

SOUTHERN JOURNEY

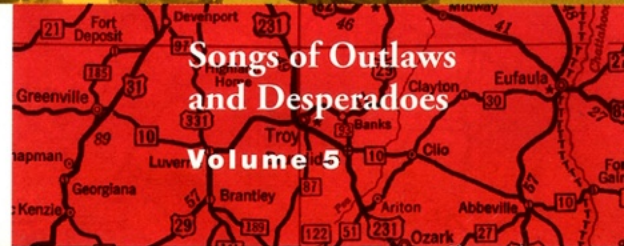
Bad Man Ballads



ROUNDER

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THE ALAN LOMAX COLLECTION



Songs of Outlaws
and Desperadoes

Volume 5

Don't that road look rough and rocky,

don't that sea look wide and deep,

Don't my darlin' look much sweeter
when she's in my arms *asleep?*

Since the early 1930s, ALAN LOMAX has been drawn to the characteristically American myths of the outlaw, desperado, murderer, hero, and hard case that he believed reflect the violent and rebellious undercurrents in American society. As he explained in his original liner notes to this album,

Even casual inspection shows that the celebrated popular ballad canon of Child is largely concerned with crimes of violence. This tradition continued in the gallows ballads and criminal good-nights of the 17th and 18th centuries. In America this sanguinary stream was enlarged upon by folk poets, who, in the days of John Dillinger and the Lindbergh kidnapping case, had not yet ceased to make new bad-man songs. The persistence of the blood feuds in our mountains and of gang warfare in our cities indicate that just below our civilized surface lies a wellspring of savagery always ready to emerge into the light of day.¹

Who is the bad man — outlaw, social misfit, folk hero, or just an ordinary person pressed to take the law into his own hands? In this expanded edition of Lomax's original album, we encounter, from the murderous Jesse James to the steel-driving John Henry "many aspects of the [bad man] tradition as it is unfolded in our violent land," as Alan Lomax wrote. In African-American vernacular usage, the

concept of *bad* may suggest positive qualities of power, independence, daring and strength. A bad man's criminal acts may serve a just cause, as in Robin Hood's legendary campaigns of wealth redistribution, and thereby encapsulate the people's struggles against injustice. For Lomax this struggle reached epic and tragic proportions in African-American song. "In these songs, too, one finds a use of the classical ballad devices — incremental repetition, the narrative sped on by dialogue, beginning at the middle of the story, the use of stock phrases, the importance of refrain [and] the heroic dimension."

Despite his mythic and heroic endowments, for whites, the outlaw frequently embodied the libertarian, anarchic spirit of the frontier and of the independent folk — in part descendants of the free-ranging Celts — who peopled it. The murderous lover and his victimized sweetheart, grim and tragic figures in American folk balladry that fascinated Alan Lomax, may reflect the change from the close and closed supervisory communities of Europe where marriages were fixed up between families and hard to elude; to the open frontier, where unwilling bridegrooms could stamp out the traces of their guilt and disappear. Among blacks, by contrast, the wronged women of song might

¹ Alan Lomax, liner notes to *Southern Journey 9: Bad Man Ballads* (Prestige International Int 25009). Other unsourced Lomax quotations in these notes are taken from the original liner and song notes for this album.

themselves rise up and execute justice, as in the famous ballad "Frankie and Johnny."

In spite of their mythic and heroic qualities, these anti-heroes have a mixed reception in folk culture, and usually come to a bad end. But as Alan Lomax remarked, "Those of us who do not indulge in violence certainly enjoy hearing about such behavior and its consequences."²

1. JESSE JAMES

performed by Almeda Riddle, vocal.

Recorded early October 1959

in the vicinity of Miller, Arkansas.

Previously unreleased.

Jesse James, whose criminal career began while he was only in his teens, may be one of the most well-known bandits and killers in American history. To some, he remains a symbol of Wild-West lawlessness, but Jesse and his brother Frank gained the admiration of many of their contemporaries in the recently-defeated South. A veteran of a renegade Confederate militia, to his admirers James' criminal exploits evoked a 19th-century Robin Hood who defied the northern-dominated establishment.

² *Folk Song U.S.A.* (New York: Signet, 1975 [1947]), p. 355.

³ *Ibidem.*

⁴ The line usually reads, "But a dirty little coward shot Mr. Howard..." James was living under the alias of Thomas Howard when he was shot by Robert Ford.

James remained outside of the law until the age of 34, when fellow gang member Robert Ford murdered him for reward money.

Almeda Riddle's comments about the infamous relatives on her father's side of the family offer an intriguing example of the popular ambivalence about bad men: "I never was ashamed that the James boys was my cousins, but neither was I proud of it." She sings an abbreviated version of the ballad Alan Lomax has called "the best-known and most singable of all our outlaw ballads".³

*Jesse James was a man who killed many men,
And robbed many an express train.
And the people all would say for many miles away,
They were robbed by Frank and Jesse James.*

*Jesse had a wife to mourn for his life,
and his children too were brave.
But a dirty little coward called Robert Howard,⁴
laid Jesse James in his grave.*

2. PO' LAZARUS

performed by the Bright Light Quartet,
vocals and guitar.

Recorded October 6, 1959 in Weems, Virginia.

