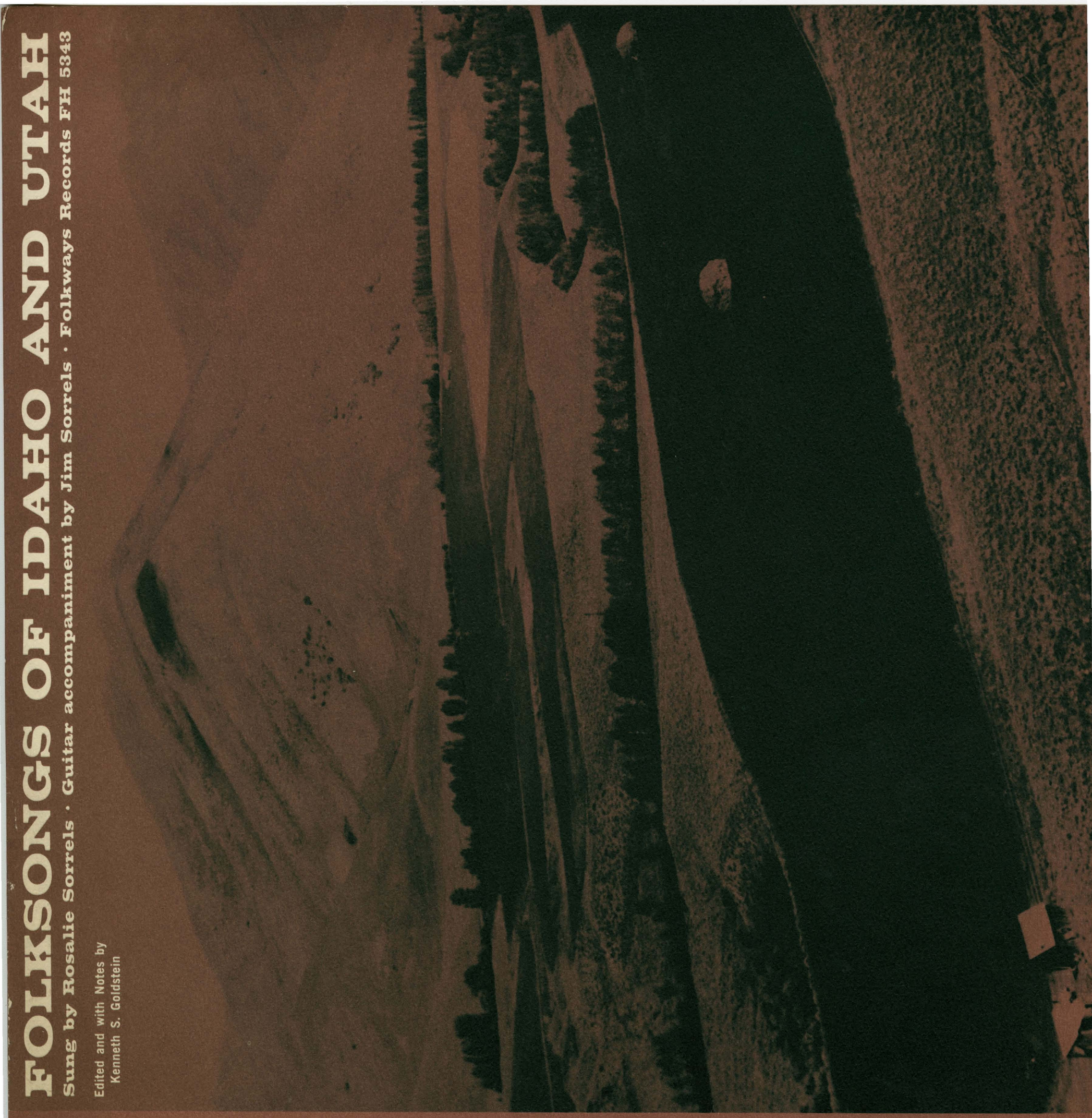
FOLKSONGS OF IDAHO AND UTAH

Sung by Rosalie Sorrels · Guitar accompaniment by Jim Sorrels · Folkways Records FH 5343

Edited and with Notes by
Kenneth S. Goldstein



FOLKSONGS OF IDAHO AND UTAH / FOLKWAYS FH 5343

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COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKSONGS OF IDAHO AND UTAH

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album # FH 5343

FOLK SONGS OF IDAHO AND UTAH

sung by Rosalie Sorrels

with guitar accompaniments by

JIM SORRELS

edited and annotated by

Kenneth S. Goldstein

Photo by R. L. Parker Jr.

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE
by ROSALIE SORRELS

To me the kind of songs I have recorded here are very personal things. Until recently I never sang them much for anyone but myself or people who were very close to me, like my husband or my children. I sing more when I am working, or when I am alone. I have been singing most of my life. My family all love music, and I just naturally like to sing. I remember my grandfather singing songs like "The Ship that Never Returned," or "Ella Speed" while he separated the milk, and my grandmother occasionally popping out to say, "Jim, don't sing that in front of the child." I used to stay with them every summer on their farm in Twin Falls, Idaho.

My father has always sung, and has picked up two or three instruments... learning to play them by ear. The music I've been exposed to was a conglomeration of opera, jazz, popular, western and folk styles, but folk songs seem to be the most satisfying to me. One of the songs I learned within my own family was "The House Carpenter." My father's mother, who was originally from Canada, had it among some other songs and poems she kept in an old scrapbook. I love the melody.

In singing the songs, and swapping them with others -- people who also sing for their own enjoyment -- I began to discover many songs that were learned in the oral tradition. Songs from childhood and the neighborhood kids, or older brothers and sisters, or parents -- songs that were passed along from one to another by ear, or written in old song books or scrapbooks like my grandmother's.

The more songs I learned, the more interested I became in their backgrounds. I began to try to find out where the songs were from. I've never had so much fun in my life as I've had tracking down songs and meeting the people who sing them -- people like Dick and Jean Person who live in Cascade, Idaho. Dick is a fish and game warden in that area. I learned "Brigham Young," "The Death of Kathy Fiscus," "I'll Give You my Story," "Empty Cot In the Bunkhouse," "Wreck of the Old Number Nine," and "The Philadelphia Lawyer" from them. He learned a lot of the songs he knows when he was a boy in Duluth Minnesota, but he has never stopped learning new ones from anyone who will sing him a good song. For the last several years, my husband and I have packed up our three children, plus anyone else who wanted to come along, and gone up to Cascade to spend two or three days singing with the Persons. They have four children, and they usually find another singer or two, so it gets a little crowded in their small house, but I can't think of a more pleasant place to go. We just sit around trading songs and enjoying the mountains. Dick plays guitar and is a fine singer and has a real affection for the songs he sings. Sometimes his wife joins him, and sometimes we all sing together.

