



Pete Seeger
AMERICAN FAVORITE BALLADS

vol. **1**



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Pete Seeger

AMERICAN FAVORITE BALLADS

vol. **1**



1. **JOHN HENRY** 4:28
2. **SHENANDOAH** 1:47
3. **BLUE-TAILED FLY (JIMMIE CRACK CORN)** 2:31 (D. Emmett)
4. **BLACK GIRL** 2:29 (Arr. H. Ledbetter/TRO-Folkways Music Pub. Inc., BMI)
5. **SKIP TO MY LOU** 3:08
6. **THE BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAIN** 3:05 (H. McClintock/EMI Robbins Cat. Inc., ASCAP)
7. **CLEMENTINE** 3:02 (P. Montrose)
8. **YANKEE DOODLE** 1:36
9. **HOME ON THE RANGE** 1:48 (B. Higley-D.E. Kelley)
10. **JOHN BROWN'S BODY** 2:56
11. **GOODNIGHT, IRENE** 3:39 (H. Ledbetter, adapted by J. L. Lomax/TRO-Ludlow Music Inc., BMI)
12. **SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT** 2:33 (W. and M. Willis)
13. **OH, SUSANNA** 1:13 (S. Foster)
14. **WAYFARING STRANGER** 1:11
15. **OH, MARY, DON'T YOU WEEP** 2:27
16. **DOWN IN THE VALLEY** 3:42
17. **THE WABASH CANNONBALL** 3:01
18. **ON TOP OF OLD SMOKY** 2:14
19. **FRANKIE AND JOHNNY** 4:24
20. **I RIDE AN OLD PAINT** 3:20
21. **THE WRECK OF THE OLD 97** 1:49 (H. Whitter-C.W. Noell-F.J. Lewey/Shapiro Bernstein & Co. Inc., BMI)
22. **WAGONER'S LAD** 1:22
23. **OLD DAN TUCKER** 2:11 (D. Emmett)
24. **I'VE BEEN WORKING ON THE RAILROAD** 1:23
25. **CIELITO LINDO** 2:30 (Q. Mendoza y Cortez)
26. **SO LONG, IT'S BEEN GOOD TO KNOW YOU (DUSTY OLD DUST)** 3:19
(W. Guthrie/TRO-Folkways Music Pub. Inc., BMI)
27. **AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL** 1:35 (K.L. Bates-S.A. Ward)
28. **THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND** 2:50 (W. Guthrie/TRO-Ludlow Inc., BMI)

PETE SEEGER AND FOLKWAYS RECORDS
JEFF PLACE

The 1950s and early 1960s were a prolific time of recording for Pete Seeger and Folkways Records. Seeger was to record and release 38 albums for Folkways between 1950 and 1964. One of the cornerstone series of albums among this vast collection of songs were his five-record *American Favorite Ballads* series (1957–1962), which presented the great American songs, the ones known by all children growing up in America during the 20th century. These were the songs sung in schools and around campfires, many having their roots in the mid and late 19th century. The series was accompanied by the publication of the sheet music for most of the songs by Oak Publications (now Music Sales Inc.) in 1961.

Issued during the height of the folk revival, these resources became essential for any student of folk song to learn from. As the 21st century begins, we have chosen to reissue all these songs in one series for current generations of folk-song enthusiasts. The reissue series is projected to include five recordings, which will have all of the *American Favorite Ballads* series along with selections from other like-minded Seeger Folkways projects of the time, like *Frontier Ballads* (1954) and *American Ballads* (1957).

INTRODUCTION
GUY LOGSDON

Pete Seeger is probably the most modest musician to educate and entertain audiences around the world. When discussing this series, in retrospect, Pete stated that it was presumptuous to have called them "American Favorite," for musical tastes constantly change, and not all of the songs are ballads; a ballad tells a story, and Pete plays play-party songs and many other kinds of songs. If others are booked to perform during the same event, he insists that all names be listed alphabetically, which places his name down the line; he does not believe in being billed as the star. He has stated that particularly at festivals all performers should receive the same fee. Other beliefs and practices make Pete unique in the music-entertainment world, but no matter how unassuming and modest he may be, many of us around the world have been influenced by his dedication to the value of music in everyday life and believe that as long as we can sing, there is hope for the future and that Pete Seeger will be with us.

My respect and admiration for Pete started before I saw him in concert or met him. I grew up in a family of musicians, and when people came to our house, they came for music. Our father, a fiddler, always said he could play anything that had strings; he taught each of us to play an instrument. Music was our recreation and our life. Though we have extremely different personalities, music has kept us together as a family. I married a beautiful young girl from Okemah, Oklahoma, and when her family and friends learned about my love for traditional music, they introduced me to the writings of Woody Guthrie. Woody introduced me to Pete, for without Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie's legacy would be limited. It was late 1956 or early 1957 when I heard and met Pete.

During the 1956–57 school year, I taught public school in Norwalk, California, a Los Angeles suburb.

We managed to save a few dollars to attend a Pete Seeger concert at the Wilshire Theater in Beverly Hills. I was fascinated by his charisma as soon as he walked onto the stage, and was amazed by his skill to get everyone to sing along with him only two minutes later. After the show, each person left happy and smiling. That Pete Seeger concert had a tremendous impact on this small-town Oklahoma boy, for I took a vow always to perform a few songs that the audience can sing with me during my own shows. Though I may not agree with Pete on all issues, I have respected him and his dedication to making music into a force that can influence people and make the world a better place for everyone.

I first subscribed to *Sing Out!* in 1957, and through the years have read Pete's "Appleseds" column, which for many years has included the statement: "Since 1954 Pete Seeger has used this column to spread ideas so that some of them can grow." That short philosophical line succinctly states Pete's life. Johnny Appleseed (Jonathan Chapman) was a historical figure admired by Pete, for if a few apple seeds could grow into massive productive trees to provide nourishment to millions, maybe a few songs and ideas could and can grow into social nourishment. A few years ago, Pete wrote an apologetic note about receiving so many recordings and songs that he could not listen to them all—he cannot listen to music and work at the same time.

Around 1957, I started corresponding with Pete and his lovely wife, Toshi. Here in 2002, I still have a mimeographed copy, dated 28 July 1956, of the thirteen-page directions about how to make a *Trinidad Steel Drum by Pete Seeger*. In my backyard I still have a 55-gallon steel barrel that I have owned and moved for years, thinking that someday I would cut the top of the barrel, build a fire, heat the metal, and hammer out the correct notes. I treasure the instructions from Pete far more than I do learning to play the steel drum, and I treasure the directions titled *How to Make a Chalil*. I sent twenty-five cents for those instructions. Pete Seeger taught me that music is for all people everywhere, if we just learn to sing together.

One morning during the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival, 2000, in Okemah, Oklahoma, Pete and I were visiting when he said with sincere concern, "Families don't sing together like they used to." At a gathering in Washington, D.C., in late 2001, Pete once again stated his philosophy: there must be a musical reunion of peoples. If we just learn to hear and respect each other's music and sing together, it will unite us as a human race.

Pete was born Peter R. Seeger, third son of Charles L. Seeger and Constance de Clyver Edson Seeger, on 3 May 1919 in New York City. Charles was a Harvard graduate and musicologist whose

family roots were deep in New England and puritan history and culture; Constance was a concert violinist who had been reared in Europe and New York City, where she studied and taught at what is now known as the Juilliard School of Music. Pete's Uncle Alan was a well-known poet, who went to Paris in 1912; as World War I started, he joined the French Foreign Legion and was killed in battle on 4 July 1916. His poem "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" (*Poems by Alan Seeger*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916) remains one of the greatest poems of that era. Pete grew up surrounded by music and creativity, with a strong element of New England individuality, social activism, and responsibility.

Following a rather unorthodox lifestyle for an important New York family, Charles moved to Berkeley, California, where at the age of twenty-five he served as the head of the music department at the university and taught the first course in musicology ever offered in the nation. He also became a political activist. A few years later, the family returned to New York. By 1927, Pete's parents had decided to divorce. Charles started a new family with musician and writer Ruth Crawford, and Mike Seeger and Peggy Seeger were born during that marriage.