Alan Lomax considered "Po' Lazarus" to be the finest African-American ballad he and his father John had ever recorded. "Known to convicts and gang workers from Virginia to Mississippi," Lomax wrote, "[Po' Lazarus] concerns the doomed attempt of an exploited and underpaid black laborer to even up the score by stealing the payroll from his bosses. The ballad sets forth in stark and unforgettable language the essential tragedy of the black man as his condition used to be in the South. If he resisted he was killed, and his family suffered." Three contrasting renditions of "Po' Lazarus" appear on this disc. Here, the Bright Light Quartet, whose members worked as menhaden fishermen, sing in a mellifluous four-part harmony.

*Well, the judge tol' the high sheriff,
"Go an' bring me Laz'rus." (2x)
"Well, dead or alive, boy,
Lord, Lord, dead or alive."*

*Well, they found ol' Laz'rus
Way down between two mountains. (2x)
Well, shot him down, boy,
Lord, Lord, shot him down.*

*Well, shot ol' Laz'rus,
Shot him with a great, big number, (2x)
Well, a forty-five, boy,
Lord, Lord, a forty-five.
Well, Laz'rus' mother,
She came a-screamin', and a-cryin', (2x)
"You killed my son,
Lord, Lord, you killed my son."*

*Well, Laz'rus' mother,
She couldn't go to the funeral, (2x)
Didn't have no shoes, boy,
Lord, Lord, didn't have no shoes.*

*Well, the judge tol' the high sheriff,
"Go an' bring me Laz'rus, (2x)
Well, dead or alive, boy,
Lord, Lord, dead or alive."*

3. RAILROAD BILL

performed by Hobart Smith, vocal and guitar.

Recorded August 25, 1959 in Bluefield, Virginia.

Railroad Bill was Morris Slater, an outlaw of the 1890's. Like Jesse James, he made a reputation as a fearsome killer and a Robin Hood-style bandit. Like Lazarus, he is said to have been pushed into a life of crime by the cruel and oppressive conditions of the Alabama turpentine camp where he toiled in forced labor. Morris Slater was eventually caught and brutally murdered in an 1897 ambush.



Railroad Bill,

so mean and so bad,

He whupped his mammy,

shot a round at his dad,

MISSISSIPPI STATE PENITENTIARY AT PARCHMAN

Numerous versions of the ballad survive him. In the version performed here by Hobart Smith, irony and exaggeration evoke a larger-than-life bad man who does as he pleases. In stark contrast to the struggling working man who might sing or listen to this tale, The Railroad Bill of mythology outfoxes the system: he never works, and he has plenty of money to spare.

*Railroad Bill, so mean and so bad,
He whupped his mammy, shot a round at his dad,
One mornin' just before day.*

*Railroad Bill, he's standing on the hill,
A-rolling cigars out of a ten-dollar bill.
Oh ride, ride, ride.*

*Railroad Bill, so mean and so bad,
He whupped his mammy, shot a round at his dad,
One mornin' just before day.*

*Early one mornin' a shower of rain,
Around the curve come a time train,
Oh ride, ride, ride.*

*If the bum's goin' to bend the rail,
There'll be nobody there to tell the tale.
Oh ride, ride, ride.*

*Railroad Bill was standin' on the hill,
He never worked and he never will
Oh ride, ride, ride.*

4. JOHN HENRY

performed by Ed Lewis, vocals and axe strokes.
Recorded mid-September 1959
at Camp B, Mississippi State Penitentiary,
Lambert, Mississippi.
Previously unreleased.

The bad man's heroic qualities are nowhere more apparent than in John Henry, the famous steel-driving man of American balladry. The song may have originated as a macho boast of prowess. The boss dares John Henry to match his strength against the new mechanized drill. John Henry responds by throwing down the gauntlet against mechanization and this challenge to his powers. He declares "a man ain't nothin' but a man," an assertion of human dignity in the face of insurmountable odds. He is victorious in his battle with the drill, but dies in the winning (the conclusion is not reached in this rendition). Like Shelley's Prometheus, John Henry dares "To defy Power, which seems omnipotent; / To Love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates..."⁵

⁵ Cf. Alan Lomax, *Folk Songs of North America* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 551-3.

This performance is one of several on this disc which were recorded from prisoners within the Mississippi penitentiary system. Lomax had recorded extensively in Southern prisons since the 1930's. He was revolted by the cruelty and injustice he found in the prisons, but was deeply moved by the cultural expression, especially in song, which the prisoners kept alive and which in turn kept them alive. He wrote,

The prison farms of the South perpetuated the slave system in official form...Out of these human infernos where men worked fourteen-hour days under the gun and lash until they dropped or "made it," came pouring a river of powerful and sorrowful song. My father and I were fortunate as collectors to find this national treasure before it had begun to disappear. As we revisited the penitentiaries and as conditions ameliorated, the songs have grown less potent and the epic lines we first encountered have begun to decay. Nevertheless, new songs have continued to grow, even recently.⁶

*Wo' John Henry went up on that mountain.
You know that mountain it was so high.
Wo' John Henry he laid his hammer down he cried,
"Captain, a ten pound maul is too small, o Lord,
A ten pound maul too small."*