Beth Phillips of Salt Lake City taught me "The Fox" and "Chiney Man". She learned them as lullabyes from her mother, Mrs. Mack Williar, who learned them here when she was a little girl. They were the only ones she could think of to sing to her children when lullabye time came around.

"The Lineman's Hymn" is a song my husband learned when he was doing telephone line construction for the Mountain States Telephone Company in Burley, Idaho. Several of the men on the crew sang it, but the one who knew it first and taught it to us was Russ Rogers. Haryy Kline, the Great While Father of the song, is well known among the linemen as a tough boss who performed some legendary feats. For example, he is reputed to have gone into the Malad, Idaho, telephone office and, having had a few, taken an operator on his lap. With one arm around her waist, he drew his trusty six-shooter (so they say) and shot out all the little lights as they appeared on her switchboard. This report is probably grossly exaggerated, but it makes a good story.

The "Winter Song" comes from Dr. Leroy Robertson, who heads the music department at the University of Utah. He remembers his mother singing it to him, and has such an affection for its melody that he has written a lovely string quartet around it.

One of our guitar students at the University of Utah taught us "Tying Knots In the Devil's Tail" and "The Girl That Played Injun With Me". One night we were talking about how much fun it is to swap songs, and he said, "I'll sing you one you've never heard." I hadn't either. His name is Bob Diener, and he is a professional wire rope slicer -- the only full time one around

here. He keeps a guitar in his shop, and when things get monotonous he picks it up and sings himself a song.

I learned "I Left My Baby" from Mary Lou Rhees in Boise, Idaho. I don't know where she got it, but I wanted to know it the minute I heard her sing it. My children go to sleep better by this one than any other song I know.

Mrs. Dora Lawrence, of Nampa, Idaho, taught me "The Wild Colonian Boy". She is a lady about 75 years old who has lived in Idaho and Washington all her life. She learned this song from a friend when she was about six years old, and insists that it couldn't be 'colonial'....she didn't learn it that way. She is very generous with her songs, and when children come at Halloween, she sings them a song for their treat.

Blaine Stubblefield, who runs boat trips down the Snake River, and is head of the Chamber of Commerce in Weiser, Idaho, sent me "Way Out In Idaho". He writes that he learned it from his father, and that there are still people around there who remember that dirty Kilpatrick and his mancatchers.

"Who Will Smoke My Last Cigar" was sung to me by Mrs. Warren Ball, who is from Colorado. She lives in Boise, Idaho, now, and was kind enough to call me when she heard I was looking for old songs.

The guitar accompaniments on this recording were done by my husband, Jim. He plays for me most of the time and sometimes we sing together. We enjoy playing, singing, and collecting, and we hope you will enjoy this group of songs as much as we did doing them.

SIDE I, Band 1:
THE LINEMAN'S HYMN

The setting was different, and so was the tune, but this ballad was sung in Ireland over 150 years ago. Then it was known as "The Unfortunate Rake", and it told the tale of a young man who died of too much high living...and some venereal disease. It eventually travelled across the ocean and became known in various versions as "The Bad Girl's Lament", "The Streets of Loredo", "The Wild Lumberjack", etc., and was parodied many times more by occupational groups, students, union pickets, and others.

One of the best of these parodies was that composed by some unknown telephone lineman as "The Lineman's Hymn". Ironically, the lineman dies from falling off an eighteen foot pole, though his job frequently calls for ascents of far greater heights. Rosalie Sorrels learned it from her husband Jim, a telephone line construction worker for the Mountain States Telephone Company in Burley, Idaho, who learned it from Russ Rogers, a boomer (itinerant) lineman with whom Jim worked.

For an album containing many variants and parodies of "The Unfortunate Rake", see Folkways Records album FS 3805, THE UNFORTUNATE RAKE AND HIS DESCENDENTS.

THE LINEMAN'S HYMN

As I walked out in the streets of
old Burley,
As I walked out in Burley one day,
I spied a young lineman all wrapped
in white linen,
All wrapped in white linen and cold
as the clay.

I see by your scare-strap[1] that you
are a lineman...
These words he did say as I boldly
walked by.
Come sit down beside me and hear
my sad story...
I fell off a pole and I know I must
die.

Twas once up the poles I used to go
dashing,
Once up the poles I used to go gay.
First up the sixties and then up
the nineties,
But I fell off an eighteen and I'm
dying today.

Oh, ring the phone softly and climb
the pole slowly,
Check your D-rings[2] when you go
aloft;
Keep your hooks[3] sharpened and grease
up your scare-strap;
I'm telling you, buddy, that ground
ain't so soft.

Get me six drunken linemen to carry
my coffin,
Six splicer's helpers[4] to mud-in[5]
my grave;
Take me to Kline[6], the Great White
Father,
And let him mourn over his gallant
young slave.

[1]scare-strap - a leather safety belt that goes around the pole

[2]D-rings - metal 'D' shaped rings on each side of the body belt into which the safety strap snaps.

[3]hooks - metal gaffs which strap on to the legs and feet for climbing poles

[4]splicer's helpers - assistants to the cable splicers.

[5]mud-in - to refill a hole in the ground.

[6]Kline - Harry Kline, a tough boss who is legendary figure among the linemen.

For additional texts and information, see:

Kenneth Lodewick, "THE UNFORTUNATE RAKE" AND HIS DESCENDENTS, article in Western Folklore, XIV (1955), pp. 98-109.

Wayland D. Hand, WO SIND DIE STRASSEN VON LOREDO, in Festschrift fur Will-Erich Peuckert, Berlin (1955), pp. 144-161.

Wayland D. Hand, "THE COWBOY'S LAMENT", article in Western Folklore, XVII (1958), pp. 200-205.

Kenneth S. Goldstein, STILL MORE OF "THE UNFORTUNATE RAKE" AND HIS FAMILY, article in Western Folklore, XVIII, (1959), pp. 35-38.