Pete attended private school in Connecticut. At the age of sixteen, with his father, he attended a k festival held in Asheville, North Carolina, and was introduced to traditional music. He recalled in later years that his father had taught him the importance of "preserving folksongs" when he showed Pete the book *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* by Cecil Sharp; Pete slowly came to believe that the only way to preserve songs was through recordings, not the printed word on paper or in books. He entered Harvard on a scholarship as a journalism major. His two years at Harvard were not enjoyable, though attending meetings of left-wing student organizations reinforced his growing interest in political activism, so he left in the spring of 1938. Along the way, he had learned to play the ukulele and the four-string banjo that he played in a jazz band, and he learned to lead others in singing along with him. After leaving Harvard, he traveled around New England selling or trading paintings, for at that time he wanted to be an artist. He made a little money by performing for schools, and during this time he met Toshi Ohta, who would later become his wife.

From 1935 to 1938, Charles worked as a musical adviser for the Resettlement Administration; from 1938 to 1941 he was deputy director of the Works Progress Administration Federal Music Project. Through his friendship with John A. Lomax, an editor in the Federal Writers Project and since 1933 the honorary curator of the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress,

Charles helped Pete in 1939 get a job working in the archive for Alan Lomax, John's son, and the first hired staff member in the archive. Alan and his father had given the archive approximately two thousand songs, and Alan had been paid to field-record more. (For more about the Lomaxes, see Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life and Times of John A. Lomax 1867-1948*, University of Illinois Press, 1996.) Pete accompanied Alan on field trips, and always gives him credit as being his mentor during those days (Pete would learn many of his songs from the collections published by the Lomaxes), when the five-string banjo became his favored instrument.

Through Alan's influence, Pete became interested in and acquainted with Lead Belly and the music of Aunt Molly Jackson, the militant labor movement advocate; however it was in New York City on 3 March 1940 when Pete and the modern folk-music movement gained their greatest inspiration and stimulus. A "Grapes of Wrath Concert" to raise money for migrant workers was held then, and it was there that Pete met Woody Guthrie. Woody was the hit of the evening, and Alan took him to Washington, where the now legendary Library of Congress recordings were made. Pete and Woody soon took a trip to see Woody's family in Texas. It was during that trip, while staying at the home of Bob and Ina Wood, local communist organizers in Oklahoma City, and performing for different labor groups, when Woody wrote the words to "Union Maid," sung to the tune of "Redwing." Pete has sung the song numerous times through the years, and has stated that Woody and that trip showed him that there was a world west of New England.

Back in New York City, Pete, Sis Cunningham, Lee Hays, Millard Lampell, Josh White, Woody, and others organized as the Almanac Singers, and Pete's first commercial-recording experience came in March 1941, when the Almanac Singers recorded *Songs for John Doe* for Keynote Records (102), a collection of songs opposed to intervention in the war in Europe. Shortly after the album was released, Hitler invaded Russia, breaking his pact with Stalin. The Almanac Singers were soon composing, singing, and recording anti-fascist songs and songs supporting the war against Hitler (see *That's Why We're Marching: World War II and the American Folk Song Movement*, Smithsonian Folkways SF 40021). In May 1941, Pete, Lee Hays, Pete Hawes, Bess Lomax, and Millard Lampell (The Almanac Singers) recorded *Talking Union and Other Union Songs* (Keynote 106; reissued in 1955 with additions and revisions as Folkways 5285). For General Records in July 1941, Pete (using the name Pete Bowers), Woody, Pete Hawes, Lee Hays, and Millard Lampell recorded an excellent collection of traditional songs, *Deep Sea Chanties and Whaling Ballads* (G-20) and *Sod Buster*

Ballads (G21). In February 1942, with America engaged in World War II, the Almanacs recorded *Dear Mr. President* (Keynote III) and gained national respect and popularity for "Reuben James" and anti-Hitler songs. In June 1942, Pete received his draft notice. Before leaving for the army, he joined Tom Glazer, Baldwin Hawes, and Bess Lomax Hawes to record *Songs of the Lincoln Brigade* (Asch Records 330, re-issued as *Songs of the Civil War, Vol. 1*, Folkways 5436); it was Pete's first recording session with Moses Asch. (For information about Asch, see the notes in *Woody Guthrie: The Asch Recordings, Vol. 1-4*, Smithsonian Folkways SFW 40112; and Peter D. Goldsmith, *Making People's Music: Moe Asch and Folkways Records*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998.) Traveling around the country performing with the Almanac Singers, Pete occasionally had conflicts with the other members, for he was not interested in tobacco and alcohol.

In Greenwich Village, on 20 July 1943, following his basic training as a mechanic, Pete married Toshi. Pete was so financially strapped that Toshi paid for the marriage license and had to borrow a wedding ring. After being transferred to a variety of camps, he was shipped to the Pacific, where he entertained the troops; in later years, when asked what he did during the war, his answer would be, "I strummed my banjo." He collected songs from the troops, and produced typed letters, such as: "REPORT FROM THE MARIANAS - Number 11 / September 16, 1945 / Notes of an innocent bystander / Several friends have written and asked me what kind of soldier songs I have run into in the Army," which continues with eleven pages of lyrics, musical notations, and commentary.

Discharged in 1945, Pete returned to active duty as a performer in the folksong movement. In New York City on 30 December 1945, twenty-five singers and songwriters met and organized People's Songs, Inc., which served as a songwriters' union, to "create, promote, and distribute songs of labor and the American people." It was soon publishing *People's Songs*, with Pete serving as editor; the organization and Pete quickly became a target of FBI investigations. After attaining a membership of about 3,000 branches, the organization faced a major lack of funds and had to dissolve; the last issue of *People's Songs* was volume 4, number 1 (February 1949).

A nucleus from the old group reorganized as People's Artists, and in May 1950 published volume 1, number 1 of *Sing Out!* The first song printed was "Hold the Line," with words by Lee Hays, who had written it as a tribute to those who had stood against the anti-communist "fascists" and the Ku Klux Klan, which had perpetrated violence at a concert sponsored by People's Artists in September 1949 in Peekskill, New York. The Cold War was escalating; thousands of anti-communists gathered

to stop the concert, and thousands lined up to protect the rights of the performers and others. The ensuing riot led to numerous injuries; rocks thrown by the Klan and anti-communists injured Pete, Toshi, and one of their children. Pete kept one of the rocks and built it into the face of his fireplace as a reminder. The music was composed by the Weavers, the folk-singing group organized in 1948 by Pete, including Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert, and Fred Hellerman.

Their first year of performing was disappointing, so they decided to try a nightclub engagement. Toshi became their manager and worked an engagement for them at the Village Vanguard in late December 1949, a nightclub that often featured folksingers; they were well received, so their performances were extended into early 1950. Gordon Jenkins, the musical director of Decca Records, heard them and eventually talked them into becoming a commercial act. Their first Decca release was in May 1950, and they soon became popular nationwide; however, the red scare and the rise of McCarthyism dampened their success. By early 1952, their appearances were being canceled, and Harvey Matusow, who later admitted to lying about them, gave the House Un-American Activities Committee false testimony about the Weavers' communist ties. The Weavers disbanded.

In 1947, Moe Asch reorganized his recording business and created a new label, Folkways Records. In 1950, Pete recorded a series of songs for Folkways, *Darling Corey* (FC 2003; reissued on Smithsonian Folkways SF 40018), and it enjoyed moderate success. There were 45-RPM and extended-play issues of Pete's songs as the long-play records grew in popularity. In 1953, Pete recorded eleven songs issued as *American Folksongs for Children* (Folkways 7601; reissued on Smithsonian Folkways SFW 45056). He was busy in 1954 with *Pete Seeger Sampler* (Folkways FA 2043), *Goofing-Off Suite* (Folkways FA 2045; reissued on Smithsonian Folkways SF 40018), *Frontier Ballads, Vol. I & II* (Folkways FA 2175 & FA 2176), *Birds, Beasts, Bugs and Little Fishes* (Folkways FC 7610; reissued on Smithsonian Folkways SF 45039), and *How to Play the Five String Banjo* (Folkways FI 8203). Many other sessions and releases of albums on which songs made popular by Pete appeared during the period leading into the recording of *American Favorite Ballads*.