*Wo' John Henry he says to the captain,
"Captain pay me my whole back day.
I will make more money on that IC Line,
I will on the M&O.
Wo' than I will on the M&O."
Well John Henry's captain told him,
"I have a power steel driver down home.
Well John Henry now if you'll beat that
powerful driver down,
Goin' to buy you a railroad of your own,
I'm goin' to buy you a railroad of your own."*

*Well John Henry told his captain,
He says, "A man ain't nothing but a man.
For I would stand and see your
power driver beat me down,
Would die with my hammer in my hand,
Wo' I would die with my hammer in my hand."*

*O well the people all hear my runnin',
Well now the train comin' down the track.
O John Henry threwed his hammer
on the ground and said,
"The echo from my hammer comin' back,
Oh that's the echo from my hammer comin' back."*

*Well John Henry had a buddy.
Said, "Buddy, why ain't you takin' your time?"
John Henry drilled down eighteen spikes,*

*While his buddy was only drivin' down nine.
While his buddy was only drivin' down nine.
John Henry, he told his shaker,
He said "My shaker, you better pray.
If I misses this deal on a deal goin' down,
Tomorrow be your buryin' day.
You'll know tomorrow be your buryin' day."*

*Well John Henry told his captain,
Said, "Just bring your steel driver down here.
And before I let your steel driver beat me down,
Goin' to die with my hammer in the wind.
I'm goin' to die with my hammer in the wind."
John Henry he had a little woman
And her name was Polly Anne
John Henry taken sick and he had to go to bed,
Polly Anne drilled steel like a man.
Wo' Polly Anne drove steel like a man.*

5. WILLIE BRENNAN

performed by Neil Morris, vocal and guitar.
Recorded October 6, 1959 in Timbo, Arkansas.

Alan Lomax called this widely-known song "the Irish prototype of 'Railroad Bill'." Brennan was a bandit operating in the Kilworth mountains in County Cork in the late 1700s. He was caught and hanged in 1804. In this ballad, circulated on

broadsides by the mid-19th century, and still sung in Ireland, Brennan appears as a Robin Hood, robbing only from the rich and sharing his bounty with the less fortunate.⁷ Lomax commented on the unusual folk variant performed here, in which Brennan is portrayed as a Londoner of the time of Queen Elizabeth I: "Until the song encountered the inventive people of the Ozarks, it always ended with Willie at the execution dock; however, some balladeer from the land of Jesse James (was it Neil Morris himself?) has added verses that have Willie serving under Drake and Good Queen Bess and ending his days in peace." The melody Morris sings is similar to one published in the Lomaxes' *Our Singing Country* (New York: Macmillan, 1941, p.317). Morris's rustic folk tenor brings out the dramatic aspects of the melody. He emphasizes his vocal range on both ends, dipping down to the lower part of his register in the first part of the melody, and then working his way higher in the second part. Finally in the chorus, he soars dramatically to the top of his range, all the while providing a gentle guitar accompaniment.

Morris: I learned this song from my grandfather and my father; I heard both of them sing this song when I was a small boy.

⁶ Alan Lomax, liner notes to *Southern Journey 5: Deep South: Sacred and Sinful* (Prestige International Int 25005).

⁷ See Peter Kennedy, *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland* (London: Oak, 1984), pp. 725-6. Alan Lomax recorded a version from the Scottish folksinger Jeannie Robertson in 1953.

*There was a highway robber a story I will tell.
His name was Willie Brennan,
in London he did dwell.
All in the mountains dreary proved his first career,
And many a noble gentleman before him
shook with fear.*

Chorus:

*O Brennan on the moor,
Brennan on the moor,
Bold, gay, undaunted
stood young Brennan on the moor.*

*A brace of loaded pistols he carried
both night and day.
He robbed not from the poor
but always on the King's highway,
He robbed from the riches and the servants of
Black Bess,
And he freely divided with the widows in distress.
Chorus*

*Now young Willie met a pedlar,
his name was Julius Bond.
They traveled on together 'til the day begin to dawn.
The peddler missed his money,
likewise his watch and chain,
And he over-taked young Willie
and he robbed him back with same.
(Chorus)*

