WOODY GUTHRIE'S

ROLL COLUMBIA

26 NORTHWEST SONGS

Night scene of the Grand Coulee Dam under construction, 1939


OLUMBIA

1. **Pastures of Plenty**
Michael Hurley and Jon Neufeld 3:18

2. **Oregon Line (That Oregon Trail)**
Pharis and Jason Romero 3:46

3. **Lumber Is King**
Cahalen Morrison 4:23

4. **Out Past the End of the Line**
Timberbound 2:51

5. **Portland Town to Klamath Falls**
Tony Furtado and Kristin Andreassen 4:18

6. **Eleckatricity and All**
Annalisa Tornfelt and the Tornfelt Sisters 1:50

7. **Hard Travelin'**
Ben Hunter and Joe Seamons 2:11

8. **Columbia Talkin' Blues (Talking Columbia)**
Carl Allen 3:06

DISC ONE

9. **The Talkin' Blues**
Al James and Jon Neufeld 3:17

10. **Jackhammer Blues (Jackhammer John)**
Martha Scanlan and Jon Neufeld 4:08

11. **Roll On, Columbia, Roll On**
Steve Einhorn and Kate Power 4:06

12. **The Biggest Thing That Man Has Ever Done (The Great Historical Bum)**
Caitlin Belem Romtvedt, David Romtvedt, and Joe Seamons 4:35

13. **Jackhammer Blues (Jackhammer John)**
Orville Johnson 3:30

14. **Guys on the Grand Coulee Dam**
Bill Murlin and Fine Company 3:11

15. **Mile an' a Half from th' End of th' Line (End of My Line)**
Timberbound 3:30

1. **Columbia's Waters**
Caitlin Belem Romtvedt, David Romtvedt, and Joe Seamons 4:06

2. **Ballad of the Great Grand Coulee (The Grand Coulee Dam)**
Darrin Craig and Jon Neufeld 3:11

3. **Washington Talkin' Blues**
Scott McCaughey, Peter Buck, and Jon Neufeld 3:50

4. **It Takes a Married Man to Sing a Worried Song**
Pharis and Jason Romero 2:39

5. **Ramblin' Blues (Portland Town)**
Ben Hunter and Joe Seamons 3:06

6. **New Found Land**
John Moen, Chris Funk, and Jon Neufeld 3:25

7. **White Ghost Train**
Cahalen Morrison 3:58

8. **The Song of the Grand Coulee Dam (Way Up in That Northwest)**
George Rezendes, David Grisman, and Tracy Grisman 3:05

DISC TWO

9. **A Ramblin' Round**
John Moen and Chris Funk 2:55

10. **Roll, Columbia, Roll**
Bill Murlin and Fine Company 3:12

11. **Grand Coulee Powder Monkey**
Scott McCaughey, Peter Buck, and Jon Neufeld 4:53

12. **The Ballad of Jackhammer John**
Cahalen Morrison, Joe Seamons, and Jon Neufeld 7:50

13. **Pastures of Plenty**
Orville Johnson 6:09

All songs written by Woody Guthrie unless otherwise indicated.
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INTRODUCTION

Woody Guthrie came to Portland, Oregon, in early May of 1941 with the promise of work at the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) as a songwriter for a documentary film. He was greatly impressed by both the natural beauty he found and the government projects being undertaken to improve the lives of Depression-era people. After signing what he called a "stack of papers 4 feet deep," Woody became a temporary government employee. Over the next 30 days he made history, writing 26 songs documenting the culture and character of the Pacific Northwest. He was paid $267 for his time—about $10 per song. Woody had already written and recorded a similar song cycle about the Dust Bowl and would go on to write other song cycles. In terms of lasting impact, though, the Columbia River song cycle was one of his greatest.

Woody recorded only 17 of the songs, for the BPA movie sound track or on acetate discs cut in a basement closet at BPA's Portland headquarters building. The lyrics and recordings mostly disappeared except for those published commercially. The "lost" nine songs were recovered by BPA staffer, musician, and folklorist Bill Murlin, who oversaw the 1987 publication of all the lyrics and known recordings. That was 46 years after the songs were written. This album celebrates the 75th anniversary of the songs and is the first time all 26 of them have ever been recorded.

Bill Murlin produced this recording in partnership with me. I was born in Portland around the time Bill began collecting the songs, and have been hearing them at cider pressings, fireside sing-alongs, and other shindigs here throughout my life. We wanted to ensure that these songs live on, that the culture and history that they chronicle are remembered. We created this album to pass the songs down to the coming generations while also engaging three generations of today's musicians in the process.

The musicians heard here come from many parts of America—but all currently reside in the Pacific Northwest. Their diverse textures and voices combine to

reflect the parts of the region's spirit that we love—a strong belief in progress and the importance of honoring traditions. The songs themselves still help define the character of this region, through Woody's use of timeless melodies, fresh lyrics, and a commitment to a better life for all.

The full story of Woody's work for the BPA is a tale beyond the scope of these liner notes. Happily, both Bill and I were consulted by author Greg Vandy for his excellent new book, *26 Songs in 30 Days: Woody Guthrie & the Planned Promised Land.* We recommend it highly to those who want to learn more; you are also invited to explore the research we have done to supplement that book by visiting the website below.

We will never know just how much Woody Guthrie foresaw of the negative impacts the dams would generate. The desecration of Native lands and culture and the destruction of the river's habitat are the two most glaring tragedies that resulted from this "planned promised land." After studying Woody's private letters from 1941, however, I can assert with certainty that he recognized and hated the pollution of the river that was already taking place. We have not sought to update his song lyrics to reflect today's realities; we thought it was important to present the lyrics in their original version as a whole—filtered only by the artistry of the musicians included here. We have excised the few verses that we found extraneous or offensive, but otherwise stuck closely to Woody's script. Until now, too many of these songs have lived on only in archives, libraries, and songbooks. Songs are made to be sung. We hope to get the chance to sing them with you.

