Cowboy Songs (Part Two) - Nebraska Folklore

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Cowboy songs
NEBRASKA

FOLKLORE

PAMPHLET ELEVEN

COWBOY SONGS

NUMBER TWO

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NOV. 1, 1937
Editor's Note:
These are songs sung by cowboys about cowboys. Few of them, if any, have a Nebraska origin, but all are much sung in this State. To obtain some of the songs it was necessary to piece fragments together from oral contributions, scrap books, and personal collections.

THE RED RIVER VALLEY

This song comes from the sandhills, where there are large ranches of thousands of acres and where cowboys are still cowboys. The melody is composed from memory by the compiler.

From this valley they say you'll be going,
I'll miss your sweet face and your smile.
Just because you are weary and tired,
You are moving your range for a while.
I've been thinking a long time, my darling—
Of the sweet words you never would say—
Now alas my fond hopes have all vanished,
For they say you are going away.

Chorus:
Then come sit by my side if you love me,
Do not hasten to bid me adieu.
But remember the Red River Valley,
And the cowboy that loved you so true.
I have promised you darling, that never,
Shall words from my lips give you pain,
And my life shall be yours for ever,
If only you'll love me again.

When you think of the valley you're leaving,
And how lonely and dreary it will be,
Then think, too, of the fond heart you are breaking,
And the pain you are causing to me.

THE TEXAS COWBOY

The appeal of this song to Nebraskans is probably in the vivid and accurate picture of cowboy life and mention of Nebraska localities.
Oh, I am a Texas cowboy,
Far away from home,
If ever I get back to Texas
I never more will roam.

Montana is too cold for me
And the winters are too long;
Before the round-ups do begin
Our money is all gone.

Take this old hon-skin bedding,
Too thin to keep me warm,
I nearly freeze to death, my boys,
Whenever there's a storm.

And take this old tarpoleon,
Too thin to shield my frame,
I got it in Nebraska
A-dealin' a monte game.

Now to win these fancy leggings
I'll have enough to do;
They cost me twenty dollars
The day that they were new.

I've an outfit on the Musselshell,
But that I'll never see,
Unless I get sent to represent
The Circle or D. T.

I've worked down in Nebraska
Where the grass grows ten feet high,
And the cattle are such rustlers
That they seldom ever die.

I've worked up in the sandhills
And down upon the Platte,
Where the cowboys are good hombres,
They'll never leave you flat.

I've traveled lots of country;
Nebraska's hills of sand,
Down through the Indian Nation,
And up the Rio Grande.

But the bad lands of Montana
Are the worst I ever seen,
The cowboys are all tenderfoot
And the dogies are too lean.

If you want to see some badlands,
Go over on the Dry;
You will beg down in the coulees
Where the mountains reach the sky.
A tenderfoot to lead you
Who never knows the way,
You are playing in the best of luck
If you eat more than once a day.

Your grub is bread and bacon,
And coffee black as ink;
The water is so full of alkali
It is hardly fit to drink.

They will wake you in the morning
Before the break of day,
And send you on a circle
A hundred miles away.

All along the Yellowstone
'Tis cold the year around;
You will surely get consumption
By sleeping on the ground.

Work in Montana
Is six months in the year;
When all your bills are settled
There is nothing left for beer.

Work down in Texas
Is all the year around;
You will never get consumption
By sleeping on the ground.

Come all you Texas cowboys,
And warn the take from me,
And do not go to Montana
To spend your money free.

But stay at home in Texas
Where work lasts the year round,
And you will never catch consumption
By sleeping on the ground.

OLD PAINT

In this song the chorus precedes the verse. It is found in many collections in widely varying versions. The titles also vary. "Goodbye Old Paint," "I Ride an Old Paint," and "I'm a-Leavin' Cheyenne," are some other titles by which this song is known.

Chorus:

Goodbye, Old Paint, I'm a-leavin' Cheyenne.

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

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

Go hitch up your hosses and give them some hay,
And seat yourself by me so long as you stay.

