KANSAS HISTORY AND FOLKSONG

by Bill and Mary Koch

America's musical heritage is a strange mixture, but from its songs, and especially its folksongs, we can relive our historical past. As our territories developed and new states came into the union, songs were made and sung which purported to tell of life and conditions in the new state. Kansas was a crucial area a hundred years ago, and the whole nation's attention was directed toward her and toward what might transpire on these prairies. The Civil War slowed down the westward movement, but only temporarily, for a new hope had already been fired in the hearts of people, especially those from the old northwest and from the eastern seaboard.

Walt Whitman, America's great poet of democratic principles, realized early in the 19th century the part that music would play in this westward movement and the settlement of America's great heartland. He praised the west and foresaw what Frederick Jackson Turner, the eminent historian, was to say later about the westward movement—that the natural processes of settlement in succeeding new areas afforded the opportunity to slough off undesirable, non-democratic principles and institutions. Both Turner and Whitman were romanticists; that well-known phrase, "The American Dream," meaning the idea of the freedom of opportunity to all, is the theme of much of their literary output.

Only a vast public domain and free land could spark this dream to a reality, so men would actually point their covered wagons westward with kids, dogs, hogs, and all, to head for the wild prairies, the waterless deserts, and the rugged mountains, to settle in the vast new territory which had been earmarked by pessimists as "unfit for settlement," or "fit habitation only for prairie dogs, owls, buffalo, and rattlesnakes." The whole territory had been named "The Great American Desert," and Washington Irving had predicted that the country would, by its nature, "form a lawless interval between the abodes of civilized man." "Here," he said, "may spring up new and mongrel races, the amalgamations of the debris and abrasions of former races civilized and savage—the descendents of wandering hunters and trappers; of fugitives from the Spanish and American frontiers; of adventurers and desperadoes of every class and country, yearly ejected from the bosom of society into the wilderness."

But the romantic promise of hope and adventure through free land, the desire to test the reality of the democratic processes, the American

dream of achievement of success on one's own merit, all motivated tens of thousands of Americans and Europeans to come west. Whitman, always the champion of this American dream, always the believer in the Great American West, always the man to celebrate, not to criticize, said:

Come, my tan-faced children,
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready,
Have you your pistols? Have you your sharp-edged axes?
Pioneers! O pioneers!

For we cannot tarry here,
We must march, my darlings, we must bear the brunt of danger,
We the youthful sinewy races, all the rest on us depend,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

O you youths, Western youths,
So impatient, full of actions, full of many pride and friendship,
Plain I see you Western youths, see you tramping with the foremost,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

O you daughters of the West!
O you young and elder daughters! O you mothers and you wives!
Never must you be divided, in our ranks you move united,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Minstrels latent on the prairies!
(Shrouded bards of other lands, you may rest, you have done your work)
Soon I hear you coming warbling, soon you rise and tramp amid us,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

From Whitman's dream we turn to the reality of the one great flaw which had to be resolved if the west were to be the fruition of that dream —human slavery. The issue had to have its martyr; the issue had to have its song. In this case, through a complicated set of circumstances, folk creators appropriated the controversial John Brown as the central figure in the period's greatest propaganda and march song. One of the stanzas in "John Brown's Body" runs:

He's gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord,
He's gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord,
He's gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord,
His soul is marching on.

Turning from the tender verse of the New England countryside, John Greenleaf Whittier's pen became a most effective weapon against this scourge, slavery. From romanticism to practical politics, to practical issues, and to Kansas, testing ground for the dedication to God's laws, Whittier

pledged his talents. The words to "The Song of the Kansas Emigrant" were composed by this great abolitionist poet on the occasion of the departure of a party of settlers who went west under the sponsorship of the New England Aid Company in 1854. This group was accompanied by a band of four musicians from Vermont. They were probably the first musical organization in Kansas—two cornets, a bugle, and a fife. Whittier saw the settlement of Kansas by free-state advocates as a moral obligation:

We cross the prairies as of old
The pilgrims crossed the sea,
To make the West as they the East
The homestead of the free.

The big push for settlement was on. "I hear Lincoln's gonna sign the Homestead Law; when he does, I'm goin' west, somewheres. I hear the land out in Kansas grows pumpkins big as rain barrels." "Yeah? You can't believe everything you hear. What about the Indians? What about the wind? What about the rain? What about those bad men, the killers?" "Gonna take your kids?" "Well, if you don't like it in Kansas you can always go to California or Oregon." "I'm not stayin' here if there's free land out west." A fellow spoke up: "I'm goin' tomorrow—I ain't got no wife nor kids—I'll get them later. I'll get a home, wait and see. My dad did all right here years ago; don't see why I can't out there."

The word "home," placed so carefully in the title of the original Homestead Act, was not without its effect in song and in a thousand other ways. "My Western Home" ("Home on the Range") truly symbolizes the dream of western settlers. Dr. Brewster Higley's moment of inspiration, which came to him in his cabin in Smith County, Kansas, has become immortal.

MY WESTERN HOME (A Home on the Range)

Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the sky is not clouded all day.

Oh, give me the gale of the Solomon vale,
Where light streams of buoyancy flow,
On the banks of the Beaver, where seldom if ever
Any poisonous herbage doth grow.

A home, a home,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where never is heard a discouraging word,
And the sky is not clouded all day.

Oh, give me a land where the bright diamond sand
Throws light from its glittering stream,
Where glideth along the graceful white swan
Like a maid in a beavenly dream.

