

FOLKWAYS FH 5337

THE CROSSERS:
WHOA, HAW, BUCK AND JERRY BOY
SWEET BETSY FROM PIKE
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COLE YOUNGER

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IMMIGRANTS:
SCHON SCHATZLEIN, 'WAS HAB' ICH ERFAHREN
WAR
JUST BEFORE THE BATTLE, MOTHER
HARD TIMES
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DEAR PRAIRIE HOME
PATCHES ON MY PANTS
THE FARMER IS THE MAN
STAY ON THE FARM, BOYS

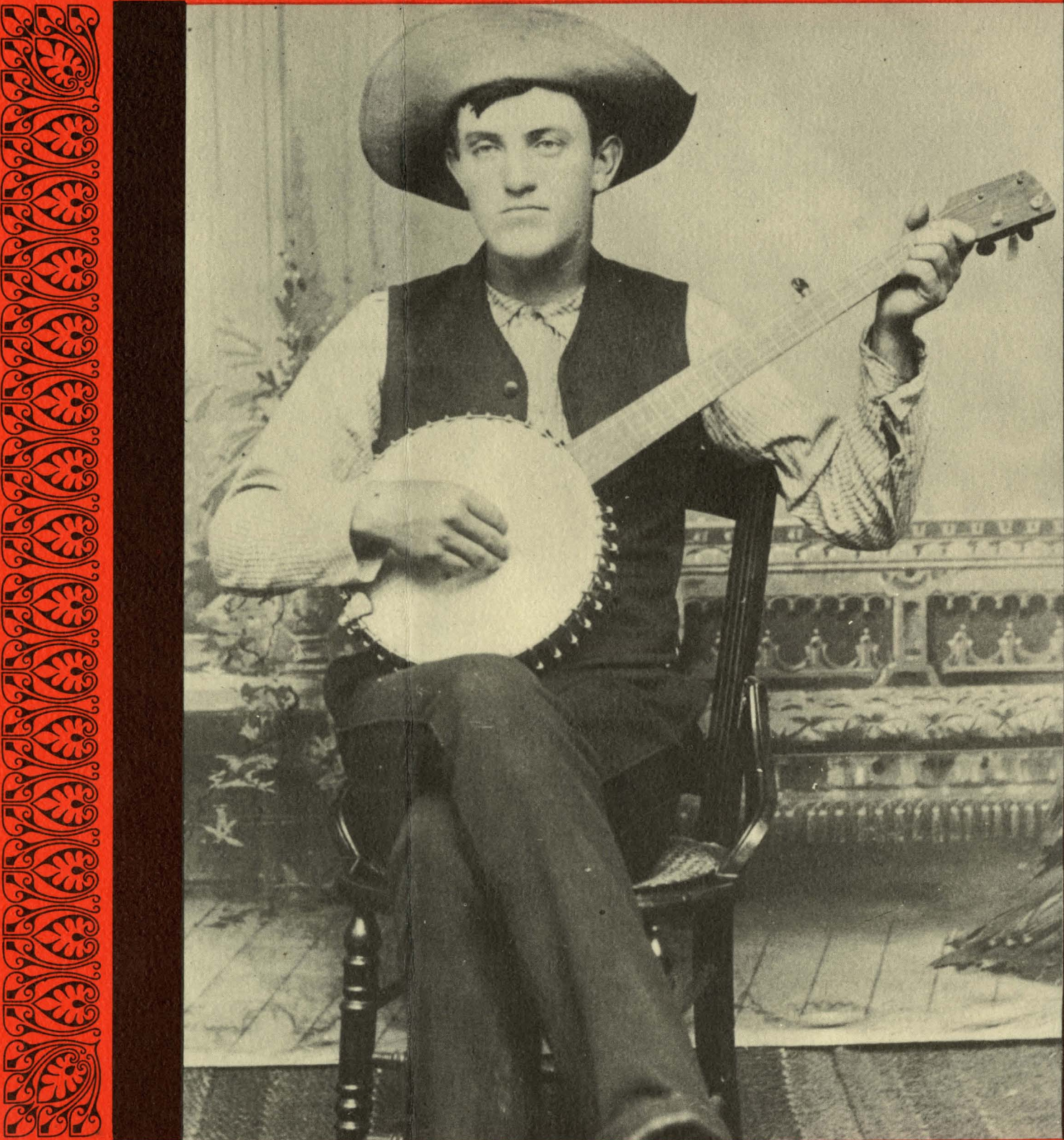
SWEET NEBRASKA LAND / Roger Welsh

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FH 5337

SWEET NEBRASKA LAND

Produced by KFMQ Lincoln, Nebraska, as a tribute to the Nebraska Centennial Celebration