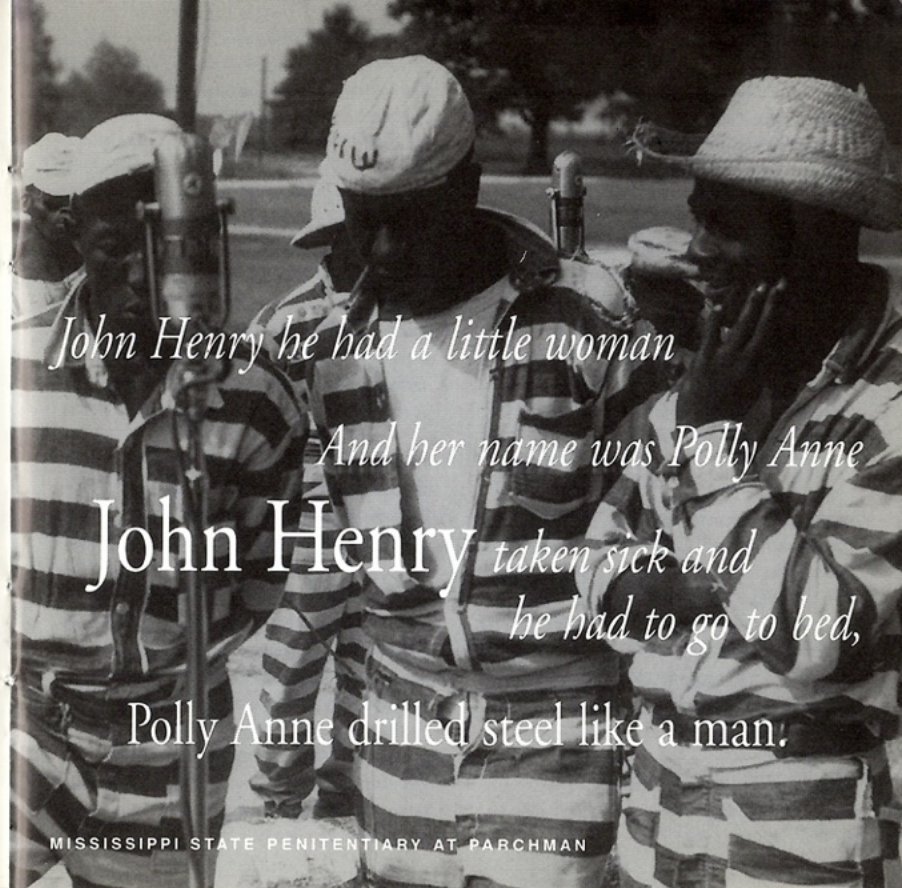
*Now young Willie finds the pedlar
as brave a man as he,
So straightway he did go his companion for to be.
The peddler being brave-hearted,
he threwed his pack away,
And he proved a royal com-e-rade
until his dying day.*

Chorus

*Now the marshals and the nobles
got a message from the Queen.
She said, "If you don't want to die
upon the guillotine,
If you would keep your riches safe
and live above the poor,
Then bring to me the body of
young Brennan on the moor."
Chorus*

*Now the night the trouble started,
the truth I will confess;
They undone their jackets
and they opened up their vests,
They threw themselves down on the ground
out in an open field,
And they both received nine wounds apiece,
before they would yield.
(Chorus)*

*Now young Willie's down in town,
in prison he's bowed down;*



John Henry he had a little woman

And her name was Polly Anne

*John Henry taken sick and
he had to go to bed,*

Polly Anne drilled steel like a man.

MISSISSIPPI STATE PENITENTIARY AT PARCHMAN

Just for some awful crime they done,
they taken him to town.
The jury found him guilty
and the judge did thus reply;
"O it's for your highway robbing
you're both condemned to die."

Chorus

That night Sir Humphrey Gilbert
was lookin' for a crew.
The Queen said, "Here's two robbers
that might like to go with you."
Young Willie and the pedlar swore
'legience on their names,
And continued with their robbing
from the Spaniards on the seas.

Chorus

Now they sailed on many missions,
bringing treasure to the Crown.
They sailed with Johnny Hawkins
when the Spanish fleet went down.
They won both fame and glory
and went down in history
With the men who made the Queen of England
the mistress of the sea.

Chorus

Now what became of Julius Bond
no one will ever know;
But Willie was in London,

when his hair was white with snow.
He gave away his riches to the widows and the poor,
And was buried in a lonesome grave
upon the lonesome moor.

Chorus

Morris: *Course the title of this song is "Brennan on the Moor." Now this song, beyond a doubt, was written during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. To her friends she was known as Queen Elizabeth. To her enemies she was known as "Black Beth," and so when she took a notion that she wanted this Brennan boy out of the way, why she laid the law down pretty strict to the men who were supposed to do that, and they finally got it done.*

6. HANGMAN TREE (Child No. 95)

performed by Almeda Riddle, vocals.

Recorded early October 1959

in the vicinity of Heber Springs, Arkansas.

This is a version of Child ballad No. 95, "The Maid Freed from the Gallows," upon which Lomax notes, "In every country in Western Europe, in the West Indies and the United States, we find a story of the young girl at the gallows, pleading with one member of her family after another to pay her fine and set her free.

Frequently her crime is not mentioned. In other versions she has been falsely accused of stealing a gold ring or a golden ball from her mistress.

Usually, in the end, her lover rescues her. The story, it seems to me, is an accurate psychological drama out of the adolescence of women in the culture of the West. Growing up for them means harboring forbidden thoughts and desires which they know their families fear and from which no relative can rescue them. Their only possible savior is (as the ballad always points out) a true love." In this variant the tale receives a new twist. The singer is female, but sings from the point of view of a male narrator — a son on the gallows. His pleas to his father, mother, sister, brother, and finally the sweetheart who saves him, are vividly rendered by Almeda Riddle, who amply demonstrates her mastery as a folk vocal stylist.

"Hangman, hangman, slacken up your line
For I see my father coming
from a far-off distant home.
O father, dear father have you brought me gold,
Or have you paid my fee,
Or did you come to see your only son
Hanging on a gallows tree?"

"No, no, son, no son, I brought no gold,
Nor have I paid your fee,
Alas, have I come to see a guilty son
Hangin' on a gallows tree."