—**Joe Seamons**, July 2016
www.benjoemusic.com/rollcolumbia

A modern-day "hysterical map" featuring natural and man-made features in the Pacific Northwest with an emphasis on visual humor. By Drew Christie, 2016.

CURATOR'S NOTE

If one conjures the image of the traveling folk singer with a guitar slung over his back, it is usually Woody Guthrie who comes to mind. Guthrie expressed himself in many ways to comment on the world around him, the injustices and what he saw as flaws in the system that negatively affected the working men and women of America he had grown up with. He used prose, cartoons, artwork, poetry, and most importantly songs to get his feelings out. When in writing mode he could write a dozen songs a day on a good day—some were keepers, some not. There were certainly other bards of the working class before him, but none got the widespread exposure that Guthrie did. Using the style of fellow Oklahoman Will Rogers, Guthrie would, in a folksy manner, tell a story that commented on things and then break into a song. When he got to New York, he used this persona of the "country philosopher" to land a job on radio, where he was heard by thousands.

Forever restless, he left New York and headed back west. In 1941, the Bonneville Power Administration up in the Pacific Northwest was planning a film to promote the building of dams on the Columbia River. The goal of the dams was to provide cheap hydroelectric power, and the BPA wanted someone to write songs for the film championing the effort. Folklorist Alan Lomax of the Library of Congress recommended Guthrie. Woody saw the dam project as beneficial to the struggling working people out west, both by providing jobs and electricity. So he was hired for $266.66 on a 30-day contract to be a government employee. He wrote 26 songs in this time, including some of his classics like "Pastures of Plenty," "Hard Travelin'," and "The Grand Coulee Dam." It might seem like a large output of songs for such a short period, but Guthrie was prone to such creative outbursts.

Back in New York in 1944, he recorded a few of the songs. He was re-invited by the BPA in 1947 to travel out to Washington State to further promote their work. He wrote his producer Moses Asch at Disc Records in New York suggesting that the BPA would love to see a 78 rpm album release of the Bonneville songs. When he came back to New York, Asch released an album of the songs, oddly called

Ballads from the Dust Bowl. BPA employee Bill Murlin later discovered copies of the acetate disc recordings Guthrie made originally while in the Pacific Northwest, including some of the other songs not on Disc Records. Rounder Records has released those recordings. After all was said and done, there were still nine songs that had never been recorded and just existed as lyrics. This recording is the first time all 26 are performed together, and that is key to its historical significance.

The musicians on this set—all talented folk singers in the Pacific Northwest region—have been involved in ongoing programs and festivals to promote Woody Guthrie's Bonneville songs.

—**Jeff Place**, Curator and Senior Archivist
Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections
Smithsonian Institution, September 2016

For an in-depth look at the story of these songs and Guthrie's partnership with the Bonneville Power Administration:
26 Songs in 30 days: Woody Guthrie's Columbia River Songs and the Planned Promised Land in the Pacific Northwest
Written by Greg Vandy. with Daniel Person. Published by Sasquatch Books
ISBN - 13:978-1570619700

Oregon or bust. Leaving South Dakota for a new start in the Pacific Northwest, 1936. Photo by Arthur Rothstein


TRACK NOTES

ROLL COLUMBIA'S MUSIC PRODUCER JON NEUFELD AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JOE SEAMONS INVITED EACH OF THE ARTISTS HEARD ON THIS ALBUM TO SELECT AND RECORD TWO SONGS FROM THE BPA COLLECTION. SOME OF THEIR VERSIONS OF WOODY'S SONGS STICK CLOSELY TO THE ORIGINAL MELODIES AND STYLES. OTHERS TAKE FRESH APPROACHES TO THE OLD SONGS, ESPECIALLY IN THE CASE OF SOME OF THE SONGS THAT WERE PREVIOUSLY UNRECORDED. WHETHER THE VERSIONS ARE TRADITIONAL OR MODERN, THE INTENT OF THE RECORDINGS IS THE SAME: TO PRESERVE THE LEGACY OF THE SONGS WHILE GIVING THEM NEW LIFE FOR NEW GENERATIONS. SONGS IN BOOKS ARE FINE, BUT SONGS ARE MEANT TO BE PLAYED AND HEARD.


DISC ONE

1. Pastures of Plenty

Michael Hurley, guitar and vocal; Jon Neufeld, guitar

Woody's transformation of the minor-key British ballad "Pretty Polly" into the major-key tune "Pastures of Plenty" has proven one of his most successful re-imaginings of a traditional melody. A manuscript version of this song shows an early draft of Woody's composition that was nine verses long. As it was originally recorded for the BPA movie sound track, Woody sang the "Pretty Polly" minor-key melody backed by his classic guitar style. Several verses were included in the final film.

Before recording it commercially, Woody dramatically revised the song, whittling it down to its essential imagery. In the process, he cut three evocative verses. Two of those verses were exclusive to the Northwest version of the song.

Woody reworked the melody as well as the lyrics. After living in Portland, he recorded and performed the song in both the original minor key of "Pretty Polly" and a major key. The strongest theory to explain the change is that Woody wanted to play harmonica when he recorded the song, and since it is quite difficult to play in a minor key without a special harmonica, he shifted the song to accommodate the instrument.

Woody later recorded the song in the major key at a faster tempo for Moses Asch, but when he performed it in 1949 (as heard on *The Live Wire* recordings), he again sang the minor version. In either mode, regardless, the lyrics to "Pastures of Plenty" are compelling.

Michael Hurley has lived within a stone's throw of the Columbia River in Brownsmead, Oregon, for the past several years. Hurley's first album was recorded by Frederic Ramsey on the same reel-to-reel tape machine he had used to record Lead Belly's *Last Sessions*. This connection and Michael's status as a longtime Oregon resident made him a natural fit for the *Roll Columbia* project.

Michael was brought on board by music producer Jon Neufeld, who worked

with executive producers Bill Murlin and Joe Seamons to assemble and record the musicians for this project. While Jon lent his guitar to this track, his contributions can be felt throughout the album. He has been a mainstay as a guitar player in the Northwest music scene for almost two decades, guiding the vision of Portland bands including Jackstraw and Black Prairie.