ROGER WELSCH: vocal, 12-string guitar, 5-string banjo, autoharp
TERRY SCHMITT: vocal accompanist, 6-string guitar accompanist



NEBRASKA COWBOY WITH 5-STRING BANJO

SWEET NEBRASKA LAND

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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SWEET NEBRASKA LAND

Roger Welsch



A small cattle ranch on Gordon Creek, Cherry County, Nebraska, 1900. (Photo courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society)

THE CROSSERS

SIDE A, BAND 1

WHOA, HAW, BUCK AND JERRY BOY:

In 1846, the Mormons were driven from Nauvoo, Illinois, by outraged and righteous Christians. During that summer and fall the Mormons set up "Winter Quarters" on the present site of Florence, Nebraska, in northern Omaha. Of the three thousand Saints in the winter camp, more than six hundred died; their graves can still be seen there and the names listed—sometimes five or six from one family—are sad and horrible reminders of the misery they suffered. On April 7, 1847, a select party of about 148 left "Winter Quarters," traveled a route along the north side of the Platte River and, on July 24, reached the Great Salt Lake.

The tune of this song is based on "Turkey in the Straw," a popular fiddle tune.

With a merry little jog and a gay little song,
Whoa, Haw, Buck and Jerry Boy,
We trudge our way the whole day long,
Whoa, Haw, Buck and Jerry Boy.
What though we're covered all over with dust,
Better than staying back home to rust,
Reach Salt Lake some day or bust,
Whoa, Haw, Buck and Jerry Boy.

There's a pretty little girl in the outfit ahead,
Whoa, Haw, Buck and Jerry Boy,
I wish she was by my side instead,
Whoa, Haw, Buck and Jerry Boy,

Look at her now with a pout on her lips,
As daintily with her fingertips
She picks for the fire some buffalo chips,
Whoa, Haw, Buck and Jerry Boy.

O tonight we'll dance by the light of the moon,
Whoa, Haw, Buck and Jerry Boy,
To the fiddler's best and only tune,
Whoa, Haw, Buck and Jerry Boy,
What though we're covered all over with dust,
Better than staying back home to rust,
Reach Salt Lake some day or bust!
Whoa, Haw, Buck and Jerry Boy.

SIDE A, BAND 2

SWEET BETSY FROM PIKE:

In January of 1848, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, near what is now Sacramento, California. Economic and social conditions were oppressive east of the Missouri, and this opportunity to escape to wealth, freedom, and adventure was welcome. The most heavily traveled highway west was the Platte Valley-South Pass Trail which crossed Nebraska on the south side of the Platte. Countless thousands died from disease, starvation, Indian raids, and strife—there were approximately seventeen dead for every mile of the Oregon Trail. Only those who were as tough and blunt as Sweet Betsy made it to the gold fields.

Oh, don't you remember sweet Betsy from Pike,
Who crossed the big mountains with her lover Ike,
With two yoke of oxen, a large yellow dog,
A tall Shanghai rooster and one spotted hog?

CHORUS:

Singing tooralai, ooralai, ooralai, ay.

One evening quite early they camped by the Platte,
'Twas nearby the road on a green shady flat,
Where Betsy quite tired lay down to repose,
While Ike gazed with wonder on his Pike County rose.

CHORUS:

They next reached the desert, where Betsy gave out
And down in the sand she lay rolling about.
While Ike, half discouraged, looked on with surprise,
Saying, "Betsy, get up, you'll get sand in your eyes."

CHORUS:

At length the old wagon came down with a crash
And out on the prairie rolled all kinds of trash;
A few little baby clothes done with great care
Looked rather suspicious, but all on the square.

CHORUS:

They went by Salt Lake to inquire the way,
When Brigham decided sweet Betsy should stay.
Well, Betsy got frightened and ran like a deer,
And Brigham stood pawing the ground like a steer.

CHORUS:

This Pike County couple attended a dance,
And Ike wore a pair of his Pike County pants.
Betsy was dressed up in ribbons and rings;
Says Ike, "You're an angel, but where is your wings?"

CHORUS:

A miner says, "Betsy, won't you dance with me?"
"I will that, old hoss, if you don't make too free.
Don't dance me too hard; if you want to know why,
Doggone you, I'm chockful of strong alkali."