"O hangman, hangman, slacken up your line
For I see my mother coming
from a far-off distant home... (etc.)

"Hangman, hangman, slacken up your line
For I see my brother coming
from a far-off distant home... (etc.)

"Hangman, hangman, slacken up your line
For I see my sister coming
from a far-off distant home... (etc.)

"O hangman, hangman, slacken up your line
I see my sweetheart coming
from a far-off distant land.

"O sweetheart, sweetheart did you bring me gold,
Or did you pay my fee,
Did you, too, come to see me
hanging on a gallows tree?"

"Oh yes, dear, yes, indeed, I brought you gold,
I have paid your fee.
I never meant to see my love hanging
High on the gallows tree."

No, no, son,
no son,

I brought no gold,

Nor have I paid your fee,

Alas, have I come

to see a guilty son

Hangin' on
a gallows tree.

7. COLUMBUS STOCKADE

performed by the J. E. Mainer Band: Joseph Emmett Mainer, fiddle; Mary Mainer, vocals and guitar; Carolyn Mainer Helmes, vocals and guitar; Glenn Mainer, banjo; Jim Dillon, guitar; Floyd Overcash, bass. Recorded October 1959 in the vicinity of Concord, North Carolina.

"Columbus Stockade" offers a sympathetic view of the bad man from behind prison walls. The motif of the prisoner separated from his or her loved one has special poignancy for those serving long terms, often in the prime of life, who cannot hope to have a sweetheart wait. "Columbus Stockade" has been popular in the country music repertory at least since the 1920s. It is given a beautiful performance by the J. E. Mainer Band. The soprano-alto duet singing in vocal harmony with typical Southern vocal slides and accents lends a poignancy to their story.

*Way down, in Columbus, Georgia,
want to be back in Tennessee.*

*Way down, in Columbus Stockade,
the girl I love went back on me.*

Chorus:

Go and leave me if you wish to,

Never let me cross your mind.

If in your heart, you love another,

Leave me little darlin', I don't mind.

*Last night as I lay sleepin',
I dreamed I held you in my arms,
When I woke, I was mistaken,
I was peekin' through the bars.*

Chorus

*Don't that road look rough and rocky,
don't that sea look wide and deep?
Don't my darlin' look much sweeter
when he's in my arms asleep?*

Chorus

8. EARLY IN THE MORNIN'

performed by Johnny Lee Moore, lead vocals, with a group of male prisoners. Recorded mid-September 1959 at Camp B, Mississippi State Penitentiary, Lambert, Mississippi.

In Lomax's recordings of songs like "Willie Brennan," ballad performers deliver detached, objective, almost journalistic commentaries on historical bad men and their exploits. In the Parchman prison recordings, we get the feeling that there is little separation between the subject and the singer. As Lomax wrote, "In [the prisoners'] song they pour out (as far as they dare) their complaints against the prison system and their longing for the pleasures of the free world."

*Wake up in the mornin', well-a,
With a cup and a pan, (2x)
Well, you say anything about it,
Well-a have trouble out the man. (2x)
Oh captain, captain, don'tcha,
Well-a, know my name? (2x)
Well, I used to be the porter, well-a,
On the southbound train. (2x)
I'm the same grand rascal, well-a,
Stole your watch and chain (2x)*

Chorus:
*Cryin' ol' Mamie, well-a, Oh Lordy, gall! (2x)
Well, Mamie in Meridian, livin' at ease, (2x)
Well, I'm on Parchman, got to work or leave. (2x)
I'll call Alberta from the woman's wall. (2x)*
Chorus

*Well, look over yonder, sun done gone, (2x)
Well, way over yonder, where the western sun. (2x)*
Chorus

9. PRETTY POLLY

performed by Estil C. Ball, vocals and guitar.
Recorded August 31, 1959 in Rugby, Virginia.

This murder ballad, wrote Alan Lomax, told of "America's favorite crime story, the same tale that Dreiser used as the theme of *An American Tragedy*. Pretty Polly is pregnant and Willie puts her out of the way." In traditional societies, when unmarried

couples violated sexual taboos, women usually paid a higher price than men. Here, in what was possibly a doomed effort to protect himself and his family name from the stigma associated with illicit sex and an out-of-wedlock pregnancy—or to avoid a shotgun wedding—the song's narrator brings about a greater tragedy. This ballad has antecedents in the British broadside ballad known as "The Cruel Ship's Carpenter" or "The Gosport Tragedy."

*"Polly, pretty Polly, come go along with me, (2x)
Before we get married, some pleasure to see."*

*She got up behind him
and away they did go, (2x)
Over the hills through the valleys so low.*

*They went up a little farther
and what did they spy? (2x)
A newly dug grave with a spade lying by.
He stabbed her through the heart, her heart's-blood it
did flow (2x)
And into the grave Pretty Polly did go.*

*He threw something over her
and turned to go home, (2x)
With nothing behind him
but the girl there to mourn.*

*"Gentlemen and ladies,
I'll bid you farewell,*

*For killin' Pretty Polly
will send my soul to hell." (2x)*

10. LAZARUS

sung by Henry Morrison. Recorded mid-October 1959 on St. Simon's Island, Georgia.