SIDE I, Band 2:
BRIGHAM YOUNG

In their fascinating survey of Mormon Lore, SAINTS OF SAGE AND SADDLE, Austin and Alta Fife write: "The legends which have helped to weld Mormonia into a homogenous body and a respected institution have had their counterpart in an anti-Mormon lore of amazing vitality. Anti-Mormonism never was a positive, unified force, but rather a thousand random voices crying "anathema" in different keys and from different motives. But the devil's advocate seems to have overplayed his hand, for the Mormon church has grown and flourished despite the sometimes malicious tales told among the Gentiles." A large part of this anti-Mormon lore concerned the supposed evils of the church, and the sinfulnes of Brigham Young and other Mormon polygamists. One of the 'best' of the several songs on the subject is "Brigham Young", learned by Mrs. Sorrels from Dick Person of Cascade, Idaho. It dates back to at least 1868 when it was printed in a California songster.

BRIGHAM YOUNG

Brigham Young was a Mormon bold, and
a leader of the roaring ram,
And the shepherd of a flock of fine
tub sheep and a passel of pretty
little lambs;
And he lived with his five and
forty wives in the city of the
Great Salt Lake,
Where they breed and swarm like
hens on a farm and cackle like
ducks to a drake.

CHORUS:
Brigham, Brigham Young, it's a
miracle he survives,
With his roaring rams, and his
pretty little lambs and his five
and forty wives.

Number forty-five's about sixteen,
number one is sixty and three,
And among such a riot how he ever
keeps 'em quiet is a downright
mystery to me,
For they cackle and claw and they
jaw, jaw, jaw, each one has a
different desire,
It would aid the renown of the best
shop in town to supply them with
half they require.

(CHORUS)

Brigham Young was a stout man once,
but now he is thin and old,
And I'm sorry to relate, there's no
hair upon his pate, where he once
wore a covering of gold.
For his oldest wife won't wear white
wool, the young ones won't take
red,
And in tearing it out and taking
turn about, they have torn all
the wool from his head.

(CHORUS)

Now his youngest wives they sing
psalms all day, the old ones all
sing songs,
And among such a crowd he had it
pretty loud, they're as noisy
as Chinese gongs.
When they advance for a Mormon
dance, he is filled with the
direst alarms,
For they're sure to spend the
night in a tabernacle fight
to see who has the fairest
charms.

(CHORUS)

Well, there never was a house like
Brigham Young's, so curious and
so queer,
For his wives were double and he
had a lot of trouble, and it
gained on him year by year.
Now he sits in his state and bears
his fate in a sanctified sort of
way;
He has one wife to bury and one wife
to marry and a new kid born every
day.

(CHORUS)

For additional texts and information see:

Austin and Alta Fife, SAINTS OF SAGE AND SADDLE, Bloomington, Indiana, 1956. (see chapter six, "The Devil's Advocate", pp. 109-125.)

Duncan Emrich, IT'S AN OLD WILD WEST CUSTOM, New York, 1951. (see chapter twenty, "...And of the Mormons", pp. 212-223.

Howard Swan. MUSIC IN THE SOUTHWEST, 1825-1950, San Marino, California, 1952. (see chapters I - IV on Mormon music, and Appendix A on Mormon Folk Songs.)

SIDE I, Band 3:
WINTER SONG

This song is actually a single stanza of a long homiletic British broadside from the 19th Century, commonly entitled "Time to Remember the Poor." Frank Kidson collected a text from a traditional singer in East Riding, Yorkshire, towards the end of the 19th century, and wrote: "'Time to Remember the Poor' is a great deal in advance of the usual street ballad, and the air is an excellent one. I claim no very great degree of antiquity for either song or tune, -- perhaps the beginning of the (19th) century may be fixed upon as the period of their composition."

This appears to be the first time the song has been reported from tradition in this country. Mrs. Sorrels learned it from Dr. Leroy Robertson, head of the Music Department at the University of Utah, who remembered it from his mother's singing.

WINTER SONG

The winter has come with its cold
chilly blast,
And the leaves are fast falling
from trees;
All nature seems touched with the
chillness of death,
For all things are beginning to
freeze.
When poor Robin Red-breast clings
close to her cot,
And the icicles hang 'round her
door,
And you sit by your fire reviving
and hot,
That's the time to remember the
poor.

For an additional text, see:

Frank Kidson, TRADITIONAL TUNES, Oxford, 1891, pp. 170-171.

SIDE I, Band 4:
DEATH OF KATHY FISCUS

This modern news ballad, just a decade old, details the death of little Kathy Fiscus of San Marino, California. The child, only three years old, was playing with other children when she disappeared on April 8, 1949. A search of the vacinity resulted in her being discovered at the bottom of a long, narrow abandoned dry well pipe. The child was still able to answer her parent's call when found. Rescue workers struggled around the clock to reach the child. The next day, the child's body was sighted and a doctor was lowered into the well. He was pulled up only to pronounce the child dead.

As in the strikingly parallel case of Floyd Collins, a quarter of a century earlier, songs were quickly composed relating the story of Kathy Fiscus' death. Indeed, at least seven (and probably more) different songs on the subject were turned into music publishers within a week of the occurence. The ballad sung here appears to have been the only one to make an impression on traditional singers, who incorporated it into their repertoire (I have three other variants recorded from traditional singers in my files). It was written and recorded by the late Jimmie Osborne, hillbilly singer and song-writer from Kentucky.

Mrs. Sorrels learned this version from Dick Person, of Cascade, Idaho, who reportedly had it from a woman who lived in San Marino at the time the tragedy occurred.

DEATH OF KATHY FISCUS

On April the eighth, year forty-
nine,
Death claimed a little girl so
pure and so kind;
Kathy, they called her, met her
doom that day,
I know it was God that called her
away.

Well, playmates with Kathy were
all having fun,
The story it goes they all started
to run,
When they looked back, she wasn't
there;
It's so hard to think of this
tragic affair.

The people they gathered from far
and from near,
The workmen they struggled in
sadness and fear;
But after two days their hopes
grew so weak...
They called down to Kathy, but she
never did speak.

After working so hard, both day
and night,
Digging for hours, she came into
sight;
Little darling was dead, her life
it was gone;
Now in San Marino there's a heart
broken home.

I know she's an angel in God's
sweet abode,
Playing with children in a
mansion of gold.
As I stand alone, so humbly I
vow,
I know Kathy's happy up there
with God now.

For additional recordings, see:

THE DEATH OF KATHY FISCUS, sung by Jimmie Osborne, KING Records, 788.

KATHY FISCUS, sung by Paul Clayton, FOLKWAYS Records, FP 2007 (as collected by Clayton from Lilly Maggard of Letcher County, Kentucky.)