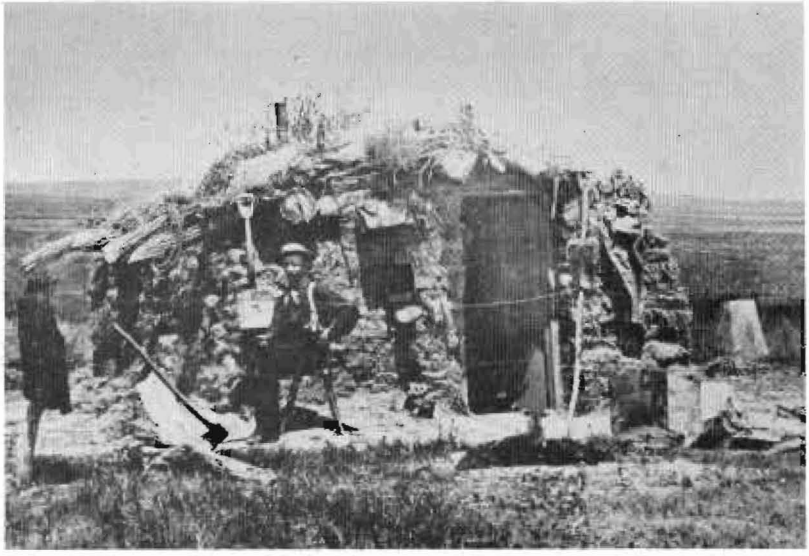
I love these wild flowers in this hright land of ours;
I love, too, the curlew's wild scream,
Tbe bluffs of wild rocks and antelope flocks
That graze on our hillsides so green.

Chorus

How often at nigbt, when the heavens are bright
With the light of the glittering stars
Have I stood there amazed, and asked as I gazed
If their beauty exceeds tbat of ours.

The air is so pure, the breezes so light,
The zephyrs so balmy at night,
I would not exchange my home bere to range
Forever in azure so bright.

Chorus



A Comanche County bachelor and his soddy in the 1880's. (Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society)

"Where you goin'?" "Who, me?" "Yeah, you!" "Well, I'm goin' to Lane County, Kansas. I've got an uncle out there; he'll show me the ropes." "Well, write me all about it, will you? What's this stuff about wet and dry cycles, no rain for four or five years? A fellow might starve to death." "Aw—you gotta have faith in the country. You gotta have courage, too. Hardship and difficulties make men—the tough things in life are all to the good. I'm gettin' too soft, and I want to go out there where men are men and women are glad of it." "Women, did you say?" "Yeah, women." "Won't find many women out there. They say it's hell on horses and women." "Yeah? Well, I'm a bachelor, so I'll try it."

THE LANE COUNTY BACHELOR

My name is Frank Bolar, 'nole bachelor I am,
I'm keepin' ole bach on an elegant plan.
You'll find me out West in the County of Lane
Starving to death on a government claim;
My house it is built of the national soil,
The walls are erected according to Hoyle,
The roof has no pitch but is level and plain
And I always get wet when it happens to rain.

Refrain:

But hurrah for Lane County, the land of the free,
The home of the grasshopper, bedbug, and flea,
I'll sing loud her praises and boast of her fame
While starving to death on my government claim.

My clothes they are ragged, my language is rough,
My head is case-hardened, both solid and tough;
The dough it is scattered all over the room
And the floor would get scared at the sight of a broom;
My dishes are dirty and some in the bed
Covered with sorghum and government bread;
But I have a good time, and live at my ease
On common sop-sorghum, old bacon and grease.

Refrain:

But hurrah for Lane County, the land of the West,
Where the farmers and laborers are always at rest,
Where you've nothing to do but sweetly remain,
And starve like a man on your government claim.

How happy am I when I crawl into bed,
And a rattlesnake rattles his tail at my head,
And the gay little centipede, void of all fear
Crawls over my pillow and into my ear,
And the nice little bedbug so cheerful and bright,
Keeps me a-scratching full half of the night,
And the gay little flea with toes sharp as a tack
Plays "Why don't you catch me?" all over my back.

Refrain:

But hurrah for Lane County, where blizzards arise,
Where the winds never cease and the flea never dies,
Where the sun is so hot if in it you remain
'Twill burn you quite black on your government claim.

How happy am I on my government claim,
Where I've nothing to lose and nothing to gain,
Nothing to eat and nothing to wear,
Nothing from nothing is honest and square.
But here I am stuck, and here I must stay,
My money's all gone and I can't get away;
There's nothing will make a man hard and profane
Like starving to death on a government claim.

Refrain:

Then come to Lane County, there's room for you all,
Where the winds never cease and the rains never fall,
Come join in the chorus and boast of her fame,
While starving to death on your government claim.

Now don't get discouraged, ye poor hungry men,
We're all here as free as a pig in a pen;
Just stick to your homestead and battle your fleas,
And pray to your Maker to send you a breeze.
Now a word to claim-holders who are bound for to stay:
You may chew your hard-tack till you're toothless and gray,
But as for me, I'll no longer remain
And starve like a dog on my government claim.

Refrain:

Farewell to Lane County, farewell to the West,
I'll travel back East to the girl I love best;
I'll stop in Missouri and get me a wife,
And live on corn dodgers the rest of my life.

A pioneer bachelor of the 1880's prepares to eat. (Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society)

But the women came, the women that Whitman dreamed of, the women that Whittier blessed, and the women that just plain "loved their old man." Everyhody sang the old songs about Suzanna and Sweet Betsy and Clementine. And what trouhles they went through! As one old-timer said, "Yeah, they had to stand what men folks stood, and stand the men folks, too."

HELLO, GIRLS

Hello, girls, listen to my voice.
Don't you fall in love with no Kansas boys.
For if you do, your fortune it will be
Hoecake and hominy, and sassafras tea.