My hosses ain't hungry, they won't eat your hay,
My wagon is loaded and rolling away.

My foot's in the stirrup, my bridle's in my hand,
Good morning, young lady, my hosses won't stand.

I'm a-ridin' Old Paint, I'm a-leadin' Old Fan,
Goodbye, Little Annie, I'm off for Cheyenne.

I'm a-ridin' Old Paint, I'm a-leadin' Old Dan,
I'm goin' to Montan' for to throw the Hoohihan.

Old Bill Jones had two daughters and a song:
One went to Denver, the other went wrong.

His wife she died in a pool-room fight,
And still he sings from morning to night.

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

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

N. Howard Thorp, who gives this song in a slightly different version in his collection, recalls that he heard it sung in Sidney, Nebraska, in 1888. The hero of this ballad is buried in Round Rock, Texas. This song seems to be his history in verse.

Sam Bass was born in Indiana, it was his native home,
And at the age of seventeen young Sam began to roam.
Sam first came out to Texas a cowboy for to be—
A kinder-hearted fellow you seldom ever see.

Sam used to deal in race stock, one called the Denton mare,
He matched her in scrub races; and took her to the fair.
Sam used to coin the money, and spent it just as free.
He always drank good whiskey wherever he might be.

San left the Collins ranch in the merry month of May
With a herd of Texas cattle the Black Hills for to see,
Sold out in Custer City and then got on a spree—
A harder set of cowboys you seldom ever see.

On their way back to Texas they robbed the U.P. train,
And then split up in couples and started out again.
Joe Collins and his partner were overtaken soon,
With all their hard-earned money they had to meet their doom.

Sam made it back to Texas all right side up with care;
Rode into the town of Denton with all his friends to share.
Sam's life was short in Texas; three robberies did he do,
The passenger and express and U.S. mail cars too.
Now Sam had four companions—all daring, bold and bad,
They were Richardson and Jackson, Joe Collins, and Old Dad;
Four more bold and daring cowboys the rangers never knew;
They whipped the Texas rangers and ran the boys in blue.

Sam had another companion, called Arkansas for short,
But Thomas Floyd the ranger cut his career short;
Oh, Tom is a big six-footer and thinks he's mighty fly,
But I can tell you his racket—he's a deadbeat on the sly.

Jim Murphy was arrested, and then released on bail;
He jumped his bond at Tyler and then took the train for Terrell;
But Mayor Jones had posted Jim and that was all a stall,
'Twas only a plan to capture Sam before the coming fall.

Sam met his fate at Round Rock, July the twenty-first,
They pierced poor Sam with rifle balls and emptied out his purse.
Poor Sam he is a corpse and six foot under clay,
And Jackson's in the bushes trying to get away.

Jim had borrowed Sam's good gold and didn't want to pay,
The only shot he saw was to give poor Sam away.
He sold out Sam and Barnes and left their friends to mourn—
Oh, what a scorching Jim will get when Gabriel blows his horn.

And so he sold out Sam and Barnes and left their friends to mourn,
Oh, what a scorching Jim will get when Gabriel blows his horn.
Perhaps he's gone to heaven, there's none of us can say,
But if I'm right in my surmise he's gone the other way.
GIT ALONG LITTLE DOGIES

The melody given for this song is the one most familiar to persons consulted. It is also the one appearing with slight variation most frequently in collections. Other melodics, however, are extant. According to an account by Lomax, the song was sung in Texas in 1893.

As I was a-walking one morning for pleasure
I saw a cow puncher a-riding along;
His hat was threwed back and his spurs was a jingling,
And as he approached he was singing this song.

Chorus:

Whoopee, ti-yi-yo! Git along little dogies!
It's your misfortune and none of my own!
Whoopee, ti-yi-yo! Git along little dogies,
For you know Wyoming will be your new home.

Early in the spring, we round up the dogies,
Mark 'em and brand 'em and bob off their tails,
Round up our cayuses, load up the chuck wagon,
Then throw the dogies out on the trail.