SIDE I, Band 5:
I'LL GIVE YOU MY STORY

The theme of this short lament is universal, and extremely common in English language folksong. The unwed mother-to-be has been deserted by her some-time lover; now she is left alone to lament the fates of herself and her unborn child. Though different versifications of the same theme are common ("Died for Love", "Careless Love", etc.), I have been unable to find any references or texts to the song given here.

Mrs. Sorrels learned this song from Dick Person of Cascade, Idaho.

I'LL GIVE YOU MY STORY

I'll give you my story,
I'm heavy with child;
You said when we parted
You'd be but a while.

Come sit down beside me
And tell me no lies;
Come tell me you love me
And never more roam.

I grieved when we parted,
I cried night and day;
Now all of my sorrows
Have passed away.

SIDE I, Band 6:
THE GIRL THAT PLAYED INJUN WITH ME

In many ways, the phonograph recording of the 20th century is a straight line descendent of the broadsides, chanpbooks, garlands and songsters of the past. Just as these older printed media helped to place new materials into the stream of oral tradition, and to refresh flagging memories in the case of songs once known but forgotten, so, too, the phonograph record did the same job during the 1920s and '30s, and has continued

in the same role (though to a lesser degree) in the past 20 years.

"The Death of Kathy Fiscus" (Side I, Band 4) is a strong case in point. Other ballads and songs written in the past 30 years have passed into a somewhat more limited tradition. Individual tastes, reinforced by a more general folk aesthetic, help to determine exactly how popular such songs may become in oral circulation. "The Girl that Played Injun With Me" has not previously been reported from tradition, and appears to have proven attractive to only a small number of persons who find it worthwhile to sing some 27 years after its original composition. It was written by Aaron Rovi, and copyright (Cross & Winge Inc.) in 1932. Several recordings, none of which became 'popular', were released soon after. Ostensibly a cowboy song (of the Country-Western Popular variety), it never passed into cowboy tradition. Its language, values, and meaning is a far cry from that found in orally circulated cowboy songs.

Mrs. Sorrels learned it from Bob Diener, one of her husband's guitar students, at the University of Utah, in 1957.

THE GIRL THAT PLAYED INJUN WITH ME

Oh, the place where I first saw the light was a ranch on the desert so dry;
The lullaby song every night was the howl of some coyote close by.
At ten I was riding the range, and boy friends I rarely did see,
But it happened that visits I'd often exchange with the girl that played injun with me.

CHORUS:
Oh, the girl that played injun with me would set my heart dancing with glee,
I would ride many miles for one of the smile of the girl that played injun with me.

When twenty, we met at a dance, it was there I first felt cupid's dart;
She conquerred my heart with a glance, and lassoed my wild bronco heart.
I lived from her then twenty miles, now that may seem far, I'll agree,
But was there I would journey for one of the smiles of the girl that played injun with me.

How often I'd round up the herd, mount the pinto, the blue or the roan,
And ride like a lone desert bird to the ranch of the girl of my own.
A proud dapple gray she would ride, where the prairie bloom scented the lea,
And I felt like a hero to ride by the side of the girl that played injun with me.

(CHORUS)

One evening I dressed in my best and I saddled my fleet footed bay,
The sunset was tinting the West as in rapture I galloped away.
My goal was the girl of my heart, for soon my dear wife she would be,
And I knew that I never, oh never could part from the girl that played injun with me.

I arrived at her ranch just at nine, could scarcely wait to propose,
I knew she would vow to be mine, but what do you really suppose?
A dude from the city was there, I felt like a burnt hollow tree...
For he sat in the moonlight and on the same chair with the girl that played injun with me.

(CHORUS)

SIDE I, Band 7:
UTAH'S 'DIXIE'

One of Brigham Young's dreams, after settling in Nauvoo, was to build a chain of settlements stretching from Salt Lake to San Pedro, California, where Young hoped to establish a Mormon seaport. In a semi-tropical valley in southwestern Utah, nearly halfway between Salt Lake and San Pedro, lay a land as fertile as that about Nauvoo. Here Young decided to build one of his way stations to Southern California. But the Virgin River Valley, or Utah's 'Dixie' as it came to be known, proved difficult to conquer. Alternating drought and torrential rains destroyed the cultivated fields, and the cotton and silk moth industry that Young hoped to establish there proved a failure almost from the start.

The present song details the trials and tribulations of one of the families that were sent down to 'Dixie'. In a footnote to a version of the song which appears in Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads, Lomax indicates that it is "said to have been written in 1861 by George A. Hicks, who died at Spanish Fork, Utah, in 1926." Mrs. Sorrels learned the present version from a longtime resident of Utah at a meeting of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers.

UTAH'S 'DIXIE'

Oh, once I lived in Cottonwood and owned a little farm,
But I was called to "Dixie", which gave me much alarm;
To raise the cane and cotton I right away must go,
But the reason why they sent me, I'm sure I do not know.

I yoked old Jim and Bally up all for to make a start;
To leave my house and garden, it almost broke my heart.
We moved along quite slowly and often looked behind,
For the sands and rocks of 'Dixie' kept runnin' through my mind.

At length we reached the 'Black Ridge' where I broke my wagon down;
I could not find a carpenter, we're twenty miles from town,
So with a clumsy cedar pole I fixed an awkward slide;
My wagon pulled so heavy that Betsy could not ride.

While Betsy was a-walking, I told her to take care,
When all upon a sudden, she struck a prickly pear.
Then she began to blubber out as loud as she could bawl:
"If I was back in cottonwood, I would not come at all."

And when we reached the Sandy, we could not move at all
For poor old Jim and Bally began to puff and bawl.
I whipped and swore a little, but could not make the rout,
For myself, the team and Betsy were all of us give out.

And next we got to Washington where there we stayed a while,
To see if April showers would make the verdure smile.
But, oh, I was mistaked and so I went away
For the red hills of November looked just the same in May.

I feel so sad and lonely now, there's nothing here to cheer,
Except prophetic sermons which we very often hear;
They'll hand them out by dozens and prove them by the book -
I'd rather have some roasting-ears to stay at home and cook.

I feel so weak and hungry now, I think I'm nearly dead;
'Tis seven weeks next Sunday since I have tasted bread;
Of carrot tops and lucerne greens we have enough to eat,
But I'd like to change my diet off for buckwheat cakes and meat.

The hot winds whirl around me and take my breathaway;
I've had the chills and fever 'til I'm nearly shook to death;
"All earthly tribulations are but a moment here."
And oh if I prove faithful, a righteous crown shall wear.