2. Oregon Line (That Oregon Trail)

Jason Romero, lead guitar and vocal; Pharis Romero, guitar and vocal

Several songs in this collection show the transition from the despair of the Dust Bowl to the promise of the Pacific Northwest. Unlike most of the manuscripts that survived from Woody's work at BPA, this song was signed with an informative note at the bottom: "This song, the words and music, were composed by W.W. (Woody) Guthrie, not at my home but on the high banks of the Columbia River, for the Department of Interior, Bonneville Power Administration, 811 Northeast Oregon Street, Portland, Oregon, on the fourteenth day of May, in the year of Nineteen hundred and Forty One." The song was thus one of the very first that Woody composed for the BPA job, and suggests that he may have begun taking rides out of Portland and along the river—chauffeured by BPA employee Elmer Buehler—within the first few days of his employment.

Each verse depicts Dust Bowl hardships and the response, to hit the trail to Oregon and the promise of the Northwest. One of Woody's best lines draws the incongruous image of needing a sledgehammer to break rock-hard eggs laid by dust-afflicted hens.

While the verses of this song closely follow the melody of "Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane," the chorus contains a melody that Woody composed himself.

This version of the song was recorded in British Columbia in the tiny village of Horsefly, where Pharis and Jason Romero build banjos and make music together.

3. Lumber Is King

Cahalen Morrison, vocal and guitar

Woody never recorded or performed this song, and thus it existed only in manuscript form in the BPA Archives until Bill Murlin published it in the original *Roll On, Columbia* songbook in 1987. For that publication, since Woody left no indication what melody he had in mind for these lyrics, Pete Seeger agreed to create one.

More than any other song from this collection, "Lumber Is King" shows that Woody was keenly aware of the environmental risks posed by the industrial work taking place in the Northwest: *But, think of the day when the land is cut o'er / And what of King Lumber when timber's no more?* A private letter that Woody wrote later in September 1941 reveals that not only timber was threatened.

> *Some of the factories are dumping refuse + chemical garbage into the nation's greatest salmon, power stream, the Columbia River. Millions of fish are destroyed and the Indians are plenty sore. The dried salmon means grub for the hard winter. A disposal plant was offered the company for a few thousand dollars but the company refused. All running water is public property under Federal law—why this poisoning of the river?*

The version of the song included here was arranged by Cahalen Morrison, a precocious young songwriter who was raised in New Mexico and now makes his home in Seattle, Washington. To the best of our knowledge this is the first audio recording of the song ever made.

4. Out Past the End of the Line

Timberbound: Kate Sandgren, lead vocal; Gavin Duffy, guitar and vocal; Joe Seamons, banjo and vocal; Jenny Estrin, violin

To sell the BPA vision of public power, Woody used this song to detail the many difficulties of living in the Northwest without electricity or irrigation water, both of which were among the reasons given for building Columbia River dams

and developing the river system. Did Woody feel rushed by the pressure to produce lyrics when he wrote this ridiculous line—*I milk my cows and my chickens too*—or did he just want to slip in some humor? Though he recorded the original, more traditional source melody of the song, Woody never recorded these lyrics.

Timberbound band was founded in the mid-1970s after a sawmill worker and his wife, John and Kim Cunnick, created a small body of folk songs depicting life outside the tiny logging community of Vernonia, Oregon. This recent-vintage folk music was all around Joe Seamons throughout his childhood, and led him to the Northwest songs of Woody Guthrie. With the blessing of Timberbound's original members, Joe revived the band's name and music with his friends, and they now travel the region interpreting new folk songs composed in and about the Northwest.

5. Portland Town to Klamath Falls

Tony Furtado, vocal and slide guitar; Kristin Andreassen, harmony vocal and clogging

Woody used the old, stalwart melody of "The Crawdad Song" for another version of his semi-autobiographical theme—leaving the dusty trials of the South for a better life out west. While Klamath Falls (a small town in southern Oregon) had no direct bearing on the BPA projects, it seems likely that Woody passed through it with his family on the way to Oregon. The name may have simply stuck in his mind, or he may have wanted to portray as wide a swath of the region as possible for this song cycle.

After being sent the *Roll On, Columbia* songbook, Tony Furtado chose to record this song. Klamath Falls is halfway between his birthplace in Pleasanton, California, and his chosen home of Portland, Oregon.

6. Eleckatricity and All

Annalisa Tornfelt, vocal and guitar; Emily Dalsfoist, vocal; Kristin Tornfelt, vocal

Making the rural electrification dimension of the BPA projects the heart of its refrain, this song also has a rather romantic slant. Unlike any other song in the

collection, it has a young lady telling her mother about her suitor, a longshoreman, and their dreams for the future. But where we might expect the cliché of a white picket fence or some other image of domestic bliss, Woody rather funnily inserts the line: *We'll have eleckatricity and all.*

Annalisa Tornfelt grew up in Alaska but now makes her home in Portland, Oregon. Her distinguished career as a teacher and performer—both solo and with nationally recognized bands like Black Prairie—continues to help define the modern sound of the Northwest.

7. Hard Travelin'

Ben Hunter, vocal, guitar, and fiddle; Joe Seamons, banjo

The fact that this wonderful song contains no verses mentioning the dams, the irrigation project, rural electrification, or the Columbia River may indicate that Woody had already written it and stashed it in his notebook when he arrived in Portland in 1941. Of course, this mattered little, since many of the images and stories in the song described hard-hit people in the Hoovervilles of Oregon just as well as those down in California. It would be interesting to know whether Steve Kahn (the chief information officer at BPA) actually encouraged Woody to produce songs like these that painted a more general portrait of the people the BPA was ostensibly trying to help with the dam-building projects.

For later recordings with Moses Asch, Guthrie added many more lyrics to the song—the ones that are now the most familiar. In making the song more universal, Woody's Northwest verses did not survive.