The anti-communist movement spread in many directions, and the entertainment industry was attacked from every direction. Pete was of particular concern, for he was honest about his beliefs and used music as his voice. He was ranked high on the blacklist. During a Weavers' show at the Vanguard in 1950, Pete and the others became met Harold Leventhal, who became their manager and friend. Harold had worked for the Irving Berlin Music Company and had much experience in

managing and promoting musicians. He brought new life to the Weavers when he booked their now famous reunion concert at Carnegie Hall, New York City, on 24 December 1955. Their future looked brighter, but the blacklist was still there.

Pete was called to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee on 18 August 1955. Unlike numerous others, he did not invoke his Fifth-Amendment right to remain silent. Instead, he refused to answer questions that he believed the committee had no right to ask. He stated: "I feel that in my whole life I have never done anything of any conspiratorial nature and I resent very much and very deeply the implication of being called before this Committee that in some way because my opinions may be different from yours...that I am any less of an American than anybody else. I love my country very deeply." He was found guilty of contempt of Congress and sentenced to a year in jail and a fine of \$10,000. He successfully appealed this sentence, but the blacklist kept the Weavers and Pete from getting radio playtime and television appearances. The blacklist did open up college concerts, however, for students wanted to know why he was blacklisted, and many were fans of his Folkways recordings.

Moses Asch knew that there was limited demand for folk music in the purest commercial terms; competing with big-band music, pop singers, and the growing country-western industries was not feasible. He directed his sales toward libraries and schools, for the music he recorded and issued was an extension of the nation's history, literature, and culture. For many years, he exhibited and promoted his recordings at the American Library Association's annual conference, other librarian meetings, and educator's conventions. Pete's series of *American Favorite Ballads* was perfect for his primary consumers, and most of the songs in this collection were selected from its first volume (Folkways FA 2320), issued in 1957. The story of Pete Seeger's life and career will be continued in volumes to follow.

Pete used some of the following tunes in his instruction book *How to Play the 5-string Banjo*, 3rd ed. (Beacon, NY: Pete Seeger, 1962); however, we have not included the citations in these annotations.

THE SONGS

1. JOHN HENRY

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Also known as "I'm Gonna Die with a Hammer in My Hand," "John Henry Blues," "Steel Driving Man," "Death of John Henry"; Laws 11; from *Folkways* 2319, 1957)

"John Henry" is often the lead song in collections or listings of African American songs and/or work songs, and the stories and legends of John Henry are as varied as the locales and the recorded variants. There are easily more than 180 variants in the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian, and the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Culture has an extensive collection. The legend of John Henry came from the Big Bend Mountain, Summers County, West Virginia, where John Henry, a powerful steel-driver using a 10-pound hammer, worked at tunneling a mile and a half through the mountain for the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad. Legend says he drove steel drills through the shale faster than the steam drill, but died from exhaustion. His death is assumed to be poetic license used by the

ballad writer. His story continues to pay tribute to hard-working laborers long after 1872, when the boring of the tunnel was completed. He was an African American man who probably had been a slave and possibly died in a rock slide during the boring. A statue near the east end of the tunnel commemorates his feat (see Jeffery M. Miller, *The Laborer*, 27 February 1973, 9-14). Fiddlin' John Carson recorded "John Henry Blues" in March 1924, and by 1941 at least twenty commercial recordings had been released. Pete's verses came from the artist Thomas Hart Benton; however, the last verse is credited to Alan Lomax. See Seeger and Reiser 1985:32-34; Laws 1964:246; Lomax and Lomax 1934:3-10; Lomax and Lomax 1947: 246-248, 258-263; Lomax 1960: 551-553, 560-564; Brunnings 1981:158.

2. SHENANDOAH

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Also known as "The Rolling River," "The Wide Missouri"; from *Folkways* 2321, 1958)

Much speculation about the origin and meaning

of "Shenandoah" has been written, and it has been associated with numerous regions in the early development of the United States. Its origin is in a sea or sailor chantey from the days of sailing vessels, and it apparently became popular as a capstan chantey, sung when sailors moved in unison pushing capstan bars around to raise the anchor. It gained popularity up and down the waterways of mid-America and among mountain men and trappers who never worked on or with boats. Since the nation was young, there were few "native" American sea songs; "Shenandoah" stands out as one of the most enduring and popular of them.

The melody in each version remains relatively constant, but there are numerous lyric variants, with many not even mentioning "Shenandoah." It was being sung by the early 1840s, but the earliest documented reference to it is in an 1882 article (Alden 1882:386). Many decades later, William M. Doerflinger wrote that the song's maiden was the daughter of Skenandoah, an Oneida chieftain (1951). However, through the years the locale and players have been rationalized by tradition. Many have considered it a song about the Shenandoah River, in Virginia, which in turn takes its name from the Indian chief. But in reality the song is a Midwestern riverboat shanty. Stan Hugill (1966) gives seven lyric variants ranging from sailor to African-American with equally diverse titles, but sung to the same melody. Alan Lomax states that "the primitive

work chant...comes into life wherever men have to do hard labor with nothing but their bare hands and their co-operative spirit to help them...*Shenandoah*, the most beautiful of all sea songs in English" (1960:37), came from that tradition. An unusual topic in some variants is interracial miscegenation, the marriage of an Englishman with an American Indian.

Pete's version has a subdued banjo background that makes his singing sound almost unaccompanied, the way it was probably first sung. See Brunnings 1981:278; Laws 1964:278; Lomax and Lomax 1947:128-129, 138-139.

3. THE BLUE-TAIL FLY
(JIMMIE CRACK CORN)

Pete Seeger, vocal and 12-string guitar (Words and music by Daniel Decatur Emmett; Laws 119; from *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

It has been written that before Abraham Lincoln gave his speech at Gettysburg, he asked for this song to be sung, and in *American Favorite Ballads* (1961) Pete wrote "I was on a CBS radio show when Alan Lomax first taught this song to Burl Ives, who made it practically his theme song. Alan got it from a collection by Dorothy Scarborough, *On the Trail of Negro Folk-songs*. It is a folk variant of a popular composed minstrel song of the 1840s. You change it some more." It is usually credited to Dan Emmett (see track 1, "Old Dan Tucker"), but according to James J. Fuld (2000), there is no evidence that Emmett composed it: he merely arranged it. In Hans Nathan's *Dan*

Emmett and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy (1962:429–431), the melody of “De Blue Tail Fly” differs from that of the traditional song, and some of the words differ, but time and rationalization could have changed the words.

According to Fuld, the song was published on 20 January 1846 under the title “Jim Crack Corn,” or “The Blue Tail Fly,” by F. D. Benteen. No matter who wrote it, it became popular as a blackface minstrel song. Fuld also makes the correction that it did not first appear in the 1844 *Ethiopian Glee Book* (as has been reported), for volume one of the *Ethiopian Glee Book* was not published until 1847; it did appear in the 1848 edition. See Seeger 1961:12; Laws 1964:256; Brunnings 1981:32; Fuld 2000:312.

4. BLACK GIRL

Pete Seeger, vocal and 12-string guitar (Also known as “In the Pines,” “Little Girl,” “Where Did You Sleep Last Night?”; arranged by Huddie Ledbetter, from Folkways 2321, 1958)

Lead Belly’s influence is heard in Pete’s 12-string guitar work as well as in the vocal that makes his interpretation of the song a “moaning blues.” The song has been widespread among black and white singers for more than a century, but its origin has not been documented. Cecil J. Sharp included it in *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (1932), as collected from Miss Lizzie Abner of Kentucky in 1917; however, it has been included in more recorded collections than printed field collections. In notes for *Folk*

Songs from the Blue Grass: Earl Taylor and His Stoney Mountain Boys (United Artists UAL 3049), Alan Lomax refers to Sharp’s variant as an example that, if not of African American origin, “shows the strong influence” of African American style on Southern white tradition. The song is now frequently performed by bluegrass musicians. It has been sung and/or recorded by a diversity of musicians, including Lead Belly, Josh White, Cisco Houston, Bill Monroe, Rod Stewart and John Baldry, and even the rock group Nirvana. See Brunnings 1981:29, 149.

