

Banjo
Tunes and Songs
PETE STEELE

*Recorded and
Edited by
Ed Kahn*



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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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Ellen Smith
Little Birdie
The Train A-Pullin'
The Crooked Hill
Galilee
The Unclouded Days
Shady Grove
Hard Times
Goin' Around This World Baby Mine
East Virginia
The Cuckoo
The War Is A-Ragin' For Johnny
Coal Creek March
Last Pay Day at Coal Creek
Ida Red
Pretty Polly
The Scoldin' Wife
The House Carpenter



Notes by Ed Kahn

It was early in the summer of 1957 that I first met Pete Steele and his wife, Lillie. A friend of mine, Arthur Rosenbaum, and I decided to drive over to Hamilton, Ohio, and try our luck at finding them. We both knew that for the past number of years the Steele family had been living in Hamilton; however, no one seemed quite sure how to get in touch with them, and moreover, no one that we knew of had visited them recently. After a few phone calls, we were able to find the Steele residence, and in a short time Pete Steele was singing and playing for us.

On this first occasion, Pete used my banjo because he had recently sold his in order to buy a pistol. He said that he hadn't played for several months, but in a matter of minutes he was playing the instrumentals that had won him fame through his Library of Congress recordings. On that visit, we recorded much of the material on a small home recorder.

In the last part of August, I was able to visit him again. It is from this session that the material in this album is taken. Although he hadn't yet purchased a banjo for himself, he had played other banjos with some regularity since the time of our first visit. The time spent with the Steeles has afforded experiences that I shall never forget; ranging from the fine cooking of Mrs. Steele to the music that was so often being made.

To the folklorist, Pete Steele is a very interesting informant. He represents a strong tradition of the Kentucky hills, in its various traditions. Wherever he lived or visited, he picked up songs, molded them into his own style, and yet preserved the essence of the material that he learned.

Throughout his life, music has served a very strong function, perhaps stronger with Steele than other folk musicians being studied today. Because of his lack of formal education, he has had to rely on materials other than the printed page for the sources of both his musical material and for his entertainment.

Music has always been a major source of entertainment for Pete Steele. Whether he is singing harmony with his wife, entertaining friends, or playing a complicated banjo instrumental, he is aware of his ability to sing songs "the old way"

and play almost anything on his instrument. It is perhaps the amazing versatility that he has on the banjo that has given him the most pleasure, for, unlike many other folk musicians, Steele has a great versatility of styles and techniques on his instrument.

While most folk instrumentalists generally use one style, Steele uses many, deciding for each song which style will be the most effective. The right hand technique most often employed by Pete Steele is a type of double thumbing with an occasional pinch of the first and fifth strings in order to add syncopation. This style is clearly heard on "Ellen Smith" and "Pretty Polly."

In addition to this style, Pete Steele also uses a standard "up-pick" style. This can be heard on "Last Payday at Coal Creek." On many of the numbers he prefers frailing and "double noting" or double thumbing. This style is well illustrated by his renditions of "Shady Grove" and "Goin' Round this World, Baby Mine."

In all of these styles, Steele uses only his fore finger and thumb. To add to the versatility already achieved in his right hand, he uses as wide a variety of tunings as the individual songs may demand. The effects achieved are perhaps best shown in "Little Birdie" and "Train-Pullin' the Crooked Hill."

Pete Steele was born in the small town of Woodbine, Kentucky, on March 5, 1891. It was in this area, from his father and people that he met, that he began to learn songs and the techniques of playing the five string banjo.

"...at six years old, my father made a small banjo. He took a sieve and put a squirrel's hide on for the banjo head; put thread strings on it and that's how I learned to play a banjo. My father was a violin player... one of the best, I think...I learned most of my banjo pieces from him. We had lots of good times together playing music at the last days of schools and at box suppers and so on. And when I think of those good times we had together, I get to feeling very sad, wishing we could be together and live them days over...."