Despite echoing the melodic formula of "This Train [Bound for Glory]," Woody succeeded in forging a distinctive song by keeping useful parts and throwing in variations wherever possible. "Hard Travelin'" remains one of the most frequently performed and widely recognized of the songs Woody turned in to the BPA. He did not record it while in Portland, only committing his version to tape years later for Asch.

Ben Hunter and Joe Seamons make their living teaching and interpreting the music of the 1920s and '30s—the era that produced Woody Guthrie. They are Seattle-based songsters who are participating in the roots music revival that is sweeping America yet again. Their version of "Hard Travelin'" was recorded just days after a weeks-long tour that began in Memphis, Tennessee, where they were awarded 1st place at the International Blues Challenge.

8. Columbia Talkin' Blues (Talking Columbia)

Carl Allen, vocal and tenor guitar

This is another of Woody's Columbia River songs that gained fame. Woody recorded it at least twice, and other folk singers recorded it, too. His first recording, for BPA, was a laconic, loping recitation against his characteristic guitar strum. The song included two verses specific to the Northwest version, verses that didn't appear elsewhere. *Water come a-splashing through the dam...* occurred only in the acetate recording; the lyrics were not in the BPA manuscript.

Later Guthrie recorded a version for commercial album release. It was faster, with a hard-driving guitar part. There were lyric changes from the original BPA recording, including a much longer tag line to the last stanza. One of the stanzas may have helped the song gain some notoriety:

Them salmon fish is pretty shrewd, they got senators and politicians, too.
Just like a president. They run every four years.

There is glory and beauty in many later interpretations of the Columbia River songs, but to hear the meaning intended by these songs you need only listen to Woody. While some criticize Woody as a technically unskilled singer, any honest soul cannot deny he could deliver a song as clearly and poignantly as anyone. He was a master of the talking blues, and his favorite melodies are those that allow him to maximize his storytelling skills. He chose to use melodies that could mirror the trajectory and the shape of his thoughts, and the pace of his unique manner of speech.

Carl Allen came to folk music through the folk revival of the 1960s. He and Bill Murlin formed two-thirds of a folk trio, The Wanderers, at Washington State University in Pullman. Their repertoire included songs by many of the day's greats, including Woody Guthrie. Carl and Bill became a duo after college and continued singing together for 54 years, before parting in 2013. After Bill discovered Guthrie's Columbia River music in 1984, Carl and Bill presented programs all over the Northwest on the songs. They also appeared at the annual Woody Guthrie Folk Festival in Okemah, Oklahoma, in 1999 and opened a Washington State showing of the Smithsonian Institution traveling Woody Guthrie exhibition in Woody's 100th year.

9. The Talkin' Blues

Al James, acoustic guitar and vocal; Jon Neufeld, baritone guitar, electric guitar, bass, and mbira

The talking blues style was one of Guthrie's signatures, and the form might be considered a precursor to modern-day rap. This song cycle includes three talking blues; two were keenly relevant, but there is no connection whatever between this talking blues and the Columbia River or the project for which Guthrie was hired. This is a version of the original "Talking Blues," the song the style was based upon. The lyrics were included in the Bonneville Power manuscripts—originally a letter written to Guthrie from the BPA in 1946 that contained copies of 24 lyrics. A faded copy of the letter and lyrics was recovered in 1984.

Talking blues don't use a melody in the traditional sense. Instead, the cadence of speech becomes its own kind of melody. The most artful quality of a talking blues beyond the comedic timing of the musician revolves around the rhythmic tension that develops between the spoken words and the simple, repetitive accompaniment (frequently, if not always, by a guitar).

"The Talkin' Blues" text—which Woody never recorded—may have been one of his first efforts to adapt the form for his own purposes. The lyrics of his first two verses clearly come from a 1926 recording by South Carolinian Chris Bouchillon,

the first recording ever made of a talking blues. The story of how the song came to be was told in a 1987 collection of Bouchillon's recorded works:

> *The recording director in charge that day recalled in later years how the odd talking blues came about! "[Chris Bouchillon] came to see me down in Atlanta. I listened to him and thought he was pretty awful. I thought the singing was the worst thing I had heard, but I liked his voice. I liked the way he talked to me. I said: 'Can you play guitar while you're talking?' He said, 'Yes.' So I said, 'Let's do it, let's fool around with something like that.' He had a little thing called a 'blues thing' and he tried to sing it. I said, 'Don't sing it, just talk it. Tell them about the blues but don't sing it.'" The record was issued in February 1927, and quickly became one of the year's biggest hits: it would eventually sell over 90,000 copies in the next three years. (Charles Wolfe, liner notes to* Chris Bouchillon: The Original Talking Blues, *1987)* (www.wirz.de/music/bouchfrm.htm)

How much of Bouchillon's performance—his pacing and quasi-melody for "the original" talking blues—was established by undocumented predecessors? How much is attributable to Bouchillon? These questions remind us that for all the thousands of hours of recorded music that were captured in this early era, we still only know a small slice of what people were singing, playing, and hearing. Woody Guthrie may have learned the talking blues form by listening to some forgotten musician who never even heard Bouchillon's record. The exciting thing about "The Talkin' Blues" lyrics that Woody turned in to the BPA is that they show us a young artist on his way to becoming a great one.

10. Jackhammer Blues (Jackhammer John)

Martha Scanlan, guitar and vocal; Jon Neufeld, guitar

Woody's note on a manuscript copy of this song makes clear that this was not his first use of "Brown's Ferry Blues" to tell the story of a man working with a jackhammer. He included the following at the bottom of his Bonneville lyrics:

I wrote my first Jackhammer Blues when I was livin' in a little old hotel up in New York Town, and the boys was a takin' up the pavement just below my window; but here it is set to a little faster time, and cut in one of the farthest, youngest, hardest working countries you ever seen, in the rough and tumble valley of the big Columbia River, out here in the good old Pacific Northwest, Oregon. / Woody Guthrie / This song written May 12, 1941.

This is one of the few surviving manuscripts from Woody's month at the BPA that contains a date, and so we know that he wrote the song towards the beginning of his job there.