CHORUS:

This Pike County couple got married, of course,
And Ike became jealous, obtained a divorce.
While Betsy, well satisfied, cried with a shout,
"Goodbye, you big lummo, I'm glad you backed out."

CHORUS:

SIDE A, BAND 3

SIOUX INDIANS:

"Uppermost in the minds of virtually all emigrants was the danger from Indians" (Olson: History of Nebraska). The raids were not so numerous and spectacular as the moving-picture industry would have us believe, but they did happen and they became particularly widespread and violent toward the end of the century. As late as 1890, the Nebraska National Guard was called to protect citizens against an Indian uprising (the "Ghost Dance").

I'll sing you a song, though it may be a sad one,
Of trials and troubles and where first begun;
I left my dear family, my friends, and my home
To cross the wide mountains and deserts to roam.

I crossed the Missouri and joined a wagon train,
Which bore me o'er mountains and valley and plain;
And often in evening a-hunting I'd go,
To shoot the fleet antelope and the wild buffalo.

We heard of Sioux Indians all out on the plains,
A-killing poor drivers and burning their trains,
A-killing poor drivers with arrow and bow.
When you're captured by Indians, no mercy they show.

We traveled three weeks till we came to the Platte,
'Twas nearby the road on a green shady flat;
We spread out our blankets on the green grassy ground,
While our horses and oxen were grazing around.

While taking refreshments we heard a loud yell,
'Twas the whoop of Sioux Indians coming up from the dell.
We sprang to our rifles with a flash in each eye,
"Boys," says our brave leader, "we'll fight till we die."

They made a bold dash and came near to our train,
The arrows they fell just like hail and like rain;
But with our long rifles we fed them cold lead,
Till many a brave warrior around us lay dead.

In our small band there were just twenty-four,
And the Indians were many—five hundred or more.
We fought them with courage; we spoke not a word.
The noise of the battle was all that we heard.

We shot their bold chief at the head of the band;
He died like a warrior with his gun in his hand.
When they saw their bold chief laying dead in his gore,
They whooped and they hollered and we saw them no more.

We hitched up our horses and started our train—
Three more bloody battles this trip cross the plains;
And in our last battle three of our brave boys they fell,
We left them to rest in a green, shady dell.

We traveled by day, guarded camp during night,
Till Oregon's mountains looked high in their might;
Now at Pocahontas beside a clear stream
Our journey is ended in the land of our dreams.

SIDE A, BAND 4

COLE YOUNGER:

Thomas Colman Younger was born in Jackson County, Missouri, in 1844. He fought as one of Quantrill's Raiders and the ante bellum persecution against the guerrillas led him to the life of crime described in this ballad. Cole was a member of the Jesse James gang and took part in most of its exploits. He was wounded and captured during a bank raid in Northfield, Minnesota, on September 7, 1876—also described in this song. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, but was paroled in 1901. He was pardoned in 1903 and died in Jackson County, on March 21, 1916.

I'm one of a band of highwaymen, Cole Younger is my name;
My crimes and depredations have brought my friends to shame;
The robbing of the Northfield bank, the same I can't deny,
For now I am a prisoner, in the Stillwater Jail I lie.

'Tis of a bold, high robbery, a story to you I'll tell,
Of a California miner who unto us befell.
We robbed him of his money and bid him go his way,
For which I will be sorry until my dying day.

And then we started homeward, when brother Bob
did say,
"Now, Cole, we'll buy fast horses and on them ride
away.
We'll ride to avenge our father's death and try to win
the prize;
We'll fight those anti-guerrillas until the day we die."

And then we rode toward Texas, that good old Lone
Star State,
But on Nebraska's prairies the James Boys we did
meet.
With knives, guns, and revolvers, we all sat down to
play,
A-drinking of good whiskey to pass the time away.
A Union Pacific railway train was the next we did
surprise,
And the crimes done by our bloody hands bring tears
into my eyes,
The engineer and fireman killed, the conductor
escaped alive,
And now their bones lie mouldering beneath
Nebraska's skies.

We saddled up our horses, northwestward we did go,
To that God-forsaken country called Minnesoteo;
I had my eye on the Northfield bank, when brother
Bob did say,
"Now, Cole, if you undertake this job, you will
surely rue the day."

But I stationed up my pickets and up to the bank did go,
And there upon the counter I struck my fatal blow.
"Just hand us over your money and make no further
delay,
We are the famous Younger Brothers, we spare no
time to pray."