They'll take you out on a jet-black hill,
Take you there so much against your will,
Leave you there to perish on the plain;
That's the way with the Kansas range.

Some live in a cabin with a huge log wall,
Nary a window in it at all,
Sandstone chimney and a puncheon floor,
Clapboard roof and a buttoned door.

When they go to milk, they milk in a gourd,
Heave it in a corner and cover it with a board.
Some get plenty and some get none,
That's the way with the Kansas run.

When they go a-courtin' they take along a chair.
First thing they say, "Has your daddy killed a bear?"
Second thing they say as they sit down,
"Madam, your johnnycake is baking brown."

When a young man falls in love,
First it's "honey," and then it's "turtle dove."
After they're married, no such thing,
"Get up and get my breakfast, you good-for-nothing thing."

Hello, girls, listen to my voice.
Don't you fall in love with no Kansas boys.
For if you do, your fortune it will be
Hoecake, hominy, and sassafras tea.

For many, the fight was desperate; to take it too seriously was to surrender. Men laughed when they could no longer swear, women laughed that they might not weep, and more than once a man was heard to say, "I lost everything to the 'hoppers yesterday. Well—not everything. I still got the mortgage."

KANSAS LAND (Version One)

I've reached the land of short-grass fine
And sought to make a homestead mine.
The hot wind blows the livelong day,
And all my cash has passed away.

Oh, Kansas Land! My Kansas Land!
As on the dugout roof I stand,
I look away across the plain
And see the corn is needing rain.
I see the 'hoppers flying low,
And feel the burning hot wind blow.

The dust clouds float upon the breeze,
Through drooping corn and wilting trees.
The wheatfields all are lifeless brown;
The sunflower leaves hang limply down.

The 'hoppers come and camp on me.
I know no place from then to flee.
They eat my crops, they eat my shirt;
They leave me nought but sun-dried dirt.
Chorus

In Kansas Land I'm going to stay,
For all these things shall pass away.
Sure, pleasure follows after pain;
Next spring it's going to rain again.
Chorus

KANSAS LAND (Version Two)

I've reached the land of corn and wheat,
Of pumpkin pies and potatoes sweet.
I bought my land from Uncle Sam,
And now I'm happy as a clam.

Oh, Kansas Land! Sweet Kansas Land!
As on the highest hill I stand
I look the pleasant landscape o'er;
For acres broad I'll sigh no more,
'Til Gabriel's trump in loud command
Says I must leave my Kansas Land.

My chickens they are Plymouth Rock;
My horses, Clydesdale Norman stock;
My cattle, Durham, very fine,
And Poland China are my swine
Chorus

When first I came to get my start,
The neighbors they were far apart.
But now there's one on every claim,
And sometimes three all want the same.
Chorus

At first the grass was brown and sear,
With drouth and grasshoppers each year;
But now there's so much rain and snow,
The cowboy is compelled to go.
Chorus

"Kansas Land" was certainly the favorite folksong of the plains pioneer, and few settlers missed its wry humor. Hundreds of older Kansans have told of having sung it in the early days. It also exists in other states ("Nebraska Land," "Dakota Land," etc.), but the song first arose in Kansas, and is sung to a folk adaptation of the well-known gospel hymn, "Beulah Land." Hot political issues of the day caused not a few parodies to arise from the stub pencils of folk creators, such as this one:

I catch the scent of garnered wheat,
Then get a whiff of sockless feet,
And recognize before I flee
The order of calamity.

Interestingly enough, German immigrants caught the spirit of the song, and versions in Plaut-Deutsch appeared. At Moundridge, Kansas, during the early period they sang:

O Kaunsas Launt! O Kaunsas Launt!
(O Kansas Land! O Kansas Land!)

Up dee hab ich mean kumpst yeplaunt.
(On you have I my cabbage planted.)

Un trick me um gaunz unfableft.
(And look me around quite unafraid.)

Auf dant uck noch mohl hafta yelft?
(If that also yet once heads gives?)

Un van eck dan betcick mean korn
(And when I then look on my corn)

Nay, dan fakape eck nich dee form.
(No, then sell I not the farm.)

(Bill Unrau, of Bethany College, explains: "I have written the exact phonetic spelling of the verse as it is in Plaut-Deutsch, with the translation [literal].")

Some went to Colorado for gold; they couldn't get across Kansas fast enough. On the sides of the covered wagons was printed, "PIKE'S PEAK OR BUST." And when some turned back, a few months later, the signs read simply, "BUSTED," and Kansas looked pretty good after all. The old folksong said:

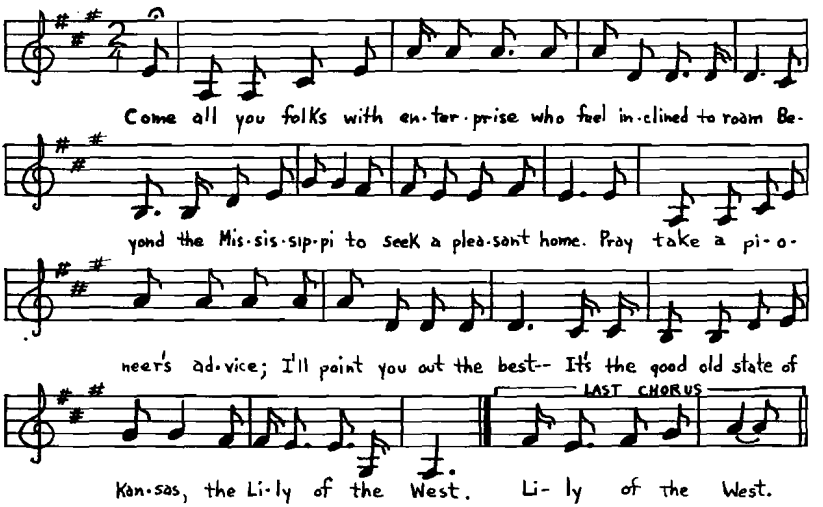
In the summer of sixty, as you all well do know,
The excitement at Pike's Peak was then all the go.
Some went there with fortunes and spent what they had,
And came back flat busted and looking quite sad.

