel Jones, C. Meekins, and Ed Lewis1:47
6. THE NEW BURYING GROUND - Willie Williams and Group3:11
7. EVALINA - Crew of the "Charles J. Colonna"3:16

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SIDE 2

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