5. SKIP TO MY LOU

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (From Folkways 2320, 1957)

This is an early frontier play-party song, popular where dancing was a sin. The fiddle, other musical instruments, and the dance caller were forbidden, so young people sang and clapped their hands to create the desired rhythm. The play-party had no age limits; young and old alike and together had musical fun and frolic. It retained popularity among children for many generations. John A. and Alan Lomax (1947) related the story of a young East Texas woman called to the front of her church by the minister to repent for dancing. When asked if she was sorry for her sin, she replied, “Yes, I’m sorry that I joined a Christian church that has such stupid rules.” She left the church and community approval and died a bitter old maid. It has been reported that more than a

century ago, the word *lou*, meaning “sweetheart,” came from the Scottish term, *loo*, meaning “love.” Pete’s banjo accompaniment would not have been acceptable at a frontier play-party. This song has been included in numerous printed collections of Anglo and African American songs and recordings. See Brunnings 1981:284; Lomax and Lomax 1947:79–80, 98–99.

6. THE BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAIN

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (From Folkways 2320, 1957)

Harry “Haywire Mac” McClintock is generally credited with writing this song. John A. and Alan Lomax (1947) give no writer credit; George Milburn in *The Hobo’s Hornbook* gives no credit for either of the variants he collected; and a sheet music variant published by the Calumet Music Company in Chicago in 1935 with a photo of Smiley Burnette on the cover gives no writer credit. Apparently Burnette sang it over WLS Radio in Chicago during the early 1930s, but did not record it. McClintock recorded it in 1928 in Hollywood, California, for Victor Records (Vi 21704), and the following year Stuart Hamblen recorded a variant, “The Big Rock Candy Mountains No. 2.” The song was a hit for Burl Ives in the early 1950s (*Ballads & Folk Songs, Vol. III*, Decca DL 5093), and it is the opening song on the award-winning soundtrack of the movie *O Brother Where Art Thou?* However, Guthrie T. Meade in his “Discography of Traditional Songs and Tunes on

Hillbilly Records” credits Marshall P. Locke with writing the words and music with Charles Tyner in 1906. No evidence has been discovered to discredit McClintock.

McClintock was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, on 8 October 1882; little is known about his childhood other than that he learned to play the guitar and to sing when young. Apparently as a child he developed a passion for church singing and the railroad, and at the age of fourteen he left home for good. He worked as a merchant seaman and a soldier and became a singing hobo. He joined the IWW and sang the popular protest music of the time, before settling in San Francisco in 1925 and becoming a radio singer, performing mostly cowboy songs. He married and worked as a brakeman for a railroad. He died in 1957.

Pete’s version of the song is similar to the Lomax and Lomax lyrics and those collected by Milburn as variant II. The song is related to the songs “The Dying Hobo” and “Little Stream of Whiskey.” For numerous references, see Brunnings 1981:28; Lomax 1960: 410–411, 422–423; Lomax and Lomax 1947:252–253, 278–281; Milburn 1930: 61–62, 86–89; Seeger 1961:66.

7. CLEMENTINE

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Also known as “Darling Clementine,” “My Darling Clementine,” “Oh, My Darling Clementine,” words and music by Percy Montrose, from Folkways 2322, 1959)

In 1863, lyrics similar to “Clementine” were published as sheet music under the title “Down the

River Lived a Maiden" (Oliver Ditson & Co., Boston) with H. S. Thompson credited for "Song and Chorus," but in 1884 the melody and lyrics were published by the same company under the title "Oh, My Darling Clementine," with Percy Montrose credited with words and music. The following year, a variant was published as "Clementine" by Willis Woodward & Co., New York, with credit given to Barker Bradford. Even though reference is made to "miner, forty-niner," no lyrics remotely similar appear in songsters related to the California gold rush. It became identified as a western song in 1946, when John Ford's film about Wyatt Earp and the Tombstone shootout, starring Henry Fonda as Earp, hit the screens, and the song was constantly played as the theme music.

The song was recorded by Floyd Thompson & His Hometowners in 1928 in Indianapolis, Indiana, for Vocalion Records (Vo 5242) and six years later by Bradley Kincaid for Decca (De W4271). It is strange that only two commercial recordings prior to 1941 have been documented, but the song was being sung for decades by people of all ages. Many variants, including bawdy lyrics, have been sung, and the song has been included in numerous popular collections. Folklorists have not listed it in field collections—which makes it one of the songs Pete considers an American favorite without being classified as a folk song. See Brunnings 1981:54; Seeger 1961:27; Fuld 2000:174–175.

8. YANKEE DOODLE

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (From *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

Much has been written about this song; in fact, it is the official state song of Connecticut, and since Pete's roots are deeply embedded in New England and "Yankee" was, and still often is, used in reference to New Englanders, it is an appropriate song for Pete to sing as an American favorite. The most thorough study of the song (Murray 1999), shows that British soldiers used the "foundation song" before the American Revolution to insult Americans, who were less dressed and trained than the British troops. They may have started this practice during the French and Indian War. They sang it in many locations to show their contempt for the colonists, and it appeared as sheet music in England and was even used in an American comic show before being adopted by Revolutionary forces. Variants quickly became widespread. American Tories used it to make fun of George Washington, but it spread as a patriotic song supporting Americans and the Revolution.

A few of the lyrics often sung today are credited to Edward Bangs, who served at the battle of Lexington. During the Civil War there was a Confederate variant. Early in the 20th century, a quotation from "Yankee Doodle" appeared in George M. Cohan's Broadway song "The Yankee Doodle Boy" (1904), which James Cagney sang in the biopic *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942). Into the 21st century, it has been used to promote items and events from athletic and community activi-

ties to coffeeshops. Often considered America's song, it continues to be known and sung by people of all ages; however, before 1941, there were not many recorded versions. A recently printed version as "funny poetry for children" gives readers the opportunity to fill in blank spaces, thus creating a modern-day variant. For additional information, see Brunnings 1981:352; Fuld 2000: 659–660; Seeger 1961:71.

9. HOME ON THE RANGE

Pete Seeger, vocal and 12-string guitar (Words by Brewster Higley, music by Daniel E. Kelley; from *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

In the summer of 1908, John A. Lomax collected "Home on the Range" from Bill Jack Curry, a black saloonkeeper in San Antonio, Texas. A few weeks later, a blind teacher of music at the State School for the Blind in Austin, Texas, set it to music. Lomax included it in his *Cowboy Songs* (1910). The song did not attract much attention until 1925, when Oscar J. Fox published sheet music. The first recording was by Vernon Dalhart, 2 April 1927 (*Brunswick* 137). In 1932, when Franklin D. Roosevelt was first elected president, the story quickly spread that "Home on the Range" was his favorite song; in concert halls, on records, and over the radio, it spread throughout the world. Suddenly it was pulled off the air, off record racks, and out of repertoires. A couple in Arizona claimed to have written it and filed a half-million-dollar lawsuit for infringement of copyright.

Music publishers hired an attorney, Samuel Moanfeldt, to trace the song's heritage. He terminated the search in Kansas, where he found the poem had been published as early as 1873 in the newspaper *Smith County Pioneer*. Further research revealed that the words had been written by Dr. Brewster Higley and set to music by Daniel E. Kelley, both early Kansas settlers. Nevertheless, John A. Lomax went to his grave believing that the song had been sung earlier than 1873. In 1947, Kansas named it the official state song, and it is still widely sung as a cowboy song. For additional references, see Brunnings 1981:130; John A. Lomax 1945:1–8; Lomax & Lomax [1938] 1986:424–428; Mecham 1949: 313–339; Seeger 1961:26.