My wagon's sold for sorghum seed to make a little bread,
And poor old Jim and Bally long, long ago are dead;
There's only me and Betsy left to hoe the cotton tree -
May Heaven help the 'Dixie-ite', wherever he may be.

For an additional text, and information see:

John A. & Alan Lomax, COWBOY SONGS AND OTHER FRONTIER BALLADS, 1938, pp. 403-404.

Austin & Alta Fife, SAINTS OF SAGE AND SADDLE: FOLKLORE AMONG THE MORMONS, 1956 (see various sections of the book in which commentary and history concerning Utah's 'Dixie' may be found.)

SIDE I, Band 8:
EMPTY COT IN THE BUNKHOUSE TONIGHT

Here we have another song out of the phonograph recording tradition of the 1930s. This song was written by one of the all-time great cowboy singers and songwriters, Gene Autry, who obtained a copyright (M.M. Cole Publishing Co.) for it in 1934. Autry's recording of it

proved very successful, and it was published in various song folios.

Unlike "The Girl that Played Injun With Me" (Side I, Band 6), this ballad is more in keeping with the mores, ideals and language found in authentic cowboy songs which have passed into tradition in this century. Death from an unexpected direction was a favorite theme in traditional cowboy ballads, though more often it was the result of a stampeding herd. The sentimentality of its lines are also commonplace in Western themes. It is therefore not surprising to find the song still being sung, and in oral circulation some 25 years after its composition.

Mrs. Sorrels learned this song from Dick Person of Cascade, Idaho.

EMPTY COT IN THE BUNKHOUSE TONIGHT

There's an empty cot in the bunkhouse tonight, pinto's head hanging low;
His spurs and chaps hang on the wall,
Limpy's gone where the good cowboys go.
There's a range for every cowboy and the foreman looks after his own,
There'll be an empty saddle tonight, but he's happy up there I know.

He was riding the range last Saturday noon, when a Norther started to blow,
With his head in his chest heading into the west, he was stopped by a cry soft and low;
There a crazy young calf had strayed from it's maw, and lost in the snow and the storm,
It lay in a heap at the end of the draw, huddled all in a bunch to keep warm.

Limpy hobbled his feet, tossed him over his hoss, started again for the shack;
The wind blew cold and the snow piled high and poor Limpy strayed from his track.
He arrived at three in the morning and put the maverick to bed;
He flopped in his bunk not able to move, in the morning poor Limpy was dead.

There's an empty cot in the bunkhouse tonight, pinto's head hanging low;
His Spurs and chaps hang on the walls, Limpy's gone where the good cowboys go.
There's a range for every cowboy and the foreman looks after his own,
And someday he'll ride old pinto on the range up there above.

For additional recording, see:

THERE'S AN EMPTY COT IN THE BUNKHOUSE TONIGHT, sung by Gene Autry, VOCALION 03475 (also released on other labels in the American Record Company Group).

For published text and tune, see:

GENE AUTRY'S BOOK NO. 2: FAMOUS COWBOY SONGS AND MOUNTAIN BALLADS, M.M. Cole Publishing Co., Chicago, 1934, p. 6.

SIDE I, Band 9:
TYING KNOTS IN THE DEVIL'S TAIL

On his day off, or after a long trip on the trail, the cowboy would venture into town and make his rounds. And in the process of 'oiling up his insides', he frequently over-imbibed. The result might well be the incidents sung about in this wonderfully humorous and obviously fictional cowboy ballad.

The color and imagination of cowboy expressions has been commented upon frequently and in depth (see, for example, Ramon F. Adams' two fine works on the subject: Cowboy Lingo, Boston (1936), and Western Words, Norman, Oklahoma (1944). Perhaps the best of his expressions, and one which could successfully compete with the most colorful language created in any segment of American life, is the term 'cowbiography', which simply means working with cattle.

Mrs. Sorrels version comes from Bob Diener of Salt Lake City, Utah.

TYING KNOTS IN THE DEVIL'S TALE

Well, way up high in the Sierra peaks,
Where the yellow pines grow tall,
Sandy Bob and Buster Jinks
Had a round-up camp last fall.

They took their horses and their running irons,
And maybe a dog or two,
'Low'd they'd brand all the one-eared calves
That come within their view.

Well, many a long-eared dogie
That didn't hush up by day
Had his long ears whittled and his old hide scorched
In a most artistic way.

Then one fine day, said Buster Jinks,
As he throwed his Seago[1] down,
I'm tired of cowbiography
And I 'lows I'm going to town.

They saddles her up and hits for the road,
It warn't no sight of a ride,
For them was the days when an old cowhand
Could oil up his old insides.

They started out at Kentucky bar,
At the head of Whiskey Row;
They winds her up at the Depot House,
Some forty drinks below.

They sets her up and turns her around,
Goes the other way,
And I'll tell you the Lord-forsaken truth,
Them boys got drunk that day.

As they was a heading back to the camp,
Packin a pretty good load,
Who should they meet but the Devil himself
Come prancing down the road.

Now the Devil he said, You cowboy skunks
Had better go hunt you a hole,
'Cause I come up from the Hell-brim muck
To gather in your souls.

Said Buster Jinks, We're just from town
And feeling kinda tight,
And you ain't gonna git no cowboy souls
Without some kind of a fight.

So he punches a hole[2] in his old throw rope,
Slings it straight and true;
He ropes the devil right around the horns,
And he takes his slack up, too.

Old Sandy Bob was a reata[3] man
With his rope all coiled up neat,
But he shakes her out, he throws up a loop,
And he ropes the Devil's hind feet.

Well, they throwed him down on the desert ground
While the irons was a-getting hot;
They cropped his horns, looped off his ears,
And branded him up a lot.

They pruned him up with a de-horning saw,
And knotted his tail for a joke;
Rode off and left him bellering there,
Necked-up[4] to a live Jack-oak.

Well, if you're ever up in the Sierra peaks,
And you hear an awful wail,
You'll know it ain't nothing but the Devil himself
Raising Hell about the knots in his tail.

[1]seago - rope used for lassoing purposes

[2]punches a hole - makes a loop

[3]reata - a rope, particularly one made of braided leather or rawhide.

[4]necked-up - tied up with a short rope

For additional texts and information, see:

G. Malcolm Laws, NATIVE AMERICAN BALLADRY, Philadelphia, 1950, p. 141.

Margaret Larkin, SINGING COWBOY, New York, 1931, p. 65-69.

John & Alan Lomax, AMERICAN BALLADS AND FOLK SONGS, New York, 1934, pp. 406-409.