At the age of nineteen, Mr. Steele married Lillie Swanner. Miss Swanner was born in Pittsburg, Kentucky, but at the age of six her family moved to London, Kentucky, where her father bought a farm. Of London, she remembers: "...I worked with my father in the fields as my brothers were much younger and not yet old enough to work. At the age of sixteen I got married...."

After their marriage, they lived in various parts of Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio, where Mr. Steele worked at jobs ranging from carpentering to making staves for whiskey barrels, and back to farming, his original occupation. Probably the most formative years for the Steeles, from a folk music point of view, were the eighteen years they spent in Harlan County where Pete worked in various coal mines. From Harlan County, they moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, for a few years, and then back to Laurel County, Kentucky, where both Pete and Lillie Steele had spent their childhoods. Of East Bernstadt, in Laurel County, Pete remembers: "...there I played my banjo for our neighbors to square dance. We would all meet at one neighbor house one Saturday night and the next Saturday night at another house...."

After leaving East Bernstadt, they moved to Hamilton, Ohio, where they have lived since 1937. In 1938 Alan Lomax recorded the Steeles for the Library of Congress Folk Music Archives.

Although more than thirty recordings were made, only a few of these have been made available to the public through records issued by the Library.

The purpose of this album is to make generally available some of the more than two score songs that they have been singing in their family for years, and furthermore, to offer comparative material for those interested in studying the musical tradition of one family over many years. In the following notes, I have indicated Library of Congress archive numbers for those songs that are deposited in the Library.



NOTES ON THE SONGS

SIDE I, Band 1: ELLEN SMITH

In 1893 Peter De Graff was convicted of the murder of Ellen Smith. As a result, several local murder ballads gained currency. Today, there are two slightly different ballads of Ellen Smith. In one, the narrator admits killing her, and in the other pleads that he has been accused of a crime which he did not commit. Steele introduces his version by saying: "The song of 'Ellen Smith,' and it was a boy that took the punishment of some other man's crime." The tune closely resembles the religious song "How Firm a Foundation." Steele learned this version from Andy Whitaker, of Shelbyville, Kentucky. I was unable to locate Mr. Whitaker or find anyone who knew of him or his family.

References:

Brown II, pp. 714-717
Brown IV, pp. 326-327
Combs, pp. 219-222
Fuson, p. 132
Laws NAB, pp. 190-191
Richardson, pp. 32-33
AAFS, 1707 B

"Ellen Smith"

Oh, it's poor Ellen Smith
This poor girl she was found
With a ball through her heart,
Lying cold upon the ground.

I was saw on Friday,
Before that sad day,
They picked up her cold body
And carried hit away.

Oh, they gathered their Winchesters,
They chased me all around,
They found this poor boy
In the fur edge of town.

Oh, they send me to Frankfurt
I've been there before,
I wore the ball and chain
Till it made my ankles sore.

I courted her through years
For to make her my wife,
I loved her too dearly
To take her precious life.

Some day before long
We'll stand before the bars,
And when God tries our case,
We'll shine like a star.

SIDE I, Band 2: LITTLE BIRDIE

Lyric songs of the folk singer have often centered about the carefree life of the little bird. In "Little Birdie," a lonesome person longs for the advantages of the little bird's life. Although I have heard this song sung many times, the only printed text which I can find is in Randolph (I, pp. 121-122). His text, under the title "The Dark Hollow," has three stanzas which bear a close resemblance to "Little Birdie" as I have heard it sung. Steele's version, while maintaining essentially the same tune which Randolph gives, differs textually from the printed version. Steele learned this version from Jesse Herald of Kentucky.

References:

Randolph, I, pp. 121-122
AAFS, 1694 A1

"Little Birdie"

Little birdie, little birdie,
Come sing your song to me;
For I am so lonesome,
Lonesome as can be.

Pretty birdie, pretty birdie,
What makes you fly so high?
You must have another true love
Far up in the blue sky.

Wish I was a little birdie,
I'd not build my nest in the air,
Build my nest in my true love's breast,
And steal the locks of her hair.

There's a place called heaven, boys,
A place where them angels dwell;
There's a place of paradise,
But there's no place like Hell.