The song clearly pleased BPA officials greatly, as it was among the ones they chose for Woody to record in their basement office. Like "The Biggest Thing Man Has Ever Done" and a couple of the other tunes, the song's lyrics included a lot of bragging about all the hard work done by the song's narrator.

Struck by the complexity and irony of lines like *Hammered on the river from sun to sun / 15 million salmon run,* Martha Scanlan changed the tone and mood of Woody's song to reflect the sentiments of modern-day Northwesterners who struggle with issues of technological progress versus its negative environmental impact. The dams were undoubtedly a major culprit in the destruction of one of the world's greatest salmon runs, a fact that no resident of our region can truly ignore.

11. Roll On, Columbia, Roll On

Steve Einhorn, guitar and lead vocal; Kate Power, guitar and harmony vocal

This is one of the best known of all of Guthrie's Columbia River songs. Even though many other folk singers recorded the song commercially, Woody never did. The only known Guthrie recording was on an acetate disc made in the BPA basement in 1941. Following the recovery of a copy of the acetate from a private collection, the recording was released in 1987. That year the song, a hymn to public power, became the official folk song of the state of Washington. The song is

based on the Huddie Ledbetter melody, "Irene Goodnight," which Guthrie used several times in the Columbia River cycle.

Guthrie was given a history book on the region shortly after he was employed, and this song, which contains several verses on the Indian wars in the Columbia Gorge, may have been among the first he wrote, influenced in part by that book. Those Indian war verses are rarely heard 75 years later. The "Tom Jefferson" verse usually sung with this song was added by BPA staffer Michael Loring in 1947.

This song stands out as one of Woody's finest accomplishments during his stint at the BPA. In a handful of the Columbia River songs he managed an incredible balancing act—creating a piece of propaganda that was made to order and simultaneously was a folk song of the highest order. "Roll On, Columbia, Roll On" rings true because it doesn't just depict the world as the BPA wanted people to see it: the song also distilled the excitement and hope that Woody felt for the public power project. Those feelings are also expressed in private letters written from Oregon during the spring and summer of 1941, as well as in the pride with which he recalled that experience in the following years.

Kate Power and Steve Einhorn are lifelong musicians, songwriters, teachers, and were the owners of the world renowned performance venue, music school, and instrument shop, Artichoke Music in Portland, Oregon (1981-2006). In recent years, they have won the Music2Life award for their song, "Travis John" at the Kerrville Folk Festival and shared the stage with Pete Seeger, Tom Paxton, Odetta, and Garrison Keillor. They've traveled around America performing, teaching, and encouraging thousands to play and experience the joy of music making. Their ninth album of original and traditional folk, *Portland Romance* was released in Fall of 2016.

12. The Biggest Thing That Man Has Ever Done (The Great Historical Bum)

Caitlin Belem Romtvedt, fiddle and vocal; David Romtvedt, accordion and vocal; Joe Seamons, guitar

Woody added a few verses about the dams onto an old, amusing song that comes from a long tradition of preposterous bragging songs. Interestingly, this song—like "Wabash Cannonball"—is now believed to have been popular in the communities of hobos, with whom Guthrie was quite familiar.

"This is a Bible Story sort of brought up to streamline. It's told like a big tall tale but I'll stand for the truth of it.... Never do I stretch the facts even a smillionth of an inch." Those sentences come from an introduction Woody wrote to a later version of this song he composed for a collection called *10 of Woody Guthrie's Songs*. As observed by Jeff Place in the notes to *Woody at 100* (2012), "Like the 'talking blues,' this song provided a perfect frame for Guthrie to hang his political commentary on."

We don't know if Guthrie had already written multiple verses of this song and then simply tacked on four new ones for BPA. Some verses simply reused the ideas and images from other songs—like this:

I climb the rocky canyon where the Columbia River rolls,
Seen the salmon leaping the rapids and the falls;
The big Grand Coulee Dam in the state of Washington
Is just about the biggest thing that man has ever done.

Other verses used fairly modern imagery to bring the song "up to streamline." The following verse reinforces Steve Kahn's assertion that he told Guthrie to write in the frame of mind of a scriptwriter in Hollywood:

There's a building in New York that you call the Empire State,
I rode the rods to Frisco to walk the Golden Gate;
I've seen every foot of film that Hollywood has run,
But Coulee is the biggest thing that man has ever done.

While the verses that Woody turned in to BPA did not directly link the power

of the dams to the impending entry of the United States into World War II, he did make the connection indirectly in the last verse:

There's a man across the ocean, boys, I guess you know him well,
His name is Adolf Hitler, we'll blow his soul to hell;
We'll kick him in the panzers and put him on the run,
And that'll be the biggest thing that man has ever done.

This is one of three songs from the collection included in the final sound track for the BPA movie, though only in fragments. Guthrie's voice and three verses (including the first one cited above) are heard over scenes of Grand Coulee construction workers pouring yards of concrete and in death-defying swings out over the canyon.

Caitlin Romtvedt was raised in Wyoming playing in family bands with her mother, Margo, and her father, David. Her ties to the Northwest were formed as a young child, when the Romtvedts began traveling every year to the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes in Port Townsend, Washington. There, Caitlin learned the fiddle while being exposed to traditional music from around the world.

13. Jackhammer Blues (Jackhammer John)

Orville Johnson, guitar and vocal

See the notes for track 10 to learn more about the creation of this song. Though he was raised in southern Illinois, Orville Johnson has made his mark on Northwest music as both a performer and teacher for over 30 years. His dobro and guitar playing has been featured on over 400 albums of music produced in the region, while the students that have passed through his music classes probably number in the thousands. The Port Townsend Acoustic Blues Festival first exposed *Roll Columbia* producer Joe Seamons to Orville's talents. Like Woody's songs, the Northwest's thriving festival and workshop scene has drawn together many of the region's most dedicated musicians for decades now.