Folk poets got busy, and western humor, that wild and fresh humor, gave a little comfort to the less fortunate. The droll, rustic Kansas poet, in his haste, parodied a favorite song:

Beautiful Kansas, beautiful land,
Nothing but blizzards blowing up sand.
Watching the cattle feed upon grass,
When the snow comes, they'll all die at last.

And, at the other extreme, we find the hustlers singing their songs, too. "Let's build a town!" "They say the railroad's coming right through; let's get some more folks out there, build the country up." "Let's start a town—get a bank, couple of stores, livery barn. That's all it takes. Good place for a county seat, maybe." "Wherever the railroad goes, that means prosperity." "I know the railroad's got a big hunk of the land in the state, but do they want it? No! They want folks to settle on it, and raise crops, and then ship the stuff out." "Prosperity—we can build it. We can build it." And so the hustlers got in on the act.

THE LILY OF THE WEST



Come, all you folks of enterprise who feel inclined to roam
Beyond the Mississippi to seek a pleasant home
Pray take a pioneer's advice, I'll point you out the best—
I mean the state of Kansas, the Lily of the West.

Our prairies all are dotted o'er with houses white as snow,
Where nothing stood but dugouts just ten years ago.
But that's the way we do things here; we enjoy it with a zest,
In the lovely state of Kansas, the Lily of the West.

Our boys, the bravest of the brave; our girls they are the best
In the lovely state of Kansas, the Lily of the West.
But that's the way we do things here, we always do the best
In the good old state of Kansas, the Lily of the West.

I've traveled the New England states, New York and North Caroline,
And down into the southern states, and thought them very fine,
But of all the states that I have roamed, the one that I love best
Is the good old state of Kansas, the Lily of the West.

They came, and they settled the land, and they built the towns. A few of the towns died, but that was all right; you can't have everything. Not only from the United States, but also from the valleys of the Volga, from the British Isles, from the Scandinavian northlands, from France they dribbled into Kansas, into the West of Whitman's Pioneer Dream, to raise wheat and herd cattle, and have some fun. "Can't work all the time, you know. Gotta have a little fun; gotta meet the girls." "Hey, did you see that new school teacher came in last week? She's prettier than a speckled pup." "Let's have a taffy pull. Let's go to singin' school. Let's have a corn shuckin'. Let's go to the literary. Let's have a social. Hey, let's dance! Let's dance!"

SKIP TO MY LOU

(Play-Party Song)

Lou, Lou, skip to my Lou
Lou, Lou, skip to my Lou
Lou, Lou, skip to my Lou
Skip to my Lou my darling

Little Red Wagon painted blue
Little Red Wagon painted blue
Little Red Wagon painted blue
Skip to my Lou my darling.

(Hup) She's gone again skip to my Lou
Gone again skip to my Lou
Gone again skip to my Lou
Skip to my Lou my darling

Flies in the buttermilk, shoo fly shoo
Flies in the buttermilk, shoo fly shoo
Flies in the buttermilk, shoo fly shoo
Skip to my Lou my darling.

Chorus

Cows in the cornfield two by two
Cows in the cornfield two by two
Cows in the cornfield two by two
Skip to my Lou my darling.

Chorus

I'll get another one better'n you
I'll get another one better'n you
I'll get another one better'n you
Skip to my Lou my darling.

Just as "The Lane County Bachelor" reflects the condition of the homesteader, and "Kansas Land" tells the story of the farmer, so we find a song or songs for nearly every class and occupation. With the close of the Civil War came the cattle drives from Texas, and the cowboy stormed into the trail towns, initiating one of the most colorful eras in our history. Romantic as it seems from this distance, the cowboy's life was hard and dull. The classic song of the cowboy, "The Old Chisholm Trail," vividly describes in its 140-odd verses every phase of his work, trials, hardships, and relaxation. But singing was a necessary part of his business, and it was big business—three million head up the Chisholm and other trails. The American cowboys and cattlemen created and crooned hundreds of their own songs—more, probably, than any other occupational group in America. John Lomax, Texas collector, was the first to realize the intrinsic worth of the cowboy song, and of "The Old Chisholm Trail" he says:

> This song in its entirety would give all the possible experiences of a group of cowboys driving a herd of cattle from Texas to Dodge City, Kansas. Many stanzas are not mailable. Thus far no one has shown that it is not a product of the plains—a genuine cowboy song, both words and music. Of all songs, the most universally sung by the cowboys.

THE OLD CHISHOLM TRAIL

Come along boys and listen to my tale,
I'll tell you of my troubles on the old Chisholm Trail,
Come-a ti yi yippy yippy yea, yippy yea,
Hi yi yippy yippy yea.