SIDE I, Band 3: THE TRAIN A-PULLIN' THE CROOKED HILL

Banjo players have long loved to immitate the sounds of life around them. The train has been an extremely popular starting point for many of these instrumentals. Steele learned this complicated instrumental from Andy Whitaker. He tunes his banjo to DCGCE, from first to fifth string.

Reference:

AAFS, 1704 B2

SIDE I, Band 4: INTERVIEW AND RELIGIOUS SONGS

Folk belief has long had it that the banjo, as well as other stringed instruments, is the devil's instrument (see Brown I, p. 97). Pete Steele's answer to the question concerning the banjo as the devil's instrument represents a general easing of former restrictions placed on "religious" people. Steele considers religion and the music of stringed instruments to be completely compatible. The Steeles' singing of religious material also shows a family tradition that they still enjoy.

Galilee

The religious song was often as much a part of the folk singer's repertoire as any other type of song; however, all too often this category is overlooked by the collector. "Galilee" is a title common to at least four religious songs, but I have been unable to find printed reference to this particular one which the Steele's learned from a Baptist church tradition.

Reference:
AAFS, 1705 A1

"Galilee"

In sweet Galilee when He came to see
Him soar from this earth adore,
Just get right with God, walk the way He's trod,
All away to sweet Galilee Shore.

Galilee (Galilee), Galilee (Galilee)
My mind is wandering back to thee (Galilee).
O Galilee (Galilee), Galilee (Galilee)
This sacred thought enraptures me (even me).

The Unclouded Days

This song apparently enjoyed more popularity around the turn of the century that it does today. Credit for the words and music is given to the Reverend J. K. Alwood in the popular religious songsters of today. The version which the Steeles sing here is a fragment made up of parts of the several verses of the song.

References:
Favorite Songs and Hymns, #53
Pentecostal Jewels, #85

"The Unclouded Days"

O they tell me of a home
Where no storm clouds rise,
O they tell me of a home far away,
Yes they tell me that He smiles on His childr n there
In the city that is made of gold.

O, the land of cloudless days,
O, the land of an uncloudy sky,
O, they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise,
O, they tell me of an uncloudy day.

SIDE I, Band 5: SHADY GROVE

Another of the many lyric songs that is made up, in large part, of floating stanzas. Lyric songs of this type can be extended as long as the singer wishes by the addition of other floating stanzas that he may have at his command. Even the chorus occasionally appears in variant form in another song, "Fly Around, My Blue-Eyed Girl" (see Brown III, p. 341). Steele's version, learned from George McFarland of Kentucky, is likely to be of Kentucky origin judging from the reference to Harlan, a county in southeastern Kentucky. This tune is particularly well suited to the banjo because of its modal quality.

References:
Brown III, pp. 552-553
JAF, XXVIII (1915), pp. 182-183
JAF, XLIX (1936), pp. 220-221

"Shady Grove"

Shady Grove, my pretty little love,
Shady Grove, my darlin',
Shady Grove, my pretty little love,
I'll go down to Harlan.

Apples in the summer time,
Peaches in the fall,

If I can't get the girl I want,
I won't have none at all.

Fatnin' hogs in the pen,
Corn to feed them on,
All I want's a pretty little woman
To feed them while I'm gone.

Shady Grove, my pretty little love,
Shady Grove, my darlin',
Shady Grove, my pretty little love,
I'll go down to Harlan.

I looked up and down the road,
Lookin' dark and hazy,
Every time I saw her track,
Damn nigh run me crazy.

Shady Grove, my pretty little love,
Shady Grove, my darlin',
Shady Grove, my pretty little love,
I'll go down to Harlan.

SIDE I, Band 6: THE SONG OF HARD TIMES

Belden (p. 433) points out that satire has long been a favorite theme of balladry. This ballad is found in several of the southern states, and a surprisingly close resemblance to several of the verses has been collected in England (Williams, p. 104). The tune, however, would tend to suggest Irish origin. The version sung here is rare in its completeness as well as the verses of religious satire. Mrs. Steele learned this version from Andy Whitaker.