Your mothers were raised away down in Texas,
Where the Jinson weed and sandburrs grow;
Now we'll fix you up on prickly pear and cholla
And get you ready for the trail to Idaho.

It's whooping and yelling and driving the dogies,
Git along, you little dogies, little dogies, git on!
It's whooping and punching and git along, little dogies,
For you know Wyoming will be your new home.
Chorus:

Some fellows goes up the trail for pleasure,
But that's where they get it most awfully wrong,
For you have no idea the trouble they give us,
As we go driving them dogies along.

When the night comes on we hold them on the bed-ground,
These little dogies that roll on so slow;
Round up the herd and cut out the strays,
And roll the little dogies that never rolled before.

Oh, you'll be soup for Uncle Sam's Injuns;
"It's beef, heap beef," I hear them cry.
Git along, git along, git along there, little dogies,
You're gonta be beef steers by and by.
Although this is a very old song, it is a sort of western parody on a still older song of the same name.

I struck the trail in seventy-nine,
The herd strung out behind me;
As I jogged along my mind ran back
For the gal I left behind me.
That sweet little gal, that pretty little gal,
The gal I left behind me.

If ever I get off the trail
And the Indians they don't find me,
I'll make my way straight back again
To the gal I left behind me.
That sweet little gal, that pretty little gal,
The gal I left behind me.

She wrote ahead to the place I said,
I was always glad to find it;
She says, "I am true; when you get through,
Ride back and you will find me."
That sweet little gal, that pretty little gal,
The gal I left behind me.

When we sold out, I took the train,
I know where I would find her;
When I got back we had a smash,
And that was no gal-darned liar.
That sweet little gal, that pretty little gal,
The gal I left behind me.

A fragment of an old square dance call based on this song is:

Oh swing that gal that pretty little gal,
The gal that stands behind you
And balance too and pass right through
And swing with the gal behind you.

O swing that gal that pretty little gal,
The gal that stands behind you.
She's pretty in the face and slender round the waist
The gal that stands behind you.
In spite of its wide popularity, and the frequency with which it has been passed on from one to another, this song seems to vary less than most songs of its type.

A group of jolly cowboys, discussing plans at ease,

Says one, "I'll tell you something, boys, if you will listen, please.

I am an old cow puncher and here I'm dressed in rags,

And I used to be a tough one and take on great big jags.

"But I've got a home, boys, a good one, you all know,

Although I have not seen it since long, long ago.

I'm going back to Dixie once more to see them all;

Yes, I'm going to see my mother when the work's all done this fall.

"After the round-ups are over and after the shipping is done,

I am going right straight home boys, ere all my money is gone.

I have changed my ways, boys, no more will I fall;

And I am going home, boys, when work is done this fall.

"When I left home, boys, my mother for me cried,

She begged me not to go, boys, for me she would have died;

My mother's heart is breaking, breaking for me, that's all,

And with God's help I'll see her when the work's all done this fall."

That very night this cowboy went out to stand his guard;

The night was dark and cloudy and storming very hard;

The cattle they got frightened and rushed in wild stampede;

The cowboy tried to head them, riding at full speed.
While riding in the darkness so loudly did he shout,
Trying his best to head them and turn the herd about,
His saddle horse did stumble and on him did fall,
The poor boy won't see his mother when the work's all done this fall.

His body was so mangled the boys all thought him dead,
They picked him up so gently and laid him on a bed;
He opened wide his blue eyes and looking all around,
He motioned to his comrades to sit near him on the ground.

"Boys, send mother my wages, the wages I have earned,
For I'm afraid, boys, my last stoop I have turned.
I'm going to a new range, I hear my Master's call,
And I'll not see my mother when the work's all done this fall.

"Fred, you take my saddle; George, you take my bed;
Bill, you take my pistol after I am dead,
And think of me kindly when you look upon them all,
For I'll not see my mother when work is done this fall."

Poor Charlie was buried at sunrise, no tombstone at his head,
Nothing but a little board and this is what it said,
"Charlie died at daybreak, he died from a fall,
And he'll not see his mother when the work's all done this fall."