(Repeat First Verse)

SIDE A, BAND 5

THE SETTLERS

GOODBYE, OLD PAINT:

This song was collected by WPA workers in Nebraska, and it is also a Nebraska song inasmuch as Cheyenne, Wyoming, was a part of what was the Nebraska Territory. At the foremost point of the railroad tracks that were pushing across the plains was a town on wheels called "Hell-on-Wheels" or "End-of-Track." This town was designed to cater to the appetites of rough railroad workers. Cheyenne was, in large part, merely a piece of "Hell-on-Wheels" that took root.

CHORUS:

Goodbye, Old Paint, I'm a-leaving Cheyenne;
Goodbye, Old Paint, I'm a-leaving Cheyenne.

I'm a-leaving Cheyenne, I'm bound for Montan',
Goodbye, Old Paint, I'm a-leaving Cheyenne.

CHORUS:

Old Paint's a good pony, he paces when he can,
Goodbye, Old Paint, I'm a-leaving Cheyenne.

CHORUS:

I'm a-riding Old Paint, I'm a-leadin' Old Dan,
Goodbye, Little Annie, I'm leaving Cheyenne.

CHORUS: (Twice)

Well old Bill Jones had two daughters and a song:
Well one went to Denver, and the other went wrong.

CHORUS:

His wife she died in a poolroom fight,
But still he keeps a-singing from morning till night.

CHORUS:

Oh, when I die, take my saddle from the wall,
Oh, put it on my pony and lead him from his stall.

CHORUS:

Tie my bones to his back, turn our faces to the west,
And we'll ride the prairie that we love the best.

CHORUS:

SIDE A, BAND 6

THE HORSE WRANGLER:

I thought one spring just for fun
I'd see how cow-punching was done,
So when the roundups had begun
I tackled the cattle-king.
Says he, "My foreman is in town,
He's at the plaza, his name is Brown.
If you see him, he'll peg you down."
Says I, "That's just the thing."

We started for the ranch the next day,
Brown augured me most all the way.
He said that cow-punching was nothing but play,
That it was no work at all—
That all you had to do was ride,
Only drifting with the tide;
That son-of-a-gun, oh, how he lied!
Don't you think he had his gall?

He put me in charge of a cavyard,
Told me not to work too hard,
That all I had to do was guard
The horses from getting away;
I had one herd and sixty head,
I sometimes wished that I was dead;
When one got away, Brown's head turned red
And there was the devil to pay.

Sometimes one would make a break,
Across the prairie he would take,
As if he was running for a stake—
It seemed to them but play.
Sometimes I could not head them at all,
Sometimes my horse would take a fall
And I'd shoot like a cannon ball
Till the earth came in my way.

They saddled me up an old gray hack
With two setfasts on his back,

They padded him down with a gunnysack
And used my bedding all.
When I got on, he quit the ground,
Went up in the air and he turned around,
And I came down and I busted the ground,
I got one hell of a fall.

They took me up they carried me in
They rubbed me down with a rollin' pin.
"That's the way they all begin;
You're doing well," says Brown,
"And in the morning, if you don't die,
I'll give you another horse to try."
"Oh say, can't I walk?" says I
Says he, "Yes, back to town."

I've traveled up, I've traveled down,
I've traveled this country round and round,
I've lived in the city and I've lived in town,
But I've got this much to say:
Before you try cow-punching, kiss your wife,
Take a heavy insurance on your life,
Then cut your throat with a butcher knife—
'Cause it's easier done that way.

SIDE A, BAND 7

LITTLE OLD SOD SHANTY:

"Pioneers in the wooded regions (of Nebraska) found it a simple matter to get enough logs for a rude cabin or even quite a comfortable dwelling. On the plains, however, it took great ingenuity or considerable expense to gather enough timbers for the basic supports. The walls were made of sod—Nebraska marble, as the early settlers liked to call it—and the sod house became the enduring symbol of the new frontier" (Olson: History of Nebraska).

The last three verses are not those usually found with this song. The WPA collectors indicated that these were Nebraska variant verses.

I'm looking rather seedy now while holding down my claim,
My victuals are not always of the best;
The mice play shyly round me as I nestle down to rest
In that little old sod shanty on my claim.

CHORUS:

Oh the hinges are of leather and the windows have no glass,
The board roof lets the howling blizzards in,
I hear the hungry coyote as he slinks up through the grass
Round that little old sod shanty on my claim.

Yet I rather like the novelty of living in this way,
Though my bill of fare is always rather tame,
I'm happy as a clam on the land of Uncle Sam,
In that little old sod shanty on my claim.

But when I left my Eastern home, a bachelor so gay,
To try to win my way to wealth and fame,
I little thought that I'd come down to burning twisted hay
In that little old sod shanty on my claim.