In this unusual, abbreviated rendition of "Po' Lazarus," Henry Morrison uses his strong baritone to striking dramatic effect, performing a melody that sweeps up from the lower part of his register culminates at a powerful pinnacle, and resolves in a blues-drenched cadence. Morrison juxtaposes two verses from the Lazarus story with an excerpt from another song with the query, "Do your dog run rabbits?" which seems to evoke the image of Lazarus being hunted down like an animal. Morrison was a charter member of the "Spiritual Singers of Georgia," a group that was founded in the 1930s with the support of Mrs. Maxfield Parrish. At the time of these recordings, he also ran a tavern in the live-oak woods on St. Simon's Island.

*I asked Aunt Dinah,
"Do your dog run rabbits?"
Aunt Dinah said, "No, no, no!"
Aunt Dinah said "no."*

⁸ For a fascinating and detailed account of the Allen affair, refer to the liner notes by Ralph and Richard Finzler to *Old-Time Music at Clarence Ashley's* (Folkways Records FA2355, 1961), pp. 5-6.

*Well, I see ol' Laz'rus
Up on the commissary counter (2x)
He walked away, 'way, 'way,
He walked away.*

*Well I asked Aunt Dinah
"Do your dog run rabbits?" (2x)
Aunt Dinah said, "No, no, no."
Aunt Dinah said "no."*

*Well I tell high sheriff
"To go an' find me Laz'rus. (2x)
Find him live, dead, alive.
Dead, alive."*

11. CLAUDE ALLEN

performed by Hobart Smith, vocals and guitar.
Recorded April 28, 1960 in Williamsburg, Virginia.

This song is based on a violent incident of 1912. It resulted in the hanging of Claude Allen and his father Floyd in the following year.⁸ Lomax wrote,

For the folk of the Blue Ridge Mountains, perhaps the most dramatic moment in recent history came during the trial of Claude Allen and his father...in the County Court House at Hillsville, Virginia, for crimes committed during a mountain feud. Without

warning, the Allen faction appeared in the courtroom, handed guns to the two defendants, and began to fire. The judge, the sheriff, and a number of spectators lay dead on the floor when the Allen gang rode away. According to the balladeer and his listeners, however, the trial was a frame-up and the Allens were justified in what they did. When they were later apprehended and executed, many folks sympathized with them, as attested by this ballad sung by Hobart Smith of Bluefield, Virginia.

*Claude Allen and his dear old father
Have met their fatal doom at last.
Their friends are glad their trouble's ended
And they hope their souls is now at rest.*

*Claude Allen was then tall and handsome;
He still had hope unto the end
That he in some way or other
Escaped his death at Richmond Pen.*

*The Governor, being so hard-hearted,
Not caring what his friends might say,
He fondly took his sweet life from him,
In the cold, cold ground his body lay.*

*Claude Allen had a pretty sweetheart,
She mourned the loss for the one she loved;
She hoped to meet him beyond the river,*

A fair young face in heaven above.

*Claude's mother's tears was gently flowin'
All for the one she loved so dear;
It seemed no one could tell their troubles,
It seemed no one could tell but her.*

*How sad, how sad, to think of killin'
A man all in his useful years,
A-leavin' his old mother weepin',
And all his friends in bitter tears.*

*Look up on yonder's lonely mountain,
Claude Allen sleeps beneath the clay;
No more you hear his words of mercy,
Nor see his face till Judgment Day.*

*Come all young men you may take warning,
Be careful how you go astray,
Or you may be like poor Claude Allen,
And have this awful debt to pay.*

12. COLE YOUNGER

performed by Oscar Gilbert, vocals.
Recorded October 6, 1959 in Timbo, Arkansas.
Previously unreleased.

Cole Younger and his brothers were Ozarks outlaws who rode with the James boys. This song tells

of the job that ended his criminal career — an 1876 bank raid in Northfield, Minnesota. In the song, Younger expresses contrition and regret, especially for the loss of his comrades. After Younger was released from prison in 1901, he published an autobiography and toured in a Wild West show. Ozarks folklorist Vance Randolph saw Younger in 1904, and recalled "a shabby fat man, looking more like a rural preacher than a dashing bandit."⁹ Younger died in Lee's Summit, Missouri in 1916.

*I am a noted highwayman,
Cole Younger is my name.
The deeds of desperators, have led to many a shame.
While the robbing of the Northfield bank,
it's a deed I'll never deny.
It's a deed that I'll be sorry of until the day I die.*

*We buy the fastest horses and northward we did go,
That God-forsaken little town called Minnetonka
Cole had his eye on the Northfield bank,
his brother Bob did say.
Says, "Cole, if you undertake the job,
you'll surely curse the day."*

*We stationed out at Pickett's, we rolled up to the town.
And on that counter, we struck our fatal blow.
Says, "Hand us over your money, boys,"
Cole's brother Bob did say,
"We are the noted Younger boys,
we spare no time to pray."*

*We then got on our horses, and started out of town.
The officers they pursued us, and Jim was shot down.
While two of the brave companions
made it home alive,
While three of the brave companions
laid between the Minnesota skies.*

13. THE LAWSON MURDER

performed by Spencer Moore, vocals and guitar,
and Everett Blevins, mandolin.
Recorded September 3, 1959 in Chilhowie, Virginia.