10. JOHN BROWN'S BODY

Pete Seeger, vocal and 12-string guitar (Includes a verse from "Battle Hymn of the Republic" by Julia Ward Howe; music from *Folkways* 2322, 1959)

The Civil War years inspired many patriotic songs, and this song has inspired the creation and singing of numerous variants and parodies. It is traditionally associated with John Brown, the abolitionist who in 1859 led a raid on the federal armory at Harper's Ferry and was subsequently executed, and with Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Pete's version includes verses from both variants. However, the John Brown in the original version was a soldier stationed at Fort Warren, Massachusetts, where recruits using the melody of

the late 1850s Methodist hymn "Say, Brothers, Will You Meet Us?" sang lyrics making fun of their sergeant. The hymn is generally credited to William Steffe, though each printing of the hymn seemed to list a different composer. It was those soldiers who in 1861 improvised verses and reportedly enjoyed knowing that the public believed them to be about the anti-slavery martyr; soon other regiments were singing "John Brown's Body," and broadsides were being published with each claiming a different writer. It became a Northern song against slavery.

One story often told is that President Abraham Lincoln and poet Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910) heard the soldiers sing "John Brown's Body." Lincoln was so moved that he asked Howe to write lyrics to the tune. There are other stories explaining her inspiration, but no matter what its source, on 19 November 1861 in the Willard Hotel, Washington, D.C., she did write the words that became known as "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." They were published in the February 1862 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* and in newspapers. See especially Brunnings 1981:158, 357; Fuld 2000:131–135; Seeger 1961:62; Silber 1960.

11. GOODNIGHT, IRENE

Pete Seeger, vocal and 12-string guitar (Also known as "Irene," "Irene, Goodnight"; words and music by Huddie Ledbetter, adapted by John Lomax Sr., from Folkways 2322, 1959)

Lead Belly had a profound influence on Pete, other singers of traditional songs, and the entire

folk-music scene, and this is without doubt the best known song that he shared with the public. It was his theme song. He called it "Irene" and usually opened and closed his shows with it. It is the lead song on *Lead Belly: Where Did You Sleep Last Night?* (Smithsonian Folkways SF 40044), and the version by The Weavers and the Gordon Jenkins Orchestra issued in mid-1950 (Decca 27077) became a number-one hit, selling more than two million copies worldwide. It has been sung in many different languages.

Little is known about the origin of the song. When very young, Lead Belly learned it from an uncle and was singing it by 1909 (Wolfe and Lornell 1992). It may have origins in minstrel show music. An "Irene, Good Night," by Gussie L. Davis (1863–1899) published in 1887 with some melodic similarity, was sung as a minstrel song (Fuld 2000), and lyrics published in the *Journal of American Folklore* as early as 1909 resemble some that Lead Belly sang, indicating that "Irene" may have been a traditional song. No matter: it became a Lead Belly song.

Since it was John A. Lomax who discovered Lead Belly, it is appropriate to cite his information about "Irene." It is the final item in *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly* (1936: 235–242). While in prison, Lead Belly created and added verses, almost making a ballad out of it: "a sweet, sentimental song from the nine-

teenth century to tell a realistic, salty story of Negro married life." In *American Favorite Ballads*, Pete wrote, "He always said Irene was a real person and he knew her—a girl just sixteen years old, who met a rambler and a gambler." Lead Belly died in December 1949 without enjoying the popularity and financial benefits that came after The Weavers' hit recording. See Brunnings 1981:150; Fuld 2000:305–306; A. Lomax 1960:580–581; Seeger 1961:48; Wolfe and Lornell 1992:52–56.

12. SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Words and music by Wallace and Minerva Willis, 1872; from Folkways 2322, 1959)

Some Choctaw Indians were slaveholders in the South, and in the 1820s and '30s, when they were forcibly removed into Indian Territory, they took their slaves and resumed cotton farming in the Red River region of what is now southern Oklahoma. Britt Willis, a white man who married a Choctaw woman and was a citizen of the Choctaw Nation, operated a large cotton farm and had many slaves. The federal government with the aid of missionaries was dedicated to teaching the Indians to read, write, and become agriculturalists. In 1842, the Choctaw Council authorized the establishment of a boarding school for boys, Spencer Academy, in the southern area of their nation. They engaged the assistance of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to find administrative leadership for the school. The sec-

ond superintendent sent by the Presbyterians was the Rev. Alexander Reid, a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, who arrived in July 1849 and remained until the Civil War started in 1861.

Britt Willis lent two slaves to work at the school; they were known as Uncle Wallace and Aunt Minerva Willis, and they sang songs that Uncle Wallace had composed as he worked. Rev. Reid and his sons were impressed and influenced by their singing. When Fisk University was established in Nashville, Tennessee, as the first black school in the postwar south, the Jubilee Singers were organized to raise money for the school, and in 1871 they were performing in Newark, New Jersey. Alexander Reid and his family, then back at Princeton, went to hear them, and Reid decided that Uncle Wallace and Aunt Minerva were better than the Jubilee Singers. An appointment was made to teach the Jubilee Singers some Indian Territory songs a few days later in Brooklyn. Reid taught them songs he had learned from Uncle Wallace and Aunt Minerva Willis: "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Steal Away to Jesus," "I'm a Rolling, I'm a Rolling," and three others. In 1883, Reid went to great expense and trouble to have photographs made of Uncle Wallace and Aunt Minerva to hang at Fisk University, where this writer saw them in 1979.

Shortly after the photographs were made, Uncle Wallace died; both he and his wife are buried in a burial ground for black freedmen

near Old Boggy Depot in Oklahoma. Alexander Reid's letter outlining his involvement was published in *The Presbyterian* on 10 September 1890, and a portion of it appears in Thoburn and Wright (1929:2:826–827). The slave-song collection gathered by Allen, Ware, and Garrison (1867) does not contain any of the songs Reid taught the Jubilee Singers. "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" first appeared in print in Seward (1872:6). See Brunnings 1981:300; Fuld 2000: 546; Seeger 1961:61.

13. OH, SUSANNA

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Words and music by Stephen Collins Foster; from Folkways 2321, 1958)

When recording this song, Pete thought it was "probably Stephen Foster's greatest song, a ditty children will always love" (1961); since the banjo is the musical instrument most often identified with Pete, he may have enjoyed singing it because of the lyrics "with a banjo on my knee." It is among the first of Foster's songs to become popular and one of the earliest songs to mention the banjo. In the 20th century, it was widely recorded as a popular song, with at least thirty recordings before 1942, starting with Riley Puckett and his banjo in 1924 (Columbia 15014-D).

Stephen Collins Foster was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1826 and died at the age of thirty-seven in New York City, in 1864. He gave America more than 200 songs, some of which live today. Others profited, but he died in poverty.

Gilbert Chase wrote that he "succeeded remarkably well in producing the kind of songs that irritated the pundits while delighting millions of people throughout the world" (1987). About 1846, he moved to Cincinnati to work as a bookkeeper for an older brother, and there he wrote "Oh, Susanna." His family had Southern roots, but he visited the South only once. Fascinated by minstrel entertainment, he wrote many songs portraying blacks and slave life. Often they were adopted by blackface minstrel singers and later criticized for romanticizing the South and slavery; however, he was not socially or politically motivated: he merely wanted to be the best possible songwriter he could be, and his legacy of songs like "O, Susanna," "Camptown Races," "Hard Times," and "My Old Kentucky Home" shows he succeeded. See Austin 1987; Brunnings 1981:229; Chase 1987:248–265; and Seeger 1961:46.