CHORUS:

My clothes are plastered o'er with dough, I'm looking like a fright,
And everything is scattered round the room,

But I wouldn't give the freedom that I have out in the West
For the table of the Eastern man's old home.

A bumper crop of corn we raised in eighteen ninety-two;
To dress my wife in silk I thought was plain;
But I sold my corn for thirteen cents, three cents beside a share,
So the wife stayed on the shanty on the claim.

CHORUS:

Our hogs they died of cholera; the chickens had the pip;
The baby swallowed buttons like a chain;
My wife was married thirteen years before she saw a dime
When we lived in the little sod shanty on our claim.

Yet for all the hardships we went through, we never gave up hope,
But plugged the harder till we made it gain.
For love was close beside us in all our ups and downs
In that little old sod shanty on our claim.

SIDE A, BAND 8

SWEET NEBRASKA LAND:

Nebraskans in the past, and now, love the state with an honesty that permits them to poke fun at its occasional shortcomings. There is a plethora of stories about winds that blow away floursacks but leave the flour standing, heat that pops the popcorn in the fields, and Platte River fish that wear goggles to keep the dust out of their eyes. But in these gentle complaints the storyteller is also saying that, as tough as Nebraska might be, he has lasted it out.

This tune is based on "Beulah Land"; the song was also sung to "Maryland, My Maryland."

CHORUS:

Ah, Nebraska land, sweet Nebraska land,
Upon thy burning soil I stand.
And I look away across the plains
And I wonder why it never rains.

We've reached the land of desert sweet
Where nothing grows for man to eat,
And the wind that blows with fev'rish heat
Across those plains so hard to beat.

CHORUS:

That's Nebraska land, sweet Nebraska land,....

We have no wheat, we have no oats,
We have no corn to feed our shoats;
Our chickens are so very poor,
They beg for crumbs outside our door.

CHORUS:

In Nebraska land, sweet Nebraska land,....

Our horses are of broncho race,
Starvation stares them in the face.
We do not live, we only stay
'Cause we're too poor to move away.

CHORUS:

From Nebraska land, sweet Nebraska land,....

IMMIGRANTS

SIDE B, BAND 1

SCHÖN SCHÄTZLEIN, WAS HAB' ICH ERFAHREN?

This song was collected in the Lincoln Russian-German colony for the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University. It was sung to me by Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Schleiger.

The Russian-Germans, like thousands of other immigrants, fled various oppressions in their homelands and came to Nebraska to find new freedom. They came without money, without property, unable to speak English, and strangers to the hardships of the Plains. Their courage and will, like those of the wagon-riding Trailers, was boundless. There are still communities like Gothenburg, Dannebrog, Swedeburg, and O'Neill that preserve the distinct ethnic qualities of their founders.

Schön Schätzlein, was hab' ich erfahren,
Jo, jo, erfahren,
Was hab' ich erfahren von dir, was?
Hab' ich erfahren von dir?

Durchs fremde Landt wollest du reisten,
Jo, jo, reisten,
Wann kommest du wieder nach Haus', wann
Kommest du wieder nach Haus'?

In zwei oder drei Jahren,
Jo, jo, drei Jahren,
Dann komm ich wieder nach Haus', dann
Komm ich auch wieder nach Haus'.

Und als schön Schätzlein nach Hause kam,
Jo, jo, nach Hause kam,
Franz Liebchen steht hinter die Tür, Franz
Liebchen steht hinter die Tür.

Schön Dank schön Dank, du Feine,
Jo, jo, du Feine,
Von Herzen gefällest du mir, von
Herzen gefällest du mir.

Was brauch' ich dir dann von Herzen gefallen,
Jo, jo von Herzen gefallen,
Ich hab' ja schon längst mein Mann, ich.
Hab' ja schon längst mein Mann.

Mein Mann das ist ein Reicher,
Jo, ja, ein Reicher,
Der mich auch ernähren kann, der
Mich auch ernähren kann.

Das zog er aus der Seite,
Jo, jo, der Seite,
Ein Flasche mit kühler Wein, ein
Flasche mit kühler Wein.

Das gab er Franz Liebchen zu trinken,
Jo, jo, zu trinken,
Das sollte der Abschied sein, das
Sollte der Abschied sein.

Das zog er aus der Seite,
Jo, jo, der Seite,
Ein Messer was scharf und spitz, ein
Messer was scharf und spitz.