I woke up one morning on the old Chisholm Trail,
A rope in my hand and a cow by the tail,
Chorus

I started up the trail on October twenty-third,
Started up the trail with a 2-U herd,
Chorus

With a ten dollar horse and a forty dollar saddle,
I'm a-goin' to punchin' Texas cattle,
Chorus

Cloudy in the west, and it looks like rain
My darned old slicker's in the wagon again,
Chorus

The wind commenced to blow, and the rain commenced to fall,
It looked, by golly, like we's goin' to lose 'em all,
Chorus

Crippled my horse, I don't know how,
Ropin' at the horns of a 2-U cow,
Chorus

We hit Caldwell, hit'er on the fly,
And bedded down the cattle on a hill near by,
Chorus

Then we rounded 'em up and put 'em on the cars,
And that was the last of the old Two Bars.
Chorus

Bacon and beans 'most every day,
I'd as soon be eatin' prairie hay,
Chorus

I went to the boss to draw my roll,
He had it figured out I was nine dollars in the hole,
Chorus

With my knees in the saddle and my seat in the sky,
I'll quit punchin' cows in the sweet by and by,
Chorus

Another bit of the cowboy's life is described in the "Song of the Slicker." This is a tribute to an indispensable item of his paraphernalia by one who had occasion to reflect with much sentiment on "the good old days."

SONG OF THE SLICKER

It hangs in the bunk house just over the door,
A relic of cowpunching trail days of yore—
A relic I prize and would never exchange—
That old yellow slicker I wore on the range.

When skies were overshadowed and rain trickled down,
It covered me well from my feet to my crown;
It kept me protected from wind and from rain,
While holding the herd on the mud-spattered plain.

Just back of the cantle it was always kept tied,
And carried wherever I happened to ride.
I never fared forth on the long cattle trail
Without that old slicker up there on the nail.

That old yellow slicker was part of my dope,
As much as my saddle, my spurs and my rope;
And how I would bless it when I would unfold
And button it 'round me to keep out the cold!

How often in musing, my memory strays
'Way back to the range and my cowpunching days,
And then I look proudly up over the door,
And fondle that old yellow slicker I wore.

The cowboy lived a lonesome life, and he often attempted to relieve the loneliness and well-nigh unendurable monotony by singing. His favorite songs were sentimental ones—"Lorena," "Streets of Laredo," "The Dying Cowboy," "Red River Valley," and sometimes religious—"When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder," "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," and songs which were a strange mixture of sentimentality and religion, such as the gospel-like "Cowboy's Dream," sung to the tune of "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean."

THE COWBOY'S DREAM

Last night as I lay on the prairies
And I looked at the stars in the sky,
And I wondered if ever a cowboy
Would drift to that sweet by-and-by.

They say there will be a great round-up,
And cowboys, like dogies, will stand,
To be judged by the riders in Heaven
Who are posted and they know every brand.

Roll on, roll on, roll on, little dogies, roll on.
Roll on, roll on, roll on, little dogies, roll on.

The road to that bright happy region
Is a dim, narrow trail, so they say;
But the broad one that leads to perdition
Is posted and blazed all the way.

I know there'll be many a stray cowboy
Get lost in that great final sale,
When he might have gone into green pastures
If he hadn't missed that dim narrow trail.

Chorus

They say that the Boss knows his business,
That he knows every break that we've took;
So, for safety, you'd better get branded,
Get your name in that big Tally Book.

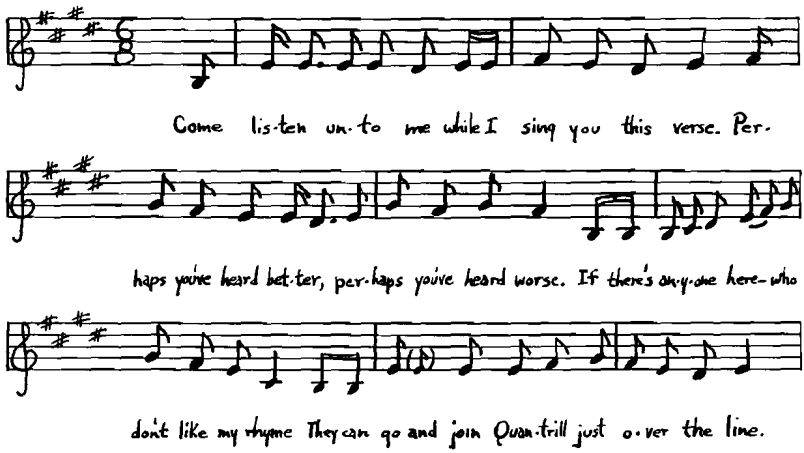
To be shipped to that bright mystic region,
Over there in green pastures to lie,
And be led by the crystal still waters
In the home of the sweet by-and-by.

Chorus

Some musical instruments used in Kansas during the pioneer period. (Fellows-Koch collection)

It is interesting to note the many ways in which the Civil War affected Kansas. The border warfare was as bitter as any major conflict of the war farther east; Quantrill's sacking of Lawrence is recalled with horror even today by those whose grandparents died in that infamous raid. And it produced a folksong. Some texts show Quantrill as a defender of the right, others as the unregenerate killer he apparently was. Only a few years ago, 87-year-old Art Rose of Lincoln, Kansas, sang this version:

QUANTRILL



Come listen unto me while I sing you this verse.
Perhaps you've heard better, perhaps you've heard worse.
If there's anyone here who don't like my rhyme
They can go and join Quantrill just over the line.

Where there's routing and shouting and raising the yell,
Like a troop of wild Indians, from where I can't tell.
They were intoxicated with brandy and wine,
And came to burn Lawrence just over the line.

It happened in Lawrence in 1863,
It was a sad sight, as you all will agree.
They came to burn Lawrence, they came not to stay;
They rode in one morning at breaking of day.

Chorus

Jim Lane, the Lawrence Free-Stater, was up before day.
He saw the Rebs coming in a terrible sway;
He saw the Rebs coming and got in a fright,
And jumped in a cornfield to get out of sight.