14. WAYFARING STRANGER

Pete Seeger, vocal (Also known as "The Wayfaring Pilgrim," "I'm a Poor Wayfaring Stranger," "Over Jordan," "Poor Wayfaring Stranger"; traditional shape-note hymn; from Folkways 5003, 1954)

Little has been written about this song, which apparently had its origin in the traditions of shape-note hymnals, singing, and singing schools. Since musical instruments were scarce in early American life, the concept of geometrically shaped musical notes representing relative pitches instead of round notes representing definite pitches was introduced in New England in the late

1700s, primarily for church singing. It soon spread to the Southern states as a teaching method that encouraged singing in harmony, and eventually traveled as far west as Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Singing conventions and organizations grew from the movement, and numerous songs traveled as the tradition moved into new regions. "Wayfaring Stranger" seems to have been one of those songs; considered a "white spiritual," sung by whites and blacks, it was printed in many shape-note hymnals. Early in his singing career, Burl Ives became identified with the song and became known as the "The Wayfaring Stranger." The shape-note tradition remains alive in fundamental denominations and numerous sacred harp-singing conventions. See Brunnings 1981:332; Lomax and Lomax 1947: 330–31, 346–47; Seeger 1961:15.

15. OH, MARY, DON'T YOU WEEP

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Also known as "Mary, Don't You Weep"; from Folkways 2320, 1957)

This African American spiritual has been popular among young people for decades, particularly in late night and campfire singings, and a few choral arrangements of it have been published; however, though it is believed to predate the Civil War, information about it is limited. One woman from Columbia, Tennessee, recalled that it had been sung in her area for many years (White 1965:59). Lead Belly also sang it (Smithsonian Folkways SF 40068/71, 1994, disc

2); he may have been Pete's source for the song. Some of the lines are from the Book of Exodus, with slaves identified with the children of Israel and slaveholders with Pharaoh and his army. See Blood-Patterson 1988; Brunnings 1981:228; Hille 1956; Seeger 1961:78.

16. DOWN IN THE VALLEY

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Also known as "Birmingham Jail," "Little Willie," "Bird in a Cage"; from Folkways 2320, 1957)

This is another of the campfire songs sung by people of all ages for decades, for it has been printed in church camp songbooks and numerous popular songbooks from coast to coast. It was recorded, but not issued, as early as September 1927 by Marion Underwood for Gennett Records. The first issued recording was under the title "Birmingham Jail," by Darby & Tarlton in March 1928 (Columbia 15212-D). By 1940, at least twenty-three commercial recordings, representing a wide variety of musical styles, had been issued.

It is a song that came out of the English, Irish, and Scottish courting-song traditions; however, while it grew into popularity in the Southern mountain region, its lonesome tone made it easily adaptable to any of various circumstances in which the singer might be placed. The melody may have come from "The Happy Home Waltz," published in the 1850s, but the composer may have obtained inspiration from the traditional song. It is a song that seems destined to be popular as long as people sing togeth-

er. See Brunnings 1981:78; Fuld 2000:201-02; Laws 1964:277; Lomax and Lomax 1947:38-39, 62-63; Seeger 1961:33.

17. THE WABASH CANNON BALL

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (From *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

In *American Favorite Ballads*, Pete wrote that this is a hobo song and the "words, half of which must be incomprehensible to most people, have a wild rush of imagery," and, indeed, the lyrics sung by Pete are in the railroad and hobo language, with the final verse metaphorically implying that death is victory. The Wabash Railroad was a company that came from the financial efforts of Jay P. Gould, but there was no train called the "Cannonball." It is possible that hobos using the term may have nicknamed a specific train or may have used it for any fast train, but George Milburn in *The Hobo's Hornbook* stated that to the hobo "it is a mythical train that runs everywhere." The song was published in 1905, with William Kent credited with writing the words and music; however, it was based on the song "Great Rock Island Route!" by J. A. Roof, published in 1885. It became popular among hobos, Southern mountain singers, and country musicians.

It was recorded but unissued in March 1928 in Richmond, Indiana, by an unknown duo, Clark and Edans, for Gennett Records. The following year, Hugh Cross recorded it for Columbia Records (15439-D) in Atlanta, Georgia. A month after the Cross recording was issued, the Carter Family

recorded it for Victor Records, also in Atlanta; their version was released in November 1932, with A. P. Carter listed as the writer of the words and music. Carter also claimed to have written other traditional songs (Malone 1985). The Carter Family helped spread its popularity, but it became widely associated with Roy Acuff. Acuff and His Crazy Tennesseans recorded it for Vocalion Records in 1936, but it was not released until 1939. Acuff stated that he had learned it as a young boy in Tennessee; it could almost be considered his theme song, for he sang it when performing on "Grand Ole Opry," broadcast by WSM Radio, in Nashville. See Brunnings 1981:328; Milburn 1930:188-191; Seeger 1961:85.

18. ON TOP OF OLD SMOKY

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Laws, "Ballad Like Pieces"; from *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

When The Weavers recorded this song, Pete lined it out as a preacher or songleader would in frontier days, or in the more traditional fundamental religion style. Their rendition (Decca 27515) became one of their biggest hits in 1951, when it became the number-two song for many weeks on the *Billboard* charts. Sheet music was published by Moe Asch and Folkways Music Publishers with the statement "New words and music arrangement by Pete Seeger." In *American Favorite Ballads* (1961), Pete provided two versions and wrote: "The first version given here shows how some songs can be adapted slightly for

group singing.... I learned it from someone in the Smoky Mountains. Certain verses go back to Elizabethan times." Cecil J. Sharp (1932) included it under the title "The Wagoner's Lad."

It is identified with the wagoners or freight haulers of the frontier before railroads started shipping most of the freight. To young, farm boys, the freighter's lifestyle had an appeal—seeing new places, money, limited responsibilities, and an undisciplined life that included women. This is a song probably from the Smoky Mountains, where Clingman's Dome is considered to be the "top" of the range. It warns young girls of the perils of falling in love with a wagoner or a traveling man, a man who will love you and then leave you. Many women still identify with and love to sing this song. It was first recorded by George Reneau, "The Blind Musician of the Smoky Mountains," for Vocalion (Vo 15366) in 1925. See Brunnings 1981:236; Lomax 1960:201-201; Lomax and Lomax 1947:38-39, 60-61; Seeger 1961:60-61.

19. FRANKIE AND JOHNNY

Pete Seeger, vocal and guitar (Also known as "Frankie," "Frankie and Albert," "Frankie Baker," "Little Frankie," "Frankie's Gambler Man"; Laws 13; from *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

This is another of the songs that appears in numerous field collections and popular songbooks throughout the 20th century, and one that will continue to generate controversy and speculation about its origin. Sigmund Spaeth (1927: 34-39)

cited a twenty-seven verse variant and stated that anyone who knows the song will have a different variant and opinion. Vance Randolph (1948:125-136) cited six variants and stated that claims dating it back to 1840 or 1850 had not been supported with evidence. Even though the melody and basic song may have been sung for decades, the locale and events in the popular variant song are often traced to St. Louis, Missouri, on 15 October 1899.

An eighteen-year-old African American named Al Britt lived with a woman named Frankie Baker. She claimed that he had threatened her with a knife and that she had shot him in self-defense; he died four days after the shooting. The song tells that her motive in shooting him was jealousy. James J. Fuld (2000) found no evidence to support any of the aforementioned stories or claims. He cites the publication of the song under the title "Frankie and Johnny" in 1912, with words and music credited to Leighton and Leighton and Tell Taylor. The first recording was by Ernest Baker in 1924 for Columbia Records (168-D). During the next fifteen years, there were at least twenty additional commercial records under different titles.

Any of numerous events could have caused the shooting, and similar shootings today can easily be inserted into the song. The actual inspiration for the lyrics may never be known, but it will have no impact on the fact that this song was and is sung by singers of all races, wherever the blues are sung.

See Seeger 1961:64–65; Laws 1964:247; Brunnings 1981:100; Fuld 2000: 233–235; Oliver 1969.