14. Guys on the Grand Coulee Dam

Fine Company: Bill Murlin, acoustic guitar and vocal; Jim Portillo, acoustic guitar and vocal; Ron Dalton, electric bass and vocal

Woody was obviously impressed with the Grand Coulee Dam project. Many of the songs include references to Grand Coulee, and several focus on some of the project's details.

Woody advocated to friends that they put the names of people or places into their songs, so that listeners could better relate to what they heard. He penned nine names into this song and then turned them into a tongue-twisting chorus. Because Woody never recorded this song, it was left to Pete Seeger to identify "Widdicombe Fair" as the likely melody, based on the song's structure. Woody's sense of humor shows here, too. Lee Hayes (The Weavers) and Matt Jennings, Woody's brother-in-law, were hardly candidates for Grand Coulee construction crews. Another unlikely worker was Pete Smith, a name generally thought to be a euphemism for Pete Seeger.

Fine Company, comprising Bill Murlin, Jim Portillo, and Ron Dalton, came to performing Guthrie's Columbia River songs because of Murlin. Jim Portillo, of Seattle, is 40 years old and relatively new to stage performances, though he has quickly grown into the role. Dalton is a Seattle singer/songwriter who performs with several groups and bands in the area. He and Portillo joined the trio about two years ago, named it Fine Company, and all three have focused on traditional as well as modern songs.

15. Mile an' a Half from th' End of th' Line (End of My Line)

Timberbound: Joe Seamons, banjo and lead vocal; Kate Sandgren, vocal; Gavin Duffy, guitar; Jenny Estrin, violin

Another of the "transition" songs, this one is a running chronology cataloging eight years of Dust Bowl existence, the flight to the Oregon country, and the

ensuing struggles. There's no resolution, just the wistful view of that distant, unreachable power line.

In many ways, the songs Woody wrote along the Columbia River were an extension of his Dust Bowl ballads. "Pastures of Plenty" presents the journey from the Dust Bowl to the Pacific Northwest from one perspective, more romantic and universal, while "End of My Line" gives another view that is more specific and practical.

Woody used a simple strategy to alter the melody of "Cumberland Gap," an Appalachian tune that dates back to the late 1800s. Keeping the basic structure of the melody intact, he just held out two or three notes for an extra amount of time. We don't know which version of the traditional ballad was familiar to Woody, but a common verse of the song uses these lyrics: *Lay down boys, let's take a little nap, / There's going to be trouble in the Cumberland Gap.*

He also crammed in extra syllables as needed to tell the story at hand. A particular tongue twister concludes this verse: *My eyes are crossed, my back's in a cramp, / Tryin' to read my bible by my coal-oil lamp.*

Instead of only telling his audience how hard it is to live without the modern convenience of electricity in the home, Woody shows us a character that is literally hobbled by that lack of convenience.

Looking at Woody's lyrics on the page for this song gives us a textbook example of Pete Seeger's observation that you can view the songs printed and they don't seem to amount to much—but when you listen to the energy and rhythmic momentum Woody creates when he delivers his story, you find that it is yet another major contribution to the evolution of American folk song. Woody slips in lines that are fun to sing and show him at his most playful: *Bonneville dam's a sight to see, / Makes this e-lec-a-tric-i-tee.*

Thus, we find Woody's relentless creativity seeking out every possible reason for people to support the BPA project.


DISC TWO

1. Columbia's Waters

Caitlin Belem Romtvedt, fiddle and vocals; David Romtvedt, accordion; Joe Seamons, guitar

The BPA job in 1941 gave Woody a singular focus for his month of songwriting along the Columbia River, but it still allowed him to refine and develop the types of songs he was always writing anyway. The job he gave himself was to represent the down-and-out folks struggling to make it through the Great Depression, giving a voice to the voiceless. He managed to fuse that work with the kind of propaganda—glorifying the work of the BPA and Department of the Interior—that the BPA wanted from his pen.

The year before, Woody had moved his family to California, leaving behind a comfortable life and steady income working as a musician and radio personality in New York City. He was a restless soul, bound to "ramble all the time," and this gave him a clear vantage point for portraying the struggle of America's anonymous, displaced families and workers.

If there's anything that sets the Columbia River compositions apart from others in Guthrie's canon, it's that we can see him pushing out additional verses that would probably have been left unwritten if Steve Kahn hadn't pressured him to produce as if he were a scriptwriter in Hollywood. He would whittle the songs down when it was time to record.

2. Ballad of the Grand Coulee (The Grand Coulee Dam)

Darrin Craig, guitar and vocal; Jon Neufeld, guitar

One of the most famous songs from this collection, it was even a 1958 hit for Lonnie Donegan and his British Skiffle Group. While this song and "Roll, Columbia, Roll" are quite similar, with recycled words, tune, and images, this one offers some of Guthrie's best poetry.

She winds down the granite canyon, and she bends across the lea,
Like a prancing dancing stallion down her seaway to the sea.

In the misty crystal glitter of the wild and windward spray...

Woody likely was reflecting on the river's power as it thundered through Celilo Falls, which he mentions in one verse, and his words capture the images like no others. The verses also take a somewhat rosy view of the commercial benefits to come from Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dams. Woody couldn't know of the ultimate end to Celilo Falls and the loss of many tribal traditions along the river.

Darrin Craig and Jon Neufeld grew up in Kansas and have been playing music together since they were 18 years old. Both are members of the bluegrass band, Jackstraw, that has held a weekly residency at Portland's Laurelthirst Pub for nearly two decades. Their musical fingerprints can be found on much of the roots music produced in the city's vibrant music scene, and they show no signs of slowing down.

3. Washington Talkin' Blues

Scott McCaughey, vocal, guitar, banjo, bass; Peter Buck, electric guitar, Jon Neufeld, guitar

This was one of the gems discovered on the acetate disc copies of Guthrie's Columbia River songs. Guthrie's characteristic tumbling guitar strum accompanied his lines, and the verses tell a cohesive story, unlike "The Talkin' Blues." The first verse here is very similar to that of Guthrie's "Talkin' Dust Blues," which likely came first. This song was never published until the 1987 release of the BPA's songbook *Roll On Columbia, The Columbia River Songs*.