Chorus

My song will be ended when I've sung this last verse.
Perhaps you've heard better, perhaps you've heard worse.
But if there's anyone here who don't like my rhyme,
They can go and join Quantrill just over the line.

Chorus

The war had another, less obviously traced, effect on Kansas. When the fighting was over, many youths who had grown to manhood during those years of strife and bloodshed were at loose ends. They found themselves dissatisfied with the hard and dreary job of the rebuilding which faced the country, both North and South. They had known the excitement of war, either as participants or as spectators, and a normal life of hard work, restoring farms or businesses, seemed dull indeed. Perhaps some of them were Southerners resentful of defeat and invasion; at any rate, they turned west, seeking the high excitement they had grown up with during the war years. In Kansas, where practically nothing was taxable, where neither the money nor the machinery for law enforcement were yet available, these discontented young men made up the lawless fringe, keeping always just ahead of civilization which imposed laws and enforced them. Sometimes they even believed they were still righting wrongs perpetrated during the war; such was the case with the James gang, at least three of whom were schooled under Quantrill.

The ballad "Jesse James" reputedly was sung on the streets of St. Joseph, Missouri, shortly after Jesse was shot in the back by Robert Ford on April 3, 1882. Mr. Howard was Jesse's alias at the time. Folk singers in the plains area usually sang this song in a vigorous manner, emphasizing the phrase "dirty little coward" (indeed, we have heard one singer so overcome with the prospect of Jesse's betrayal that he stopped singing just long enough to hurl a blasphemous epithet at Robert Ford, then resumed his song), which should lead us to accept the theory that to violate the code of the west (never shoot a man in the back!) was strictly taboo.

JESSE JAMES

Jesse James was a man that was known through all the land,
He robbed the Danville train.
But that dirty little coward that shot Mister Howard
Has laid poor Jesse in his grave.

It was Robert Ford, that dirty little coward,
I wonder how he does feel.
For he ate of Jesse's bread, and he slept in Jesse's bed,
Then he laid poor Jesse in his grave.

Oh, Jesse had a wife to mourn for his life,
The children they were brave,
But that dirty little coward that shot Mister Howard
Has laid poor Jesse in his grave.

It was on a Wednesday night, the moon was shining bright,
They robbed the Glendale train;
And the people they did say for many miles away
'Twas the outlaws, Frank and Jesse James.

It was on a Saturday night, Jesse was at home,
Talking with his family brave;
Robert Ford came along like a thief in the night,
And laid poor Jesse in his grave.

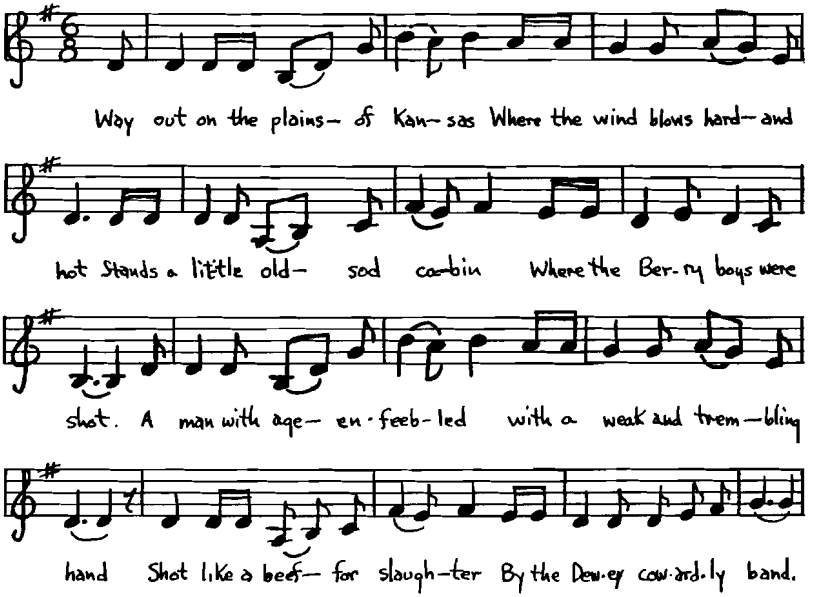
Chorus

Oh, the people held their breath when they heard of Jesse's death,
And wondered how he ever came to die.
For the big reward, little Robert Ford
He shot poor Jesse on the sly.

Chorus

Conflict between cattlemen and farmers, cattlemen and sheepmen, and other occupational groups, not to forget the county seat wars, was almost the order of the day during the developmental period. Folksongs arising from such circumstances generally functioned as propaganda to bring about reforms and to focus public attention on issues which otherwise might be forgotten too soon. The accompanying posed photograph of the action in the Dewey-Berry fiasco was used, we are told, in "magic lantern" shows in western Kansas not long after the unfortunate affair. The harsh range-war folksong, "The Dewey-Berry Ballad," arose after a shooting on June 2, 1903, in Cheyenne County, the result of a feud between the Dewey Cattle Company and the Berry boys over the fencing of grazing land. Three of the Berrys were killed, and Chauncey Dewey's horse was shot from under him during the melee. Court trials dragged on for years, but no one was ever convicted of murder. J. P. Callahan, formerly of Hill City, Kansas, sang this song for us in 1947. He stated that it was sung at country dances. Mrs. Leonard Schruben remembers her father singing it as they hauled wheat into town. The tune used is probably a variant of "I'll Be All Smiles Tonight," a popular song of the early 1900's. Interestingly enough, the melody also suggests parts of the gospel hymn, "Never Alone." This folksong first appeared in print only recently. Chauncey Dewey died in 1959 and is buried at Junction City, Kansas.