20. I RIDE AN OLD PAINT

Pete Seeger, vocal and 12-string guitar (From *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

Pete recorded one version of this with Woody Guthrie, 7 July 1941, for General Recordings (released on *Sod Buster Ballads*, General Album G-21); Woody is credited with writing a verse that starts with, "I've worked in your town, I've worked on your farm," but Pete does not sing it in this variant. Woody wanted it to sound more like a worker's song than a lyrical cowboy song, and he learned it from Alan Lomax, who had learned it from Margaret Larkin. Pete's interpretation is basically Larkin's. Larkin was a writer-poet who grew up on a New Mexico ranch. In New York City in the 1920s, she was singing folksongs including those she had collected from a North Carolina textile worker, Ella Mae Wiggins, and she provided cowboy songs for the Broadway play *Green Grow the Lilacs* and authored one of the best cowboy songbooks, *Singing Cowboy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931). The song has been a popular cowboy song since the early 1930s. For additional information, see *Cowboy Songs on Folkways* (Smithsonian Folkways SF 40043). It was first recorded as "Riding Old Paint, Leading Old Bald" by Stuart Hamblin, 3 March 1934, in Los Angeles, California (Decca 5145). See Brunnings 1981:139; Seeger 1961:25.

21. THE WRECK OF THE OLD 97

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Words and music by Henry Whitter, Charles W. Noell, and Fred J. Lewey; from *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

In the early days of the recording industry, the record company, the composer of the song, and the publisher made most of the money; the performer, as a rule, made the advance they paid him or her, and usually not much more. As with many public-domain songs that are given a new life and generate large amounts of revenue, individuals who claim to be the composer emerge from all walks of life. Such is the case of "The Wreck of Old 97." In December 1923, hillbilly music pioneer Henry Whitter recorded his version of "The Wreck of the Southern Old 97." His recording was soon followed by the North Carolina blind singer Ernest Thompson's recording of a slightly different version for Columbia, and in May 1924, Vernon Dalhart recorded Whitter's version for Edison. Vernon Dalhart was a stage name of Marion Try Slaughter, a Texan who became a popular and light opera singer in New York and eventually recorded under at least 110 names. The Edison recording sold well enough for Dalhart to persuade Victor to record it as the flip side of "The Prisoner's Song." This recording was the first hillbilly or country music recording to sell more than one million copies. Dalhart also recorded it for more than ten different labels, so the claims for composing or owning the rights to it started. Sheet music claiming Henry Whitter, Charles W. Noell,

and Fred J. Lewey was published, but litigation soon pitted RCA Victor against David Graves George, who claimed to be the composer. Victor prevailed, and in January 1940, the U.S. Supreme Court denied a rehearing of the case. A study by Norm Cohen concludes that the song is a parody of Henry Clay Work's 1865 song "The Ship That Never Return'd" (1981:197–226).

The tragedy was obscured by the song and the litigation, for, indeed, Number 97 was wrecked. It was a mail train that ran between Washington and Atlanta on the Southern Railway in the early 1900s. When the engineer, Joseph A. "Steve" Broady, took the controls on Sunday, 27 September 1903, in Monroe, Virginia, the train was one hour behind schedule. In an attempt to make up the time, combined with a lack of knowledge about the track, Broady literally flew the train off the tracks, killing himself and eight others—perfect material for a tragedy ballad. See Brunnings 1981:352.

22. WAGONER'S LAD

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Also known as "My Horses Ain't Hungry," "Drunken Hiccups," "Lovin' Nancy," "Fare You Well, Polly"; from *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

This is a singing cousin to "On Top of Old Smoky," and it possibly came from a British broadside; however, the "wagoner" is the same Conestoga wagon lad who hauled freight and worked on the frontier seeking fortune and fun, and lyrics, including entire verses, are interchangeable with its cousin

and with many other songs from that era. To some singers, it is simply a frontier love song. Pete's version reflects a male playing on the heartstrings of the girl, stating he is too poor for her and her parents, and she responds that she is not interested in wealth, only his love. The last verse is an "Old Smoky" verse that warns, "Don't trust him."

It was recorded for Victor in 1926 by Kelly Harrell (V 20103), and later by such folk and Southern country musicians as Vernon Dalhart, Sarah Ogan Gunning, and others. Buell Kaeze recorded it as "Loving Nancy" in 1928 for Brunswick (Br 213B; available on *Anthology of American Folk Music*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings 40090, 1997, track 7). With some lyrics different from those recorded by Pete, it became a mildly popular song during the folksong revival of the 1960s and '70s, when Joan Baez, the Kingston Trio, Peggy Seeger, and others recorded and performed it. See Brunnings 1981:329.

23. OLD DAN TUCKER

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Words and music by Daniel Decatur Emmett, from *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

This song has a long and varied history. It has survived as a fiddle and/or banjo instrumental and a song sung in a wide variety of settings, with lyrics from bawdry to sentimentality, and it has been a popular dance tune, usually at play-parties and for contra dancing. Benjamin A. Botkin wrote that play-party dancing developed from a "need for vigorous recreation"—recreation that was controlled by reli-

gious fervor and purity. Instrumental music was banned by some religions, and the fiddle as the basic instrument for dancing was the “devil’s instrument.” Dancing was, and still is in some denominations, a sin, equal to adultery. The play-party afforded revelers an opportunity to sing a song unaccompanied, to hold hands, to “elbow swing” (“waist-swinging” was the ultimate dance sin), and to have a good time. (For more information about play-parties and dancing, see Botkin [1937] 1963.

“Old Dan Tucker” has the musical simplicity to be adapted easily for dance calls, jingles, and harmless games. It was written by Daniel D. Emmett in approximately 1831, but first published by C. H. Keith in Boston in 1843; Emmett also wrote “Dixie” and “The Blue-Tailed Fly” (see track 3). The popular theater of the early 19th century evolved around white imitation and humorous interpretation of black song and dance, usually exaggerated and stereotyped. Dan Emmett was the master writer, imitator, and entertainer of his times. He was born in Mount Vernon, Ohio, in 1815, and died there in 1904. He was one of the originators of the “Negro Minstrel” troupe, in 1842–1843 (Nathan 1962).

The first documented recording was on 12 March 1925 in St. Louis, Missouri, by Judge Sturdy and His Orchestra (Victor-20102); it was a dance disc, with Sturdy as the caller, backed up by two fiddles and a guitar. Variants have been recorded by hundreds and maybe thousands of

professional and amateur musicians, and numerous variants can be found in printed form. Pete’s version is close to the traditional lyrics as collected by John A. and Alan Lomax, but many of Emmett’s original lyrics were stereotypically 19th-century racist in content. See Brunnings 1981:231; Laws 1964:278; Lomax and Lomax 1934:258–262; Lomax and Lomax 1947:77–78, 92–93.

24. I’VE BEEN WORKING ON THE RAILROAD

Pete Seeger, vocal and 12-string guitar (Also known as “Someone’s in the Kitchen with Dinah”; “Dinah,” “Levee Song,” “Workin’ on the Line,” “The Eyes of Texas”; from *Folkways* 2445, 1962)

This is another song found in numerous songbooks and one that young people in the last century who experienced any form of camp life sang. They were probably singing it even before having a camp experience. It was so widely sung that the common answer to the question “When did you learn it?” would be, “I don’t know; I’ve known it all of my life—it’s a song that’s part of my life.” It gained widespread popularity in the early 20th century, and tradition has identified it as a railroad song; however, there is no evidence that it was a railroader’s song. For unknown reasons it was adopted by college students.

Though some have written that black railroad workers adapted it from a slave-period levee song, there is no evidence to support such claims (Cohen 1981:537–542). It first appeared in 1894 in print in the college songbook *Carmina Princetonia*,

under the title “Levee Song” (Fuld 2000). In 1903, John Lang Sinclair adapted the words for a student minstrel show at the University of Texas, and “the eyes of Texas are upon you” became another traditional song in Texas; however, non-Texans, as heard in Pete’s variant, continue to sing the 1894 lyrics with the addition, as a tag to end the song, of lyrics from another song, “Someone’s in the Kitchen with Dinah.” See Brunnings 1981:53; Fuld 2000:309, 513–514.

25. CIELITO LINDO

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Words and music by Quirino Mendoza y Cortez; from *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

This is a song of admiration that may date to Mexico in the 1830s; however, Quirino Mendoza y Cortez was credited as the composer by a copyright granted to him in Mexico in 1929. As with copyright of traditional songs in the United States, Mendoza probably arranged it before publication. Pete wrote in *American Favorite Ballads*: “No one has yet been able to make a singable English translation which is worth printing on the same page as this gem. It’s worth learning Spanish just for this one song. It was probably composed in the 19th century, when Italian opera had a great influence on Mexican popular song.”