Das stoch er Franz Liebchen durchs Herzen,
Jo, jo, durchs Herzen,
Das rotes Blut gegen ihn spritzt, das
Rotes Blut gegen ihn spritzt.



Immigrants entering the Loup Valley, Custer County, Nebraska, 1886.
(Photo courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society)

Das schrie sie zu ihrem Vater,
Jo, ja, ihr'm Vater,
Lieb' Vater, was hab' ich getan, Lieb'
Vater, was hab' ich getan?

So geht's wenn ein Mädchen zwei Knaben lieb hat,
Jo, ja, zwei Knaben lieb hat,
Den einen denn muss sie verlassen,
Den andren verschmerzen im Blut.

Dem einen den gibt sie das Leben,
Jo, ja, das Leben,
Dem andren die Grenk und schwer Not, dem
Andren die Grenk und schwer Not.

.....

My dear, what have I learned,
Yes, yes, learned
What have I learned about you, what?
What have I learned about you?

You want to travel to a foreign land.
When will you return home?
In two or three years,
Then I'll come home again.

And when her handsome dear came home
"Franz, darling," stood behind the door.

Good-day, good-day, you fine creature,
You are my heart's desire.

What do I care how you desire me?
I've been married for some time.

My husband is a rich man
Who can take care of me.

Then from his side he pulled
A bottle of cool wine.

He gave this to "Franz, darling," to drink.
That was to be a farewell.

Then from his side he pulled
A knife that was sharp and pointed.

He stabbed "Franz, darling," through his heart.
The red blood sprayed on him.

She cried to her father,
Dear Father, what have I done?

That's the way it goes when a girl has two boyfriends;
The one she must leave,
The other dies in his blood.

The one she gives her love,
The other woe and agony.

WAR

SIDE B, BAND 2

JUST BEFORE THE BATTLE, MOTHER:

Words and music by George F. Root

"No man made a greater contribution to the music of the Civil War than did George Frederick Root.... Even in his songs of sentiment—and Root could be as maudlin as any songwriter of the sixties—he directed his work to aiding the war effort. In 'Just Before the Battle, Mother,' one of the most widely sung songs of the war, Root takes the opportunity to inveigh against Northern Copperheads: 'Tell the traitors all around you....' Root apparently had also been reading his press notices when he wrote the song in 1862, for his reference to 'Battle Cry of Freedom' came as a result of numerous reports to the effect that the song was actually sung by troops marching into battle.

"Perhaps to us today the song is just another musical relic of a long-dead era. But to the ordinary people of Civil-War America, it reached out and touched a responsive nerve ending which was attached to the nation's heart" (Irwin Silber, in *Songs of the Civil War*).

And that nerve ending also touched Nebraska, for this was one of the few Civil-War songs that Dr. Louise Pound found in her field-collecting of Nebraska songs in the early years of this century.

Just before the battle, Mother,
I am thinking most of you,
While upon the field we're watching
With the enemy in view.
Comrades brave are round me lying,
Filled with thoughts of home and God;
For well they know that on the morrow
Some will sleep beneath the sod.

CHORUS:

Farewell, Mother, you may never
Press me to your heart again;
But, oh, you'll not forget me, Mother,
If I am numbered 'mong the slain.

Oh, I long to see you, Mother,
And the loving ones at home.
But, no, I'll never leave our banner,
Till in honor I can come.
Tell the traitors all around you
That their cruel words we know,
In every battle kill our soldiers
By the help they give the foe.

CHORUS:

Hark! I hear the bugles sounding,
"'Tis the signal for the fight."
Now may God protect us, Mother,
As He ever does the right.

Hear the "Battle Cry of Freedom"—
How it swells upon the air!
Oh, yes, we'll rally round the standard,
Or we'll perish nobly there.

CHORUS:

HARD TIMES

SIDE B, BAND 3

HARD, HARD TIMES:

Come listen awhile I'll sing you a song,
Concerning the times—it will not be long.
When everybody is striving to buy,
And cheating each other, I cannot tell why.

CHORUS:

And it's hard, hard times.

From father to mother, from sister and brother,
From cousin to cousin, they're cheating each other;
Since cheating has grown to be the fashion,
I believe to my soul it will ruin this nation.

CHORUS:

Now there is the talker; by talking he eats,
And so does the butcher by killing his meats;
He'll toss the steelyard and weigh it right down,
And swear it's just right if it lacks forty pounds.

CHORUS:

And there is the merchant, as honest, we're told;
Whatever he sells you, my friend, you are sold.
Believe what I tell you and don't be surprised
If you find yourself cheated half out of your eyes.