THE DEWEY-BERRY FEUD BALLAD



'Way out on the plains of Kansas
Where the wind blows hard and hot
Stands a little old sod cabin
Where the Berry boys were shot.
A man with age enfeebled,
With a weak and trembling hand
Shot like a beef for slaughter
By the Dewey cowardly band.

Two men in the prime of manhood,
A man with silvery hair
Were cruelly murdered that bright day
By the outlaw millionaire.
Oh! Grand and free America,
In this land where live the brave,
Is this the glorious country
Our fathers died to save?

Must wives be changed to widows
In the space of a fleeting breath?
Must children be made orphans,
And men be shot to death?

It's hard to believe, but it's true,
In the land we love so well;
It's hard for us to believe
That men will their honor sell.

Oh, is there no punishment
For the murderous blood-stained hand?
Is there no court of justice
In this glorious Christian land?
I would think that the murderers,
Although they may be free,
Those quiet and deathly faces
In troubled dreams would see.

That aged and that furrowed brow,
Those bloodstained locks so gray,
I'd think that Chauncey Dewey
Could see them night and day.
The jury has cleared the savages;
The court its verdict has given;
But they'll find when through with this life
That they can't buy the court of Heaven.

Setting of the Dewey-Berry feud battle. The shooting was incited by an argument over the water tank at the left. This is a posed photo taken shortly after the affair; it was used in lantern-slide shows to bolster sentiment against Chauncey Dewey.

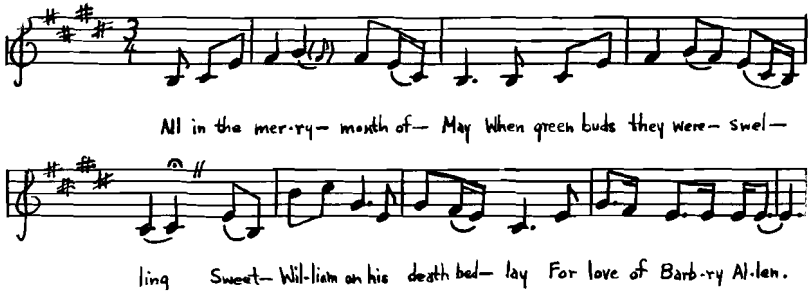
Most of the folksongs sung in Kansas were not of Kansas origin, but were brought from the old world and from other areas of the United States. Songs not connected with historical circumstances of Kansas, but sung in the state, would fill a volume, but we would find distinctive variations which indicate regional or state influences.

"Barbara Allen," the jewel of English ballads, was, and still is popular in Kansas. The version included here was collected in the state by Joan O'Bryant of Wichita. It is one of the oldest traditional English ballads, and only last year Mrs. Tillie Cole, Kansas centenarian of Bazine, sang another version for us.

"The Butcher Boy," an old English broadside, has moved west from Jersey City to Kansas City, thence to Kansas. This theme of domestic tragedy during the days of apprenticeship is certainly old-world in character, and reminiscent of the apprentice system in the American colonies.

"The Baggage Coach Ahead" was a real favorite in Kansas and on the plains. We have had many inquiries about it. Vance Randolph, veteran Ozark collector, suggests that this American broadside was based on an actual incident which took place in 1869 on a train between Kansas City and a station in Pennsylvania.

BARBARA ALLEN



All in the merry month of May,
When green buds they were swelling
Sweet William on his death bed lay
For love of Barb'ry Allen.

He sent a servant to the town
To the town where she was dwellin'.
"Oh miss, oh miss, come with me, pray
If you be Barb'ry Allen."

So slowly, slowly she got up,
And slowly she went nigh him;
And all she said when she got there,
"Young man, I think you're dyin'."

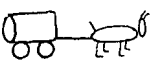
"Oh, I am sick and very sick,
And death is in me dwellin'.
And I will never better be
If I can't have Barb'ry Allen."

As she was walkin' over the hill
She heard the death bells a-knellin',
And every stroke they seemed to say
Hard hearted Barb'ry Allen.

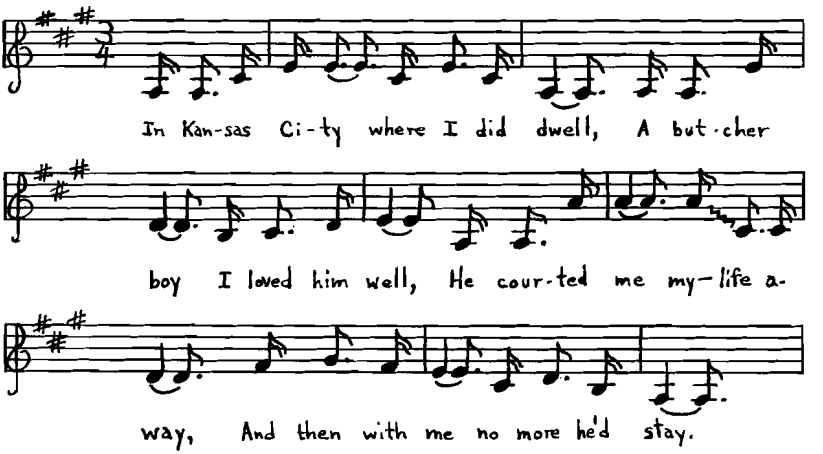
"Oh father, father, go dig my grave,
Go dig it deep and narrow.
Sweet William died for me today;
I'll die for him tomorrow."

They buried them in the old church yard.
In death he was beside her,
And out of his heart grew a red, red rose,
And out of hers a briar.

They grew and they grew 'round the old church tower,
'Til they couldn't grow any higher.
And there they tied in a true lover's knot
The red rose 'round the briar.