Probably no theme captures the popular imagination more than a tabloid-style murder scandal. This song recounts a tragic multiple murder-suicide in the Smokey Mountains. A poor farmer named Charlie Lawson killed his wife and children before turning the gun on himself. Moore's calm, unhurried account, typical of mountain folk singers, wrote Lomax, "lends it a timeless quality" and lets the horror speak for itself.

*It was on one Christmas evening,
the snow was on the ground.
A-home in North Carolina,
this murderer he was found.
His name was Charlie Lawson,
and he had a lovin' wife,
We'll never know what caused him
to take his family's life.*

⁹ Vance Randolph, *Ozarks Folksongs* (Columbia: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1948), Vol. II, p. 12.

*They say he killed his wife at first,
and the little ones did cry,
"Please Poppa, won't you spare our lives,
for it is so hard to die."*

*This ragin' man could not be stopped,
he would not heed their call,
And he kept on firin' fatal shots,
until he killed them all.*

*They all were buried in a crowded grave,
while the angels watched above.*

*"Come home, come home, you little ones,
to a land of peace and love."*

*They did not carry him to jail, no lawyer did he pay,
He will have his trial in another world
at a final Judgment Day.*

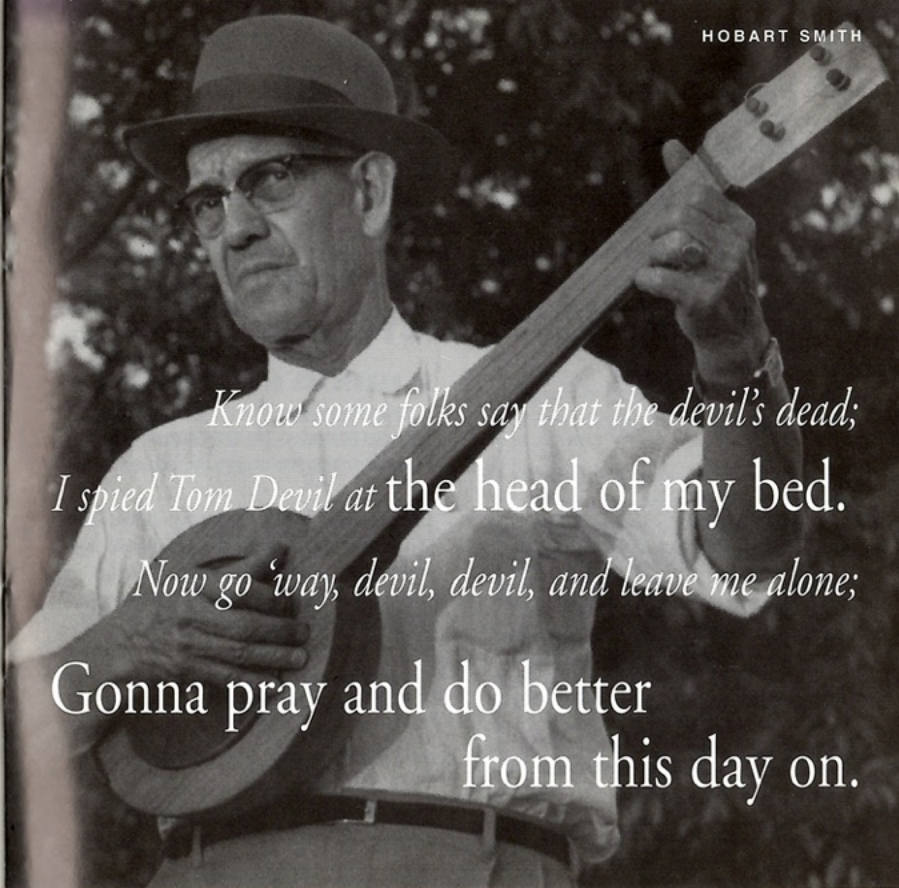
14. TOM DEVIL

performed by Ed Lewis
with Johnny Lee Moore, James Carter, and
Henry Mason, vocals and axe strokes.
Recorded mid-September, 1959
at Camp B, Mississippi State Penitentiary,
Lambert, Mississippi.

The disturbing verses of this song refer to the character of Tom Devil preying on the troubled soul of the singer. The singer tries to chase away the devil through prayer; his thoughts then wander to a woman, and he imagines offering her a life of plenty, in the manner of "Railroad Bill," with every day

a Sunday. Ultimately, the weight of reality sets in, and in the final verses he expresses his anger and distress at being unable to control his women, his money, or his fate.