SIDE II, Band 1:
THE FOX

Tales of the sly fox with near-human characteristics have been in the popular traditions of many countries for centuries. The particular incident in this song, that of the fox robbing a barnyard, appears in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales in the 14th century, and in many children's nursery rhymes and songs from at least the 17th century on.

This nursery ballad has been collected frequently both in Britain and

this country. Mrs. Sorrels version was learned from Beth Phillips of Salt Lake City, Utah, who had it as a lullabye sung to her by her mother.

THE FOX

Oh, the fox travelled out one moon-
shiney night,
Prayed that the moon would shine
very bright,
For he had a long journey to go
that night
Before he could get to the town-o,
town-o, town-o,

He had a long journey to go that
night
Before he could get to the town-o.

Oh, the fox ran along 'til he came
to a farm,
And there he found ducks and geese
in alarm;
Said, The fattest of you all is
gonna grease my back
Before I leave this town-o, town-o,
town-o,

The fattest of you all is gonna
grease my back
Before I leave this town-o.

Well, old Mrs. Flipper-Flopper
jumped out of bed,
And out of the window she poked
her long head,
Saying, Jump up, John, the gray
goose is gone,
And the fox will soon be out of
the town-o, town-o, town-o,

Jump up. John, the gray goose
is gone,
And the fox will soon be out of
the town-o.

So John took his gun and ran to
the hill,
And there he blowed it loud and
shrill;
You may blow, said the fox, it
is good music still,
But I will soon be out of the
town-o, town-o, town-o,

Blow, said the fox, it is good
music still,
But I will soon be out of the
town-o.

The fox ran along 'til he came to
his den,
And there he found young ones nine
or ten.
Oh, lawsy massa, father, you had
better go again,
For we think you had a lucky journey,
journey, journey,

Lawsy massa, father, you had better
go again,
For we think you had a lucky journey.

For additional texts and information, see:

I. & P. Opie, THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NURSERY RHYMES, London, 1951, pp. 173-175.

John H. Cox, FOLK-SONGS OF THE SOUTH, Cambridge, 1925, pp. 474-475.

C. Sharp, ENGLISH FOLK-SONGS FROM THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS, Vol. II, London, 1932, pp. 332-333, 398.

SIDE II, Band 2:
WAY OUT IN IDAHO

The history of the American frontier is the story of many men at hard work in countless occupations. One of the most fascinating of these were the railroad builders of the second half of the 19th century. Only a handful of their songs have come down to us, but one of the best of these is this ballad of the narrow gauge railroad construction workers in Idaho. A great percentage of the track laid by the Oregon Short Line (now the Union Pacific) through Idaho and Oregon was only 3 feet wide (compared to the standard gauge of 4 feet, 8-1/2 inches) and there are still a few narrow gauge appendages to main trunk lines still to be found (though unused) in Idaho.

"Way Out in Idaho" is a ballad complaint about bad working conditions, lousy food and poor quarters, sharing both sentiment and some few lines with the best of the Arkansas complaint songs, "Stanford Barnes".

Mrs. Sorrels learned this version from Blaine Stubblefield of Weiser, Idaho, who recorded a slightly longer version for Alan Lomax in Washington, D.C. in 1938.

WAY OUT IN IDAHO

I was walking around in Denver one
luckless rainy day,
When Kilpatrick's mancatcher cam
up to me and did say:
I'll lay you down five dollars
quickly as I can
If you'll hurry up and catch the
train, she's starting from
Cheyenne.

CHORUS:
Way out in Idaho, way out in Idaho,
A-workin' on the narrow gauge way
out in Idaho.

Well he laid me down five dollars,
like many another man,
And I hurried to the depot as
happy as a clam;
When I got to Pocatello my troubles
begin to grow,
I was waitin' in the sagebrush...the
rain, the wind, the snow.

(CHORUS)

When I got to American Falls, it
was there I met Fat Jack,
He kept a little hotel tent
along beside the track.
Now, says he, you are a stranger,
perhaps your funds are low,
Well, yonder stands me hotel tent,
the best in Idaho.

(CHORUS)

I followed my conductor into his
hotel tent,
And for one square and hearty meal,
I paid him my last cent.
Now Jack's a jolly fellow, you'll
always find him so,
A-working on the narrow gauge, way
out in Idaho.

Well, they put me to work next
morning with a cranky cuss
Called Bill,
They gave me a ten pound hammer
to strike upon a drill;
They said if I didn't like it,
I could take my shirts and go,
And they'd keep my blankets for
my board way out in Idaho.

(CHORUS)

Well, it filled my heart with pity,
as I walked along the tracks,
To see so many old bundlers with
their packs upon their backs;
They said the work was heavy, the
grub they could not go
Around Kilpatrick's dirty tables
way out in Idaho.

(CHORUS)

Well, now I'm well and working down
in the harvest camps,
And there I will continue till I
make a few more stamps;
I'll go back to New Mexico, marry
a girl I know,
And we'll buy us a horse and buggy
and go back to Idaho.

For the variant recorded earlier by Blaine Stubblefield, see:

John & Alan Lomax, OUR SINGING COUNTRY, New York, 1941, pp. 269-270.

B.A. Botkin & Alvin F. Harlow, A TREASURY OF RAILROAD FOLKLORE, New York, 1953, pp. 440-441.

SIDE II, Band 3:
MY LAST CIGAR

If we may judge from its wide incidence in oral songlore, one of the most popular commonplaces in all folksong is the "Who Will Shoe..." stanzas commonly associated with "The Lass of Roch Royal" (Child #76), but which most frequently appear as a separate and distinct series of lyric lines, or in combination with other textual materials in a great number of songs (see T.P. Coffin, THE BRITISH TRADITIONAL BALLAD IN NORTH AMERICA, 1950, p. 81 for a partial list of such songs.) It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the folk have chosen to parody such sacred lines. "My Last Cigar" is but one of such parodies, and perhaps the funniest of them all.

Mrs. Sorrels learned "My Last Cigar" from Mrs. Warren Ball of Boise, Idaho (formerly from Colorado).

Oh, who will smoke my last cigar,
my last cigar?
Who will smoke my last cigar, my
last cigar?
Who will smoke my last cigar, my
last cigar?
When I am far away?

Oh, I will smoke your last cigar,
your last cigar,
I will smoke your last cigar, your
last cigar,
Oh, I will smoke your last cigar,
your last cigar,
When you are far away.