THE BUTCHER BOY



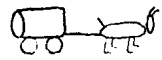
In Kansas City where I did dwell,
A butcher boy I loved him well,
He courted me my life away,
And then with me no more he'd stay.

There is a strange house in this town,
My true love goes and sits him down,
He takes a strange girl on his knee,
And tells to her what he won't tell me.

Oh, once I wore my apron low,
He followed me through ice and snow;
But now my apron's to my chin,
He'll pass my door and he won't come in.

Her father came home one evening late
Inquiring for his daughter, Kate;
They found her hanging from a rope,
And in her hand this note she'd wrote.

"Go dig my grave both wide and deep,
Put marble stones at my head and feet,
And on my breast a snow-white dove,
To tell the world that I died for love."



THE BAGGAGE COACH AHEAD

On a dark, stormy night as the train rattled on
All the passengers had gone to bed,
Except one young man with a babe in his arms,
Who sat there with a bowed down head.

The innocent one commenced crying just then,
As though its poor heart would break,
One angry man said, "Make that child stop its noise
For it's keeping us all awake."

"Put it out," said another, "don't keep it in here,
We have paid for our berths and want rest."
But never a word said the man with the child,
As he fondled it close to his breast.

"Where is its mother, go take it to her,"
A lady then softly said.
"I wish that I could," came the man's sad reply,
"But she's dead in the coach ahead."

Every eye filled with tears as his story he told,
Of a wife who was faithful and true,
He told how he'd saved up his earnings for years
Just to build up a home for two.

How when heaven had sent them this sweet little babe
Their happy young lives were blessed,
In sobs he broke down as he mentioned her name,
And in tears tried to tell them the rest.

Every woman arose to assist with the child,
There were mothers and wives on that train,
And soon was the little one sleeping in peace
With no thought of sorrow and pain.

Next morn, at a station, he bade all goodbye,
And God bless you, he softly said,
And each one had a story to tell in their homes
Of the baggage coach ahead.

The fifteen folksongs which are included above were chosen because they are among our favorites. Not all are indigenous to Kansas, but they were all sung here. They represent aspects of Kansas culture during its developmental period, and are real folksongs because they have passed through time and space by oral tradition, and have been continually molded anew in the process of transmission.

From the beginning, Americans have expressed themselves in song; there is a song connected with almost every famous person, place, and event in American history, although some may not be folksongs. Of the dozen or so real folksongs which arose in Kansas and then spread throughout the country, only two have been studied intensively (where they started, where they traveled, and what happened in the process). They are "Home on the Range" and "Kansas Land." Kirke Mechem's article on "Home on the Range" in the *Kansas Historical Quarterly,* November, 1949, is more than adequate for the problem of the song's history. Mr. Mechem well succeeds in establishing it as a Kansas product, and discussing its early life in Smith County. (For a reprint, see *Heritage of Kansas,* May, 1958.) Literally scores of newspaper articles, and treatment in books, especially Mrs. Margaret Nelson's *Home on the Range,* helps to fill in the picture of this dramatic song. One aspect, however, has not been covered adequately: that is a study of the variant versions, stanzas added for special occasions, and treatment of the song by arrangers and composers of cultivated music.

Our own study of the history and travels of "Kansas Land" has been going on intermittently for fifteen years. With some forty versions collected on the plains from the Canadian border to Texas, we are ready to complete

the study and draw some conclusions about the song. It has had wide currency in the central plains only; it is strictly a wheat-country song, and probably was known to more people in the area during the developmental period than was "Home on the Range."

But the existence of special studies of a few folksongs does not serve adequately the needs of our Kansas society, especially its school children. To the teacher who would like to utilize music of all kinds with special emphasis on its role in Kansas history, we want to recommend Lois A. Erickson's *Music of Kansas*, a music education resource unit for the grades (Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia). This twenty-page mimeographed outline illustrates how a teacher can correlate music with literature, history, social studies, and tangible cultural items within the community and state.

But, turning again specifically to folksong, we must realize that it is not a distinct species, nor it is entirely unrelated to art music. Throughout history there have always been borrowings and influences, with composed tunes passing into tradition and with the best traditional tunes being used by composers. Many Kansas songs employ tunes from songs whose composers are known, but the stature of the composer is of little consequence.

Certainly the ballads and songs of our frontier folk are important in the study of our social history and are worth preserving for that reason alone. But we must never lose sight of the intrinsic value of many folk songs. Some of them are truly beautiful creations, which have appealed to past generations so much that they have seemed to them worthy of being sung over and over, and so have come down to us. In the transmission, crudities have been refined until today they are often exquisite little lyrics with an emotional impact not often found in more sophisticated music. We must in all honesty add that this does not apply to all of our folksongs; some have suffered in transmission, and some are still crude and almost un-singable. But, whichever the case may be, the spirit of the times, tragic or humorous, is reflected in the songs people sang. And even though the new generation of the space age pulses to strange rhythms, they also respond to the spirit of our frontier songs. This is as it should be. Mere veneration for the past without a healthy awareness of the present modes is stagnation, and a generation which is unwilling to learn from its past is headed for trouble.

At the present time America is experiencing a folksong revival of no small proportions. Urban interest is so intense that there is some likelihood that our folk music may lose its inherent qualities, for American folk music has always been rural, and its use by sophisticated artists is bound to make changes in the songs and the spirit which they reflect. But we should congratulate our city people for the revival, for it is they especially who have given the impetus to the present interest in folk music and have made large numbers of our people presently aware of a unique heritage.

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All the songs here printed were learned from oral tradition. "Barbara Allen" and "The Butcher Boy" were transcribed from the singing of Joanie O'Bryant of Wichita; the remainder were transcribed from the singing of Bill Koch.

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