CHORUS:

And there is the lawyer, you plainly will see,
He'll plead your case for a very large fee;
He'll law you and tell you the wrong side is right,
And make you believe that a black horse is white.

CHORUS:

And there is the doctor, I like to forget—
I believe to my soul, he's the worst of the lot!
He'll tell you he'll cure you for half you possess,
And when you are buried, he'll take all the rest.

CHORUS:

And there's the old bachelor, all hated with scorn;
He's like the old garment all tattered and torn;
The girls and the widows all toss him a sigh
And think it's quite right, and so do I.

CHORUS:

And there's the young widow, coquettish and shy,
With a smile on her lips, a tear in her eye;
But when she gets married, she'll cut quite a dash;
She'll give him the reins; she'll handle the cash.

CHORUS:

And there's the young lady, I like to have missed;
I believe to my soul she'd like to be kissed.
She'll tell you she loves you with all pretense,
And ask you to call again—sometime hence.

CHORUS:

And there's the young man, the worst of the whole;
He'll tell you he loves you with all of his soul.
He'll tell you he loves you, for you he will die,
And when he's away, he'll swear it's a lie.

CHORUS:

SIDE B, BAND 4

DEAR PRAIRIE HOME:

Words by Mrs. J. T. Kellie; tune based on
"Darling Nellie Gray"

"This is one of the very bitter songs to come out of the Farmers' Alliance movement. The Farmers' Alliance Party was formally organized in Lincoln, Nebraska, on January 5-6, 1888, when delegates from twenty-five counties met in Lincoln. This organization—later absorbed by the national Populist Party—was an attempt on the part of the farmers of the state to secure, through political means, higher prices for their farm produce (hogs and cattle sold at this time for two cents a pound, corn for ten cents a bushel), lower freight rates (it took one bushel of wheat to send another to market), and protection against unfair farm foreclosures. All of these grievances had been caused or aggravated by rampant speculation, financial panic, and drought.

"A third party seemed to be the only answer to these problems, since nearly every farmer in the state was dissatisfied with the two major political parties, both of which seemed to favor the large monopolies and Eastern bankers. Throughout Nebraska from 1885 to 1905, crusading farmers gathered at hundreds of political rallies, barbecues, and picnics to hear orators from among their own people discuss the pressing questions of the day. To reach these meetings it was necessary for many farmers to drive in clumsy lumber wagons for long distances. Seemingly endless parades of farm wagons were arranged in order to impress the spectators. Sixteen hundred teams paraded into Hastings for one meeting. In order to add excitement to these parades and to create diversion between speeches at the rallies, these songs were sung" (from original FWP notes).

Farmers and sympathizers especially liked parodies of familiar verses or ballads arranged so that they could be sung to old familiar tunes. This device, so common to the broadside tradition, was necessary in a movement of musically untrained—sometimes illiterate—farmers.

There's a dear old homestead on Nebraska's fertile plain

Where I toiled my manhood's strength away;
All that labor now is lost to me, but it is Shylock's gain,
For that dear old home he claims today.

CHORUS:

Ah, my dear prairie home! Nevermore in years to come
Can I call what I made by toil my own;
The railroads and banks combined, the lawyers paid to find
Out a way to rob me of my home.

When first I took that prairie home, my heart was light and gay,
And I sang as I turned the prairie sod;

My hair that then was thick and brown, today is thin and white,
And I've lost all faith in man and God.

CHORUS:

It was many years ago that I first saw through this scheme,
And I struggled from their meshes to get free;
But my neighbors all around me then were in a party dream,
And they voted to rob my home from me.

CHORUS:

Now their homes are gone as well as mine, and they're awake at last,
And they now see the great injustice done;
While some few their homes may save, yet the greater part, alas!
Must be homeless for all time to come.

CHORUS:

We must now the robbers pay for a chance to till the soil,
And when God calls us over the great range,
All Heaven will be owned, I suppose, by men who never toil,
So I doubt if we notice the exchange.

CHORUS:

SIDE B, BAND 5

THE PATCHES ON MY PANTS:

Of all the years since I began
To mix in politics,
The one that tries my inner man is
Eighteen Ninety-six;
And as this aching void I feel,
I cast a wishful glance,
And count them all from hip to heel,
These patches on my pants.

My mind runs back to Eighty-eight
When first I tried them on,
And walked with proud and joyous gait
To vote for Harrison;
Had I prophetic eyes to see,
They'd swim with tears, perchance,
To find that vote brought out on me
These patches on my pants.