A literal translation of “Cielito Lindo” is “Lovely Little Heaven,” and the words go: “Only on Sundays I see your face when you go to mass in the morning; Ay, ay, ay...ay! I wish every day of the week, Cielito Lindo, were Sunday” (Toor

1947:427–428). The song was printed, untranslated, in numerous songbooks throughout the 20th century. See Brunnings 1981:54; Fuld 2000:172; Seeger 1961:23.

26. SO LONG, IT’S BEEN GOOD TO KNOW YOU (DUSTY OLD DUST)

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Words and music by Woody Guthrie, music adaptation of “Billy the Kid”; from *Folkways* 2320, 1957)

Woody Guthrie wrote his well-known Dust Bowl version under the title “Dusty Old Dust” on 1 April 1940 during one of his early trips to New York City, and his first recording of the song, a few weeks later for RCA Victor, carried the same title. As the song became better known, Woody changed the title to “So Long, It’s Been Good to Know You.” Through the 1940s, he wrote at least four different versions, two of which were war songs.

He typed many different manuscripts of the song, of which six are in the Asch-Folkways Archives. He composed the tune for the chorus, but for the verses adapted the melody of “Billy the Kid,” a song that he and many others believed to be a folksong; however, it was composed by the Rev. Andrew Jenkins on 20 January 1927 and recorded for two different labels by Vernon Dalhart a few weeks later. Professional singers and folklorists have assumed the ballad to be traditional, and through the song transmission process, indeed, it has become so. Woody had no problem in adapting that melody or any other melody. See Brunnings 1981:286; Seeger

1961:92–93; Seeger and Reiser 1985:155–157.

27. AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

Pete Seeger, vocal and guitar (Words by Katherine Lee Bates, music by Samuel Augustus Ward; from Folkways 2323, 1961)

Standing before 10,000 young people, a songwriter probably would get greater vocal response from “This Land Is Your Land” than from this song; however, following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, “America the Beautiful” has been sung at many public gatherings and may well be the nation’s favorite song. It is easier to sing than the national anthem, but then most songs are easier to sing. Pete introduces it with whistling, showing his musical versatility, followed by a genuine musical expression of love for his country.

The poet Katharine Lee Bates was inspired to write the poem “America the Beautiful” as she viewed the region surrounding Pike’s Peak, Colorado, when she visited the famous site in 1893. The music was adapted from Samuel Augustus Ward’s “Materna.” See Brunnings 1981:9; Sherr 2001.

28. THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

Pete Seeger, vocal and banjo (Words and music by Woody Guthrie, 1940; previously unreleased; from Smithsonian Asch reel 1349, recorded 29 September 1958)

Much has been written and speculated about why Woody Guthrie wrote this song. Indeed, he grew tired of hearing “God Bless America” almost everywhere he went, and he believed that the words were not inclusive for all. If instead of

Kate Smith Mother Maybelle Carter had been heard singing it all across America, Woody may have reacted differently, and there may not have been “This Land Is Your Land.” Woody did not like Smith’s singing style or the establishment that she represented. He loved the grassroots and laborers of the United States and the musical styles that came from them, and during his formative years the Carter Family represented the people and life he loved; they had a tremendous influence on Woody’s musical style.

For the melody of Woody’s song (originally titled “God Blessed America for Me”), he adapted “When the World’s on Fire,” a gospel tune that the Carter Family used and his lyrics stressed that God made this land “for you” and “for me”—leaving no one out. Pete, by continually singing this song and talking about Woody in his shows, made it a favorite during the folksong revival, and the informal national anthem. See Brunnings 1981:310; Seeger 1993:142–146; Seeger 1961:30; Seeger and Reiser 1985:160–162; *Woody Guthrie: Asch Recordings vol. 1* (Smithsonian Folkways SF 40100)

For a complete listing of Pete Seeger’s recordings in the Smithsonian Folkways Collection go to www.folkways.si.edu. For lyrics to the songs on this CD go to: www.folkways.si.edu/catalog/40150lyrics.htm

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ABOUT THE COMPILERS

JEFF PLACE

Jeff Place has been the archivist for the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage since coming from the Library of Congress American Folklife Center in 1988. He has overseen the cataloging of the center's collections. He has a master's in library science from the University of Maryland and specializes in sound archives. He is currently on the Preservation and Technology Committee for the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences and the advisory board for the Woody Guthrie Archives. He has been involved in the compilation of 20 CDs for Smithsonian Folkways, including Woody Guthrie's *Long Ways to Travel: The Unreleased Folkways Masters*, which won him the 1994 Brenda McCallum Prize from the American Folklore Society; the Asch Recordings of Woody Guthrie; and the Lead Belly Legacy Series. He has been nominated for four Grammy Awards and 10 Indie Awards, winning two Grammys and five Indies. He was one of the producers and writers of the acclaimed 1997 edition of the *Anthology of American Folk Music* and *The Best of Broadside, 1962–1988* (2000). He has overseen the recording of a number of regional folk festivals in addition to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival (1988–present). In addition, he was a member of the curatorial team for the current traveling Woody Guthrie exhibition, *This Land Is Your Land*. He has been a collector of traditional music for more than 30 years. A native of Palo Alto, CA, he lives in Mayo, MD, with his wife, Barrie and son, Lee.

ABOUT THE COMPILERS

DR. GUY LOGSDON

Born and reared in Ada, Oklahoma, **Dr. Guy Logsdon** is a Smithsonian Institution Research Associate, and in 1990–1991 was a Smithsonian Institution Senior Post-Doctoral Fellow, compiling a biblio-discography of the songs of Woody Guthrie. He received a two-year grant, 1993–1995, from the National Endowment for the Humanities to complete the Woody Guthrie project. Logsdon has written numerous articles about Woody Guthrie, cowboy songs, and poetry, and has authored the highly acclaimed, award-winning book *"The Whorehouse Bells Were Ringing" and Other Songs Cowboys Sing*, and compiled and annotated *Cowboy Songs on Folkways* (Smithsonian Folkways SF 40043) and *Cisco Houston: The Folkways Years 1944–1961* (Smithsonian Folkways SF 40059). Former Director of Libraries and Professor of Education and American Folklife, University of Tulsa, Logsdon works as a writer and entertainer.

Logsdon and Place have collaborated on other Smithsonian Folkways collections: *Woody Guthrie: Long Ways to Travel, The Unreleased Folkways Masters 1944–1949* (40046), *That's Why We're Marching: World War II and the American Folk Movement* (40021), and *Woody Guthrie: The Asch Recordings, Vols. 1–4* (40100–40103, 40112).

C R E D I T S**Compiled by** Jeff Place and Guy Logsdon**Annotated by** Guy Logsdon and Jeff Place**Mastered by** Pete Reiniger**Original recordings made by** Moses Asch, New York, 1950-1962**Production coordinated by** Mary Monseur**Production supervised by** Daniel Sheehy and D.A. Sonneborn**Edited by** Jacob Love**Cover photo by** David Gahr**Design and layout by** Visual Dialogue, Boston, MA**Many thanks to** Pete Seeger, Toshi Seeger, Bill Aldacushion, Greg Adams, David Dennie, David Gahr, Gerald Gay, Bob Kaiman, Harold Leventhal, Ronnie Simpkins, Pam Stanfield.**ABOUT SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS RECORDINGS**

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The Smithsonian Institution acquired Folkways from the Moses Asch estate in 1987 to ensure that the sounds and genius of the artists would be preserved for future generations. All Folkways recordings are available by special order on high-quality audio cassettes or CDs. Each recording includes the original LP liner notes.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings was formed to continue the Folkways tradition of releasing significant recordings with high-quality documentation. It produces new titles, reissues of historic recordings from Folkways and other record labels, and in collaboration with other companies also produces instructional videotapes and recordings to accompany published books and other educational projects.

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