References:
Belden, pp. 433-434
Cox, pp. 511-513
Hudson, pp. 215-216
Lomax ABFS, pp. 332-334
Williams, p. 104
AAFS, 1711 A1

(ED. SEE ALSO KEN PEACOCK IN FOLKWAYS ALBUM SONGS OF NEWFOUNDLAND, ALSO ALAN MILLS IN FOLK SONGS OF NEWFOUNDLAND.)

"The Song of Hard Times"

Come all you good people, I'll sing you a song,
I'll tell you the truth, I know I ain't wrong;
It's from father to mother, from sister to
brother,
They've got in the fashion of cheating each
other,
And it's hard times.

Since cheating is got so much into fashion,
I'm 'fraid it will spread all over the nation,
And it's hard times.

Here's the old baker bakes all the bread we eat,
Likewise the old butcher by selling his meat;
They'll tip up the stillyards and make them
weigh down,
And swear it's good weight if it lacks ten
pound,
And it's hard time.

Here's the old blacksmith makes his living by
the sweat of his brow,
Likewise the old farmer by foll'rin' his plow;
They think they are right in their own conceit,
They'll cheat each other in measure and weight,
And it's hard times.

Since cheating has got so much in the fashion,
I'm 'fraid it will spread all over the nation,
And it's hard times.

Here's the old Methodist, they'll sigh and they'll
mourn,
They'll hang down their heads, they'll grunt and
they'll grown;
And if there's no money, they'll have to go out,

They'll shut out their doors, they'll sing and
they'll shout,
And it's hard times.

Now here's the young gentlemen, they'll mount
and they'll go,
With their ruffles and buffles to make a great show;
They'll go to their town and call for some wine,
I'm 'fraid a great many the gallows will find,
And it's hard times.

Here's the young ladies, they'll slick and they'll
sleep,
They'll roast back their hair so nice and so neat;
They'll sit up in their chairs so nice and so
straight,
To make the young gentlemen's think they look sweet,
And it's hard times.

Since cheating has got so much in the fashion,
I'm 'fraid it will spread all over the nation,
And it's hard times.

Here's the old Baptist I like to left out,
I believe to my God they're the worst in the shop;
They'll sell you cold iron and swear it's good steel,
And they'll charge you two dollars a bushel for meal,
And it's hard times.

Now I've concluded, I've finished my song,
I've told you the truth and I know I ain't wrong;
And if you ain't ready to come at His call,
The Lord will depart and the devil take all,
And it's hard times.

Since cheating has come so much in the fashion,
I'm 'fraid it will spread all over the nation,
And it's hard times.

SIDE I, Band 7: GOIN' AROUND THIS WORLD,
BABY MINE

This is another of the nondescript tunes that often
make up a large portion of the folk instrumentalist's
repertoire. It serves well as a vehicle for his
instrumental ability, with the words playing a
secondary role. I have been unable to find similar
texts in print. The nature of the stanzas which Mr.
Steele sings suggests that his text may be fragmentary.
He does not remember from whom he learned this song.

"Goin' Around this World, Baby Mine"

Goin' around this world, baby mine,
Goin' around this world, baby mine,
Goin' around this world
With a banjo pickin' girl,
Goin' around this world, baby mine.

Think I'll go across that ocean, baby mine,
Think I'll go across the ocean baby mine,
Think I'll go across the ocean
If I don't change my notion,
Goin' across that ocean, baby mine.

SIDE I, Band 8: EAST VIRGINIA

As a lyric piece, "East Virginia" has been reported
from various parts of the South. Steele's version
is definitely a ballad, but close enough to the
more common text to suggest that this may be
either an earlier and more complete version of
what has developed into a lyric song, or that
elements have been added to the more common
text to make it into a ballad. The tune sung
here seems to be related to the tune of "Greenback
Dollar." Steele learned this song in Kentucky
from a man who was singing this song after having
been released from jail.

References:

Lomax OSC, pp. 144-145
Sharp, II, p. 233

"East Virginia"

Born and raised in old Kentucky,
North Carolina was my home;
I fell in love with a fair young lady,
Though her name I did not know.