Scott McCaughey and Peter Buck are versatile, Northwest-based musicians who are mostly known for their contributions to the band R.E.M. Peter started in that Athens, Georgia–spawned world-famous group, while Scott cut his teeth with the groundbreaking underground Seattle pop band Young Fresh Fellows, going on to front The Minus Five and other critically beloved, roots-friendly indie rock collectives. Their collaborations have stretched beyond popular rock music and filled many of the diverse nooks and crannies where Americana and new rock music meet. Seventy-five years after Woody wrote his Northwest

songs, the region is now known more for its impact on rock music than for any other genre. As their contributions here demonstrate, these musicians' talents and interests stretch far beyond the bounds of any one genre.

4. It Takes a Married Man to Sing a Worried Song

Jason Romero, lead guitar and vocal; Pharis Romero, guitar and vocal

For this song, Woody quite simply took The Carter Family's version of "Worried Man Blues," wrote new verses, and changed a single word of the refrain from "worried" to "married." A handwritten manuscript of this song preserved in the Woody Guthrie Archives, dated December 20, 1940, proves that Woody had composed these lyrics months before he ever laid eyes on Portland. We can only guess why he chose to include it among the typed manuscripts turned in to the Bonneville Power Administration. But when Woody left Portland and returned to New York City in July of 1941, his wife stayed behind with their three children. Apparently, their marriage effectively ended at that time. So perhaps there was a personal connection between the song's content and the Bonneville work.

5. Ramblin' Blues (Portland Town)

Ben Hunter, fiddle; Joe Seamons, guitar and vocal

Huddie s*—I am on the edge of playing them One Dime Blues—and if I spend 10 years on them I'll figure the time pretty well spent. Who besides me in this century has had the honor and privilege of studying under the one and only Leadbelly? I'm really proud.* (Woody Guthrie in an addendum to a letter to his friends, the Ambellans, in New York City, sent from his address in southeast Portland, postmarked June 10, 1941)

"Ramblin' Blues" is one of Woody's less original adaptations of an older melody. He not only adapted multiple songs from a single Lead Belly tune for his BPA assignment, here he also lifted a melody (and lyrical idea) from Blind Lemon Jefferson, one

of Lead Belly's mentors. This is the second verse of Jefferson's "One Dime Blues":

I was standing on East Cairo Street one day (3x) / One dime was all I had.

Obviously, Woody simply recast the location for this song:

Standing down in Portland town one day. / Hey, hey, hey, hey.

While Guthrie's love for and artistic debts to Lead Belly are well documented, his debt to blues music as a whole is rarely discussed. Even when he traveled thousands of miles away from the regions where the blues began, Woody Guthrie continued to find the forms and melodies of blues music extremely valuable to his creative process.

6. New Found Land

John Moen, vocal and guitar; Chris Funk, baritone guitar; Jon Neufeld, organ

Here Woody created a wholly distinct song despite the close relation of the song's melody to its source. This is another in the general grouping of "transition" songs. Woody recorded the song only once (for Folkways founder Moe Asch in 1947), and it was included in two commercial collections, the last one titled *Bonneville Dam and Other Columbia River Songs* and issued on the Verve/Folkways label in 1966. Moe Asch dedicated the album to Guthrie, who was hospitalized in New York and only a year from dying. The song's lyrics did not appear in the recovered BPA manuscripts. Like several other songs in the collection, the tie to the Columbia River and the Northwest is tenuous.

As with "Jackhammer Blues," Woody recorded the source tune for "New Found Land" during a session with Sonny Terry playing harmonica and Cisco Houston playing mandolin. Guthrie's version of "Buffalo Gals" is played at a faster clip, but it includes the same joyful energy as his recording of "New Found Land."

In 2009, Joe Seamons discovered four different manuscript versions of this song in the Woody Guthrie Archives. However, there was very little lyrical variation between them, and none of the manuscripts included a date. Thus, it seems that

Woody revisited the song on multiple occasions following his work in Portland.

While multi-instrumentalist John Moen is best known for his work as the drummer for the Portland-based band The Decembrists, his contributions to Northwest bands stretch back to 1986, when he moved to the city from his hometown of Salem, Oregon. In addition to his solo projects, he has collaborated with Elliott Smith, Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks, and Guided By Voices.

7. White Ghost Train

Cahalen Morrison, guitar and vocal

This is the only one of Woody's three "Cannonball" variants for the BPA that had no bearing whatsoever on the public power project. "White Ghost Train" mentions the city of Portland once in passing.

8. The Song of the Grand Coulee Dam (Way Up in That Northwest)

George Rezendes, guitar and vocal; David Grisman, mandolin and vocal; Tracy Grisman, bass

Originally written to the tune of "On Top of Old Smokey," the song recites numerous specific details about Grand Coulee Dam: its location, materials, irrigation system, reservoir, and even some dimensions! And it repeats the dam's promised benefits to farmers and factories. Woody's only recording was made on acetate disc in the basement of the Bonneville Power Administration, and it appears that he never revisited the song after 1941.

George Rezendes is a Brooklyn-born guitar player, luthier, and bandleader who has been living in Port Townsend, Washington, for the past three decades. He built his house and a recording studio in Port Townsend called Toolshed Soundlab, where he hosts concerts as well as professional recording projects. George contributed his own arrangement of this song to the new *Roll Columbia* project, and also enlisted recent Port Townsend transplant David Grisman to play mandolin, while David's wife Tracy played bass.

9. A Ramblin' Round

John Moen, vocal, acoustic and electric guitars; Chris Funk, dobro

As he did for "Roll On, Columbia, Roll On," Woody took the tune of Lead Belly's "Irene Goodnight," sped it up a little, and altered the lyrical meter. However, he did not give the song a chorus, simply writing eight verses, none of which are repeated in manuscripts or recordings of the song. The most notable element of this composition is the lyric thread created in verses three through five. Woody describes the work of growing the fruit, the peach tree limbs bending under the heavy weight of their bounty, and finally the rotten fruit wasted on the ground as hungry families starve nearby. The beauty and honesty of the growing work is contrasted with the needless waste of the badly needed food. This simple but powerful depiction of human struggle proves to be one of Woody's most poetic descriptions of the harsh troubles that he hoped the BPA projects would help resolve. Unsurprisingly, this became one of the more well-known songs among those Woody turned in to the BPA, and it is always credited as one of his Northwest compositions even though it makes no specific references to the region.