SIDE B, BAND 6

THE FARMER IS THE MAN:

When the farmer comes to town
With his wagon broken down,
Oh, the farmer is the man who feeds us all.
If we'd only look and see,
Well, I think that we'd agree that
The farmer is the man who feeds us all.

CHORUS:

The farmer is the man,
The farmer is the man,
He lives on credit till the fall;
Then they take him by the hand
And they lead him from the land,
And the middleman's the one who gets it all.

When the lawyer stands around
 While the butcher cuts a pound,
 He forgets that it's the farmer feeds them all,
 And the preacher and the cook
 Go a-strolling by the brook,
 They forget that it's the farmer feeds them all.

CHORUS:

The farmer is the man,
 The farmer is the man,
 He lives on credit till the fall;
 With interest rates so high,
 It's a wonder he don't die,
 And the middleman's the one who gets it all.

When the banker says he's broke
 And the merchant's up in smoke,
 They forget that it's the farmer feeds them all.
 If he'd only take a rest
 He could put them to the test,
 'Cause the farmer is the man who feeds them all.

CHORUS:

Well, the farmer is the man,
 The farmer is the man,
 He lives on credit till the fall—
 His condition it's a sin
 'Cause his pants are gettin' thin,
 We forgot that he's the one who feeds us all.

SIDE B, BAND 7

STAY ON THE FARM, BOYS:

Written by James L. Orr for Grange Melodies
 (Philadelphia, 1891)

The Grange, like the Alliance, was directed toward combating the railroads and big businesses that were crushing the farmers. It was founded in 1869 as a social and educational society and was organized in Nebraska in 1872. Because of its political and economic failures, it declined and then was reborn as a less militant, nonpolitical organization—as this song clearly illustrates. "Stay on the farm... though profits come in rather slow" is an anticlimactic and pathetic aftermath of the Alliance's "with truth for our weapon, we'll fight till we die."

Come, boys, I have something to tell you,
 Come near, I would whisper it low;
 You're thinking of leaving the homestead,
 Don't be in a hurry to go.
 The city has many attractions,
 But think of its vices and sins;
 When once in the vortex of fashion,
 How soon our destruction begins.

CHORUS:

Well, stay on the farm, boys, stay on the farm,
 Though profits come in rather slow,
 Stay on the farm, boys, stay on the farm,
 Don't be in a hurry to go.

You talk of the mines of Australia,
 Well, they're wealthy in treasure, no doubt;
 But, ah, there is gold on the farm, boys,
 If only you'll shovel it out.
 The mercantile life is a hazard,
 Surrounded by glitter and show;
 And wealth is not made in a day, boys,
 Don't be in a hurry to go.

CHORUS:

The farm is the best and the safest,
 And certainly surest to pay;
 You're free as the air of the mountain,
 And monarch of all you survey.
 Then stay on the farm awhile longer,
 Though profits come in rather slow,
 Remember, you've nothing to risk, boys,
 Don't be in a hurry to go.

CHORUS:

Roger Welsch: vocal, twelve-string guitar, five-string banjo, autoharp

Terry Schmitt: vocal accompanist, six-string guitar accompanist

Allan Kestner: recording technician

Taped at Studios of KFMQ, Lincoln, Nebraska.



ROGER WELSCH

Photo by Ken Schmieling

Roger Welsch was born, raised, and educated in Nebraska. He earned his B.A. and M.A. degrees in German at the University of Nebraska and has studied folklore at the University of Colorado and the Folklore Institute of Indiana University. He teaches German and folklore at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Many of the songs on this album are taken from his book A Treasury of Nebraska Pioneer Folklore made up of materials collected by the WPA in Nebraska during the Great Depression.

The WPA workers were generally unsophisticated in folklore scholarship and field techniques. They collected substantial quantities of useless material and missed some things that they should have collected; but generally we can be glad that they saved what they did, for otherwise we would have virtually nothing outside the collection of Louise Pound. These songs were collected from singers in Nebraska, or they deal with Nebraska in their subject matter; in either case, they can be considered Nebraska songs. The songs are arranged in historical categories: the Crossers, who used Nebraska's broad plains as a highway—Mormons, Oregon Trailers, outlaws; the Settlers—the farmers and cowboys who first lived here and were Nebraskans; the Immigrants, who came from outside the Anglo-American tradition and formed new ethnic enclaves on the plains; War, which claimed Nebraskans—they have fought and died in every conflict of this country; Hard Times—droughts, floods, tornadoes, blizzards, grasshoppers, the railroads, politics, bankers, and just plain crooks.