Oh, who will drink my glass of wine,
my glass of wine? (3 times)
When I am far away?

Oh, I will drink your glass of wine,
your glass of wine, (3 times)
When you are far away.

Oh, who will feed my little ducks,
my little ducks? (3 times)
When I am far away?

Oh, I will feed your little ducks,
your little ducks, (3 times)
When you are far away.

Oh, who will kiss my Mary Ann,
my Mary Ann? (3 times)
When I am far away?

Oh, I will kiss your Mary Ann,
your Mary Ann, (3 times)
When you are far away.

SIDE II, Band 4:
THE WRECK OF THE OLD NUMBER NINE

Just as their ancestors had sung of the heroic sea captains who stayed with their ships until they went down, the inland American folk made a staggering number of ballads about train wrecks and disasters and the heroic engineers who kept their hands on the throttle until their gory deaths. Frequently these ballads told the story of actual train wrecks, but more often then not ballads were composed on a general theme of death behind the throttle. Many of these ballads were the work of early hillbilly composers whose wreck songs sold hundreds of thousands of copies in phonograph recordings and in song folios. And a large number of these passed into wide-flung oral circulation. "The Wreck of the Old Number Nine" appears to be such a song. Carson Robison obtained a copyright for the song in 1928, though it has never been definitely established that he was the actual author of the song (the same song folio which contains Robison's copyright notice for this ballad also has versions of older traditional ballads, which were certainly not his compositions, but which have a copyright notice crediting him as author.) The ballad may have become popular among the folk from the many hillbilly recordings made of it by Vernon Dalhart (Marion Try Slaughter).

Mrs. Sorrels learned the version sung here from Dick Person of Cascade, Idaho.

THE WRECK OF THE OLD NUMBER NINE

'Twas a cold winter's night, not a
star was in sight,
And the north wind came howling
down the line;
Near his sweetheart, so dear,
stood a brave engineer,
Beyond them stood poor old Number
Nine.

Oh, she kissed him goodbye, tears
in her eye,
And the joy in his heart he could
not hide,
For his whole world was right when
she told him that night
That tomorrow she'd be his blushing
bride.

Oh, the wheels hummed a song as the
train rolled along,
The black smoke came pouring down
the stack;
And the headlight's sick gleam
seemed so bright in his dream,
For tomorrow then he'd be coming
back.

Oh, he sped 'round the hill, his
great heart stood still,
For the headlights were shining in
his face;
And he whispered a prayer as he
threw on the air,
For he knew this would be his final
race.

In the wreck he was found, lying
there on the ground,
He asked them to raise his weary
head;
As his breath slowly went, this
message he sent
To the maiden who thought she would
be wed.

There's a little white home that I
bought for our own,
I dreamed we'd be happy by and by,
But I'll leave it to you, for I
know you'll be true
When we meet at the golden gate...
Goodbye.

For additional texts and information, see:

Vance Randolph, OZARK FOLKSONGS, Vol. IV, Columbia, Missouri, 1950, pp. 134-135.

Mellinger E. Henry, SONGS SUNG IN THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS, London, 1934, pp. 77-78.

VERNON DELHART & CARSON ROBISON ALBUM OF SONGS, New York, 1928, p. 12

For additional recordings, see:

WRECK OF NUMBER NINE, sung by Al Craver (Vernon Dalhart), Columbia 15121.

THE BRAVE ENGINEER, sung by Cisco Houston, Folkways Records FA 2013 (900 Miles and Other Railroad Songs).

SIDE II, Band 5:
THE HOUSE CARPENTER (Child #243)

In its original form this ballad told of a supernatural suitor who came to steal away a married woman. His demonic character is sharply etched, and the ship's sinking at the end of the ballad is in keeping with the total supernatural overtones of the ballad. Most recently collected texts have tended to rationalize the returning lover's demonic nature.

The earliest known text, a black-letter broadside in the Pepysian collection, was typical of the low order of composition turned out by the hack-broadside scriveners of the 17th century. In the course of oral circulation it has become one of the finest English language ballads. Mrs. Sorrels version is an excellent one, both textually and musically. She learned the text from an old family notebook which had been kept by her paternal grandmother, Mrs. Rosalie Cope Stringfellow, who lived near Idaho City, Idaho. The melody came from Mrs. Sorrels' uncle, Stan Stringfellow.

THE HOUSE CARPENTER

Well met, well met, my own true love,
Well met, well met, said he;
I've lately come from the salt,
salty sea,
And it's all on account of thee.

Oh, I've lately come from the salt,
salty sea,
And it's all on account of thee.

Well, I've lately come from the salt,
salty sea,
All on account of thee,
For I've had an offer of a king's
daughter fair,
Fain would have married me.

I've had an offer of a king's
daughter fair,
And she fain would have married me.

If you've had an offer of a king's
daughter fair,
I think you're much to blame,
For I've lately married to a house
carpenter,
I think he's a nice young man.

Oh, I've lately married to a house
carpenter,
I think he's a nice young man.

Oh, will you leave your house
carpenter,
Folly (follow?) with me?
I'll give you jewels and fine
silken hose,
And I'll live but for thee.

I'll give you jewels and fine
silken hose
And I'll live but for thee.

Oh, you can keep your gold and your
jewels,
Keep your fine silken hose,
For rest assured, I'm not so poor
As to have to marry for clothes.

Oh, rest assured, I'm not so poor
As to have to marry for clothes.

They hadn't been gone but about
three weeks,
I'm sure it was not four,
When the gallant ship turned 'round
three times,
And sank to rise no more.

Oh, the gallant ship turned 'round
three times
And sank to rise no more.

Oh, cursed be the sailor's life,
And any other strife,
For the robbing of the house
carpenter
And the taking away of his wife.

Oh, the robbing of the house
carpenter
And the taking away of his wife.

For additional texts and information, see:

Francis, J. Child, THE ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH POPULAR BALLADS, 1882-1898, see Volume IV, p. 361 ff.

Tristram P. Coffin, THE BRITISH TRADITIONAL BALLAD IN NORTH AMERICA, Philadelphia, 1950, pp. 138-140.

Margaret Dean-Smith, A GUIDE TO ENGLISH FOLK-SONG COLLECTIONS, Liverpool, 1954, p. 80.