I went over in old Virginia,
There I shot a colored man;
I wrote my true love a hard luck letter,
Sayin' darlin' do the best you can.

I stayed over in old Virginia,
Found no one could go my bail;
Yes I go back to old Kentucky,
Where my friends will never fail.

I'll go down and see your papa,
See what he thinks best to do;
If he says so, I'll come back and tell you,
Then I'll run away with you.

Then I'll go down and see my papa,
For he's setting in that chair of red;
And in his hands he holds a weapon,
To kill the boy I love the best.

Yes her hair was dark and curly,
And her cheeks was a rosy red;
And on her breast she wore white lilies,
I wish that I was dead.

SIDE II, Band 1: THE CUCKOO

The cuckoo has long been an object of attention
for the folk throughout those parts of the world
where this bird appears. In superstition, he
has taken on various characters ranging all the
way from a symbol of good luck to a symbol of
bad luck. In song, he has appeared widely in
both England and the United States. In this
country, "The Cuckoo" is closely related to the
whole corpus of lyric songs dealing with the
unconstant lover (see Brown III, p. 271). This
is a fragment of the first song which Mrs.
Steele learned. She remembers her father taking
her upon his knee and singing this song as a
lullaby.

References:

Brown III, pp. 271-274
Creighton and Senior, pp. 142-144
JAF, ~~XXX~~ (1917), pp. 349-352
JFSS, III, p. 90
Kincaid, p. 20
Randolph, I, pp. 237-239
Thomas, p. 153
Williams, p. 165

The cuckoo is a pretty bird,
She sings as she flies;
She brings us no tidings,
Nor she tells us no lies.

She rises in the morning
With the dew on her breast;
She sucks the sweet flowers
To make her voice clear.

SIDE II, Band 2: THE WAR IS A-RAGIN' FOR JOHNNY
(Laws 0 33)

The theme of the girl pleading to go off to war
with her lover has been found on both sides of
the Atlantic for many years. Entering this
country as a broadside, it has remained closely
linked with "Jack Munro" and "Lisbon" (see Brown
II, pp. 317-318). Often under the title
"The Girl Volunteer," it has been collected
through much of the southern Appalachian region
of the country, but perhaps less frequently with
the "Yes, my love, yes" ending than the final
refusal of the man to have his love go along
with him to battle. Steele learned this version
from Andy Whitaker.

References:

Belden, p. 180
Brown II, pp. 317-318
Fuson, p. 104
JFSS, III, p. 52
Laws ABBB, p. 241
Ord, pp. 136-137
Randolph, I, pp. 224-226
Sharp, II, pp. 111-112

"The War is a-Ragin' for Johnny"

Oh, the war it is a-raging
And Johnny has to fight
And I long to be with him
From morning 'till night.
That's what grieves my poor heart so,
May I go with you Johnny?
Oh no, my love, no.

I'll shoulder up my rifle,
I'll march to Mexico,
Can I foller my love Johnny
Wherever he may go?
That's what grieves my poor heart so,
May I go with you Johnny?
Oh no, my love, no.

Your waist, hit is slender
And your fingers, they are small;
And your cheeks are too shy
To face the cannon ball.
That's what grieves my poor heart so,
May I go with you Johnny?
Oh no, my love no.

I know my waist is slender
And my fingers, they are small;
But it would not change my countenance
To see ten thousand fall.
That's what grieves my poor heart so,
May I go with you Johnny?
Oh no, my love, no.

One hand upon his shoulder
And the other on his breast;
May I go with you Johnny?
Oh yes, my love, yes.

SIDE II, Band 3: COAL CREEK MARCH

Since Pete Steele's recording of this banjo instrumental for the Library of Congress in 1938, there has been valuable work done on the facts and songs centering around Coal Creek (now Lake City), Tennessee. It seems that there were three separate incidents centered around the mines of Coal Creek. In 1891, the miners rebelled against the use of convict labor as competition in the mines. In both 1902 and 1911, there were mine disasters. In spite of Steele's introduction, it seems likely that the March centers around the rebellion of 1891 (see Korson, pp. 353-370).