10. Roll, Columbia, Roll

Fine Company: Bill Murlin, acoustic guitar and vocal; Jim Portillo, acoustic guitar and vocal; Ron Dalton, electric bass and vocal

One of Guthrie's more poetic songs in the collection, it was the opening theme music for the BPA documentary, *The Columbia,* which was envisioned in 1941. Steve Kahn got as far as recording Guthrie's songs and writing a draft script before the project was stopped by World War II. After the 1948 Columbia River flood wiped out Oregon's second largest city, Vanport, Kahn saw the opportunity to renew the call for public development of the river, and his film was eventually produced in 1949. This song bears an uncanny resemblance to "The Grand Coulee Dam," but while "The Grand Coulee Dam" closely follows the contours of

its source melody, "Roll, Columbia, Roll" departed from that familiar track for a melodic chorus that was all Woody's own:

Roll, Columbia, won't you roll, roll, roll / Roll, Columbia, won't you roll, roll, roll.

The chorus is the key distinguishing feature between this song and "The Grand Coulee Dam." Many of the verses contain couplets that are simply rewrites of the same imagery and ideas. But the verses of "Roll, Columbia, Roll" are beautifully descriptive and include many great lines heard nowhere else in the collection. It is hard to imagine a more sincere advertisement for Dust Bowl farmers to move to the Northwest than the song's first two verses.

The only known complete recording of the song came from a vinyl copy of the original movie sound track master, recorded in New York in 1942. Several verses from the song appeared throughout the movie, but editing them together doesn't make it complete. Other than Woody's original acetate recording, the version here is the only known recording of the song.

11. Grand Coulee Powder Monkey

Scott McCaughey, guitar, vocal, bass, harmonica, piano, stomps, and handclaps; Peter Buck, electric guitar; Jon Neufeld, guitar, stomps, and handclaps

These lyrics were not included in the BPA manuscripts, and this was one of the last of the 26 songs identified as most likely a part of the collection. The song was found in *The Nearly Complete Collection of Woody Guthrie Folk Songs* published by Ludlow Music. Until this album, it's never been recorded.

12. The Ballad of Jackhammer John

Cahalen Morrison, vocal; Joe Seamons, banjo; Jon Neufeld, guitar

Woody never recorded this epic tale that weaves together multiple mythic figures of American folklore. Grand Coulee Dam is only mentioned briefly near the song's conclusion after over a dozen verses describe the work done by characters

including the famous John Henry and Paul Bunyan as well as Guthrie creations like Jackhammer John. As in "The Biggest Thing That Man Has Ever Done," Woody used the strategy of glorifying the Grand Coulee by placing it alongside the larger-than-life characters and images familiar to all.

All the musicians on the album had prepared their versions of Woody's songs before entering the studio, but confusion over similar titles left them without a prepared a version of this epic ballad. So Jon Neufeld and Joe Seamons laid down a long instrumental track and then asked Cahalen Morrison to sing his way through the 17 verses of Woody's folk odyssey; he did it in a single take, with a mere ten minutes of preparation. It is unlikely that all of these verses had ever been sung before, and it will take a brave artist to memorize and perform them someday.

13. Pastures of Plenty

Orville Johnson, guitar and vocal

Though "Roll On, Columbia, Roll On" remains the most famous song in this collection, "Pastures of Plenty" is the song that best encapsulates the breadth and scope of both the BPA projects and Woody's great task. In just five verses, Guthrie describes the struggling, displaced workers. He details the impacts of the dams—the new irrigation, the rural electrification, and the dream of a more prosperous future. Fittingly, the final verse suggests a metaphor—the singer is the river, always rambling onward. But Woody does not leave it at that, choosing instead to suggest something even grander: *My pastures of plenty must always be free.* The dams would not solve everything, but they would create more freedom through opportunity. This was the part of the American dream that Woody could fully support—where working people pulled together in common with both public and private institutions to build something greater than could be done alone.


CREDITS

Executive producers: Joe Seamons and Bill Murlin

Produced by Jon Neufeld, Joe Seamons, and Bill Murlin

Co-produced by John Smith

Engineered by Adam Selzer

Mixed by Jon Neufeld and Adam Selzer

Mastered by Jeff Lipton at Peerless Mastering

(Except "Guys on the Grand Coulee Dam" engineered, mixed, and mastered by Camelia Jade Lazenby and George Rezendes at Toolshed Soundlab, Port Townsend, WA)

("Columbia Talkin' Blues" was recorded by Carl Allen; engineered by John W. Gray in Studio A at The Saltmine Studio Oasis, Mesa, AZ)

Tracks featuring Pharis and Jason Romero were engineered by Brandon Hoffman;recorded in Horsefly, B.C., in the Jason Romero Banjo Workshop

Tracks featuring either Carl Allen or Pharis and Jason were mixed by Jon Neufeld and Adam Selzer at Type Foundry Studio; mastered by Jeff Lipton at Peerless Mastering

All tracks featuring Orville Johnson, Ben Hunter & Joe Seamons, Martha Scanlan, Cahalen Morrison, Bill Murlin & Fine Company, Caitlin Belem Romtvedt & David Romtvedt were recorded at Studio Litho in Seattle by Jon Neufeld.

All tracks featuring John Moen, Timberbound, Kate Power & Steve Einhorn, Scott McCaughey & Peter Buck, Darrin Craig & Jon Neufeld, Tony Furtado, Al James, and Michael Hurley were recorded at Type Foundry Studios in Portland by Jon Neufeld.

Annotated by Joe Seamons and Jeff Place

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