SIDE II, Band 6:
THE WILD COLONIAN BOY

Well known throughout the lumbering country of America, this ballad comes to us from Australia, where, next to "Waltzing Matilda", it is the most popular of all folksongs. Though an extensive search has been made for the real Jack Dolan of this ballad, the records show no trace of the bushranger whose exploits are chronicled here. John Greenway believes that this ballad is a generalization of the ballad "Bold Jack Donahue", created when Australian authorities outlawed the singing of the latter ballad after it had become an expression of political protest. If such is the case, then a great deal indeed is known about the hero of this ballad. Donahue was the first of the great Australian outlaws. Transported from Ireland to Australia in 1825, he soon resumed his trade as highwayman. He and his gang avoided capture for two years, but they were finally surrounded by the police at Bringelly, New South Wales, in September, 1830. Donahue was fatally shot in the head, though his companions escaped only to be later captured or killed.

Mrs. Sorrels learned this version from Mrs. Dora Lawrence of Nampa, Idaho, a septuagenarian who first heard the ballad as a little girl.

THE WILD COLONIAN BOY

'Twas of a wild colonian boy, Jack Dolan was his name,
He was born in Ireland's sunny clime in a place called Castlemain;
He was his father's only son, his mother's only joy,
So dearly did his parents love that wild colonian boy.

'Twas at the age of sixteen years he left his native home,
And to Australia's sunny clime, a bushranger to roam.
And at the age of eighteen years he began his wild career;
He robbed the rich, he helped the poor, he stopped judge Black with joy,
And he trembling gave his gold up to the wild colonian boy.

'Twas on a bright May morning, young Jackie rode along,
A-listening to the mocking birds a-singing their noted song;
Up rode three bold policemen, Kelly, Davis, and Fitzroy,
The three rode out to capture that wild colonian boy.

Surrender, Jack Dolan, you see there's three to one!
Surrender in the Queen's name, you are her plundering son.
He drew a pistol from his side and he waved that little toy;
I'll fight, but I'll not surrender, said the wild colonian boy.

He fired a shot at Kelly, and it brought him to the ground,
But in return from Kelly's gun he received a fatal wound.
A bullet sharp, it pierced his heart, from the pistol of Fitzroy,
And that's the way they captured this wild colonian boy.

For additional texts and information, see:

Douglas Stewart and Nancy Keesing, OLD BUSH SONGS AND RHYMES OF COLONIAL TIMES, Sydney, Australia, 1957, pp. 39-40 (also see pp. 35-37 for versions of "Bold Jack Donahue.)

G. Malcolm Laws, AMERICAN BALLADRY FROM BRITISH BROADSIDES, Philadelphia, 1957, p. 177.

For additional recordings, see:

AUSTRALIAN FOLKSONGS AND BALLADS, sung by John Greenway, Folkways Records FW 8718 (includes Australian versions of both "The Wild Colonial Boy" and "Bold Jack Donahue").

SIDE II, Band 7:
I LEFT MY BABY

This beautiful lullaby is probably Gaelic in origin. Several lullabies from the Orney's and Hebrides tell of a child who is carried away by fairies, and whose sorrowing mother seeks after him in vain. Unable to find the song previously reported in America, I searched through several collections of Gaelic songs, and found one, "An Cubhrachan" (The Sweet Little One), which tells not only an almost identical story, but whose tune is very closely related to the present song. It would appear that "I Left My Baby" is either an English language versification of an original Gaelic song, or a rather free translation of one.

Mrs. Sorrels learned this song from Mary Lou Rhees on Boise, Idaho.

I LEFT MY BABY

I left my baby sitting alone,
Sitting alone, oh, sitting alone,
I left my baby sitting alone;
Nobody there but my baby.

When I came back, 'twas no one there,
No one there, oh, no one there,
When I came back, 'twas no one there,
And not a sign of my baby.

I walked into the forest green,
Forest green, oh, forest green,
I walked into the forest green,
A-looking for my baby.

I asked the little brown mother doe,
Mother doe, oh, mother doe,
I asked the little brown mother doe
If she had seen my baby.

The mother doe, she answered, No,
Answered, No, answered, No.
The mother doe, she answered, No,
I've not seen your baby.

And then I asked the mother swan,
Mother swan, oh, the mother swan,
And then I asked the mother swan
If she had seen my baby.

Then spake the swan, Your baby's gone,
Baby's gone, oh, baby's gone,
Then spake the swan, Your baby's gone,
You'll never see that baby.

I walked into the mountain mist,
Mountain mist, oh, mountain mist,
I walked into the mountain mist
Looking for my baby.

For a version of the Gaelic lullaby "An Cubhrachan", see:

JOURNAL OF THE FOLK-SONG SOCIETY, No. 16 (part 3, volume IV), London, 1911, p. 167. (This song is part of the Frances Tolmie collection of Gaelic songs from the Western Isles of Scotland.)

SIDE II, Band 8:
THE PHILADELPHIA LAWYER

It's not surprising to find that this song has passed into oral tradition, albeit a limited one, for it is certainly one of the finest compositions of the man who Alan Lomax once called "...our best contemporary ballad composer", Woody Guthrie. "The Philadelphia Lawyer" is an excellent example of Guthrie's skill at adapting an older folksong into a modern, humorous ballad. Woody has taken the well known murder ballad, "The Jealous Lover", borrowed its melody, discarded its tragic theme and substituted in its place a humorous tale of irresponsible love. The finished product is a tribute to Woody's talent as a folk composer.

Mrs. Sorrels learned this version from Dick Person of Cascade, Idaho.

THE PHILADELPHIA LAWYER

Oh, way out in Reno, Nevada,
Where romances bloom and fade,
A great Philadelphia lawyer
Fell in love with a Hollywood maid.

Oh, come, love, and we will wander
Down where the lights are so bright;
I'll win you a divorce from your husband
And we can get married tonight.

Wild Bill was a gun-totin' cowboy,
Six notches were carved on his gun;
And all the boys around Reno
Left Wild Bill's maiden alone.

One night when Bill was returning
Out from the desert so cold,
He dreamed of his Hollywood sweetheart...
Her love was as lasting as gold.

Well, Bill looked up in the moonlight,
Two shadows he saw on the shade;
'Twas the great Philadelphia lawyer
Making love to his Hollywood maid.

Oh, your hands are so soft and so lovely,
Your form is so rare and divine;
Come away with me to the city
And leave this wild cowboy behind.

Well, way back in old Pennsylvania,
The stars they are shining so bright,
But there's one less Philadelphia lawyer
In old Pennsylvania tonight.

For an additional text, see:

Woodby Guthrie, CALIFORNIA TO THE NEW YORK ISLAND, ed. by Millard Lampell, New York, 1958, p. 42.

LITHO IN U.S.A.