Other versions of "Coal Creek March" often involve imitations of drums and other sounds of a military march. There may have been words associated with the tune. Possibly either Pete Steele or his informant, Andy Whitaker, took the center part of a fairly standard version of "Coal Creek March" and developed it into this fantastic banjo instrumental.

References:

Korson, pp. 353-370
AAFS, 1703 A

SIDE II, Band 4: LAST PAYDAY AT COAL CREEK

"Payday" has proved every bit as difficult a problem as "Coal Creek March." Because it hasn't been nearly as widely collected as the March, it is difficult to draw any conclusions as to its origin. It would seem, from the introduction given by Mr. Steele, that this song is a result of the explosion of 1911. Judging from textual,

metrical, and musical evidence, it seems likely that this song may be of Negro origin. Steele learned this song from Andy Whitaker.

References:

Lomax OSC, p. 274
AAFS, 1702 B1

"Last Payday at Coal Creek"

Bye bye, oh bye bye, oh bye bye;
Bye bye my woman, I'm gone;
Bye bye my woman, I'm gone.

Payday, it's payday, payday;
Payday at Coal Creek in the morn';
Payday at Coal Creek in the morn'.

Payday, it's payday, oh payday;
Payday won't come at Coal Creek no more;
Payday don't come no more.

Miss me, you'll miss me, you'll miss me;
You'll miss me when I'm gone;
You'll miss me when I'm gone.

Easy rider, oh easy rider, oh easy rider;
Easy rider but you leave that rail sometime;
Easy rider but you leave that rail sometime.

SIDE II, Band 5: IDA RED

There has been some suggestion that this song may have been a ballad at one time (Laws NAB, p. 262); however, it is generally accepted to be one of the numerous tunes that was popular for dances. Each song of this sort is set apart from the body of these songs by the repetition of an identifying stanza. The stanzas which provide the body of the song are often commonplace stanzas that can fit equally well into any other song with similar metric structure, but may tend to group around one particular refrain or set of stanzas. This version was learned from a second cousin, Forester Steele.

Reference:

Gordon, pp. 72-73
Laws NAB, p. 262
Lomax ABFS, pp. 110-111
Randolph, III, p. 197
AAFS, 1704 A2

"Ida Red"

See old Ida goin' to town
Ridin' a billy-goat, leadin' a hound;
Hound give a bark, and the billy-goat jumped,
Threwed old Ida straddle of a stump.

Ida Red, Oh Ida Blue
Ida Red, please tell me true.

Took me down to the mail house door,
Where I'd been six times before;
Open the door and shoved me in,
Said old boy you're home again.

Ida Red, Ida Blue,
Ida Red, please tell me true.

Come back Ida, don't go off;
I'm gonna buy you a pacin' hoss.

Ida Red, she lives in town;
She wears a mother-hubbard with the wrong end down.

Ida Red, Ida Blue,
Ida Red, please tell me true.

Strike a match and you can see,
There hain't nobody in the bed with me.

Ida Red, Ida Blue,
Ida Red, please tell me true.

SIDE II, Band 6: PRETTY POLLY

Another of the American ballads about a man murdering his sweetheart, this one stems from mid-eighteenth century broadsides (see Laws ABBB, pp. 268-269). This ballad and "The Gosport Tragedy" have a close connection; the "Gosport Tragedy" giving, in most cases, more complete details. The development of the "Gosport Tragedy" into the ballad of "Pretty Polly" is a wonderful example of Tristram P. Coffin's theory of ballad development. "The Gosport Tragedy," with all of its many details, still retains the personal touch of a broadside writer. By the time "Pretty Polly" has emerged, only the essentials of the ballad remain, shaped by transmission, and lacking the marks on an individual's composition. "Pretty Polly," in its varying forms, has been widely reported from the southern Appalachian region of this country. Mr. Steele learned this version from Andy Whitaker.