*Know some folks say that the devil's dead; (2x)
I spied Tom Devil at the head of my bed. (2x)
Now go 'way, devil, devil, and leave me alone; (2x)
Gonna pray and do better from this day on. (2x)
Say, "Too late to pray,
you will have to die today." (2x)
Ol' axe is talking while those chips all flyin.' (2x)
Oh Mamie, oh Lordy, gal;
oh Mamie, Lordy, gal, (2x)
Oh Mamie, Mamie, gal, if you just say so, (2x)
The bottom of your pocketbook
will never be seen. (2x)
Well, you won't do nothin' but wash and iron. (2x)
Oh when you marry, marry a railroad man, (2x)
Every day is Sunday, a dollar
restin' in your hand. (2x)
That looks like Mamie comin' down the road; (2x)
It walks just like her but she walks too slow; (2x)
She walks just like she's carryin'
some heavy load. (2x)
Cryin', "Look on your finger, Mamie,
and think of me" (2x)
See the ring I bought you when I was free. (2x)
While you's in Meridian livin'
wo' like you please, (2x)
Crying, "I'm on Parchman got to oh work
or leave." (2x)*



*Know some folks say that the devil's dead;
I spied Tom Devil at the head of my bed.
Now go 'way, devil, devil, and leave me alone;
Gonna pray and do better
from this day on.*

*Oh work or leave, Lord, oh work or leave
Crying "I'm on Parchman, got to oh work or leave."
Well I don't gamble and well I don't see (2x)
Wo' how my money gets away from me. (2x)
I would write the governor but
that'll do no good. (2x)
I ain't got no money and that,
that's a good excuse. (2x)
Well early in the morning, baby, oh when I rise, (2x)
See the 38-40 stick, wo' in my face (2x)
Well I'm killin' the devil big, enough to die. (2x)*

15. HAWKINS COUNTY JAIL

performed by Hobart Smith, vocals and banjo.
Recorded August 24, 1959 in Bluefield, Virginia.

Alan Lomax wrote, "I suppose there is no prison without a song which celebrates its discomfort, its bad food, its filth. Nor is there any type of song which brings a quicker smile to our guilt-ridden people than one of these jailhouse satires. Hobart Smith, the Bluefield, Virginia bard, has kept in mind this old, ribald outcry from behind the bars in the hard-rock hotel of Hawkins County, Tennessee."

*When I was sleepin' I dreamt a pleasant dream,
Dreamed I was a-strollin' all down the golden streets.*

*Woke so broken-hearted in Hawkins County Jail,
All my friends was standin' 'round,
no one to go my bail.*

*Yonder come Luler, ten dollars in her hand,
Keys in her hand, went shovin' through the lock,
"Cheer up, cheer up my prisoner,"
I thought I heard them say,
"Send you 'round the White House,
seven long years to stay."*

(2x)

16. DANGEROUS BLUES

sung by Floyd Batts.
Recorded September 18, 1959 at Camp 11,
Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman.

Delta bluesman Johnny Shines said "Blues is when you are lost, blues is when you are depressed but don't know why you are depressed."¹⁰ In this striking solo blues, sung in the field holler style, there is much to be read in between the lines. This song reminded Lomax of the levee camp text, *Cap'n got a pistol and he wants to be bad; Get mine in the morning if you make me mad.*"

*Lord, everybody talkin' 'bout the dangerous blues;
The peoples talkin', Lordy, Lord,*

*'bout ol' dangerous blues.
If I had my special, Lord, I'd be danger', too.*

*A thirty-two-twenty, a-huh,
Lord a-do very well.
A thirty-two-twenty, a-twenty, a-huh,
Lord, do very well.
A four-five Mattie, a-huh,
Lord's a-burning hell.
Just don't know, Lordy, just don't know.
A-huh, Lord, I b'lieve I will,
Make my home, Lord, man, way in Jacksonville.*

17. PO' LAZARUS

performed by James Carter and group of male prisoners. Recorded mid-September 1959 at Camp B, Mississippi State Penitentiary at Lambert.

In this rendition of "Po' Lazarus," Parchman prison inmates perform in the compact, bluesy call-and-response style of work-camp singing that Alan Lomax found to be widespread in the Mississippi penitentiary system.

*Well, the High Sheriff, he tol' his Deputy
"Won't you go out and bring me Laz'rus,
Bring him dead or alive, Lord, Lord,
Bring him dead or alive."*

*Well, the Deputy he tol' the High Sheriff,
Says, "I ain't gonna mess with Laz'rus,*

*Well he's a dangerous man, Lord, Lord,
Well, he's a dangerous man."*

*Well, the High Sheriff, he found Laz'rus,
He was hidin' in the fields of a mountain
With his head hung down, Lord, Lord
With his head hung down.*

*Well, the High Sheriff he tol' Laz'rus,
Says, "Laz'rus, I come to arrest you,
To bring you dead or alive, Lord, Lord,
To bring you dead or alive."*

*O then Laz'rus, he tol' the High Sheriff,
Says, "I've never been arrested,
By no one man, Lord, Lord,
By no one man."*

*O well, the High Sheriff, he shot Laz'rus,
Yes, he shot him with a great big number.
With a forty-five, Lord, Lord,
With a forty-five.*

*O then they taken po' Laz'rus,
An' they laid him on the Commissary galley
He said, "My wounded side, Lord, Lord,"
He said, "My wounded side."*

¹⁰ Quoted from the *Tuscaloosa News*, 1982, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

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Every effort has been made to make these historic recordings sound as good as they did when Alan Lomax made them in the field. All transfers were made, wherever possible, from the original source materials using the Prism 20 Bit A to D converters and the Prism 20 Bit Noise Shaping System.

Last night
as I lay sleepin',

I dreamed I held you in my arms,
When I woke, I was mistaken,
*I was peekin' through
the bars.*