References:

Brown II, pp. 233-240
Coffin JAF, pp. 208-214
Laws ABBB, pp. 268-270
AAFS, 1702 A1

"Pretty Polly"

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

Pretty Willy, Pretty Willy, I fear your way,
Pretty Willy, Pretty Willy, I fear your way,
Pretty Willy, Pretty Willy, I fear your way,
You taken my body all out astray.

Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly, you was guessing just
right,
Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly, you was guessing just
right,
Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly, you was guessing just
right,
I dug on your grave the biggest part of last night.

Yes he lead her over them hills and the valley so deep,
Yes he lead her over them hills and the valley so deep,
He lead her over the hills and the valley so deep,
And at last Pretty Polly begin to weep.

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

Said no time to talk, no time to stand,
No time to talk, no time to stand,
No time to talk, no time to stand,
Then he drew his knife all in his right hand.

Yes he stobbed her to the heart and the blood it
did flow,
Yes he stobbed her to the heart and the blood it
did flow,
Stobbed her to the heart and the blood it did flow,
And into the grave Pretty Polly did go.

Yes he threw some dirt o'er her and turned to go home,
Yes he threw some dirt o'er her and turned to go home,
He threw some dirt o'er her and turned to go home,
Left nothing behind but them birds to mourn.

SIDE II, Band 7: THE SCOLDIN' WIFE

Folk belief has long had it that the three things that will drive a man out of his house are the rain, smoke, and a scolding wife (see Archer Taylor's "Sunt tria damna domus"). The theme of the shrewish wife also has a long history in balladry and folk song. "The Farmer's Curst Wife" (Child #278) is perhaps the best known example. The instrumental

that Steele plays here is a fiddle tune that he learned from his father and depicts an argument between a husband and wife. Samuel P. Bayard indicates that this format has been part of the folk music repertoire on both sides of the Atlantic for many years (Hill Country Tunes, #80).

References:

Bayard, #80
Taylor, "Sunt tria damna domus"

SIDE II, Band 8: THE HOUSE CARPENTER (Child #243)

"The House Carpenter" is one of the best known of The English and Scottish Popular Ballads in this country, making its appearance in almost every state where good collecting has been carried on. This version is interesting in that it has undergone extreme sentimentalization and moralization with the addition of the last three stanzas. The "cursed" verse is occasionally found in the ballad (see Davis, pp. 439-478); however, the "never believe" stanzas are most likely borrowed from the "unconstant lover" cycle (see Sharp, II, pp. 51-58). This version was learned by the Steeles' from the singing of Elizabeth Steele Jones, Mr. Steele's sister.

References:

Coffin, p. 138
Davis, pp. 439-478

We have met, we have met, said my old true love,
We have met, we have met, said he,
For I've just come from a salt salt sea,
And it's all for the sake of thee.

I have refused a king's daughter fair,
I'm sure she'd have married me,
I have refused a crown of gold,
And it's all for the sake of thee.

If you have refused a king's daughter fair,
I'm sure you are to blame,
For I have married to a house carpenter,
And I'm sure he's a very fine man.

If I was to leave my house carpenter
And go along with you,
I'll take you where the sugar cane grows
On the bank of the deep blue sea.

She went unto her little babe,
Of kisses she gave three,
Lie there, lie there, my sweet little babe
And keep your father's company.

She went unto her golden store,
She dressed herself in green,
And as she walked the streets all around,
She looked like a lovely queen.

I'm not weeping for my house carpenter,
I'm not weeping for my store,
I am weeping for my sweet little babe
That I never shall see no more.

They had not gone but a week or two,
I'm sure not more than four,
Till her gallant ship by night did leak
And it sunk for to rise no more.

May cursed be to all sea men,
May cursed be their life,
For they have been the ruin of a house carpenter
In persuading away his wife.

Don't never believe what a young man says,
Let his hair be dark or brown,
Unless he's on some high gallis drop
And say he would like to come down.

Don't never believe what a young girl says,
Let her hair be dark or brown,
For she'll tell you more lies than the stars in the
skies
Or the grass that grows on the ground.

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Picture Captions

The photographs are numbered on the back.

Pete and Lillie Steele, 1958.

Part of the Steele family which now includes nine children, twenty-one grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

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