

"The Lane County Bachelor": Folksong or Not?*

by Jan Harold Brunvand

The folksongs of homesteaders on the Great Plains have received relatively little study by American folklorists.¹ Such songs are not deficient as documents of social history, for the numerous texts of a homesteaders' song like "Sweet Nebraska Land" with its variations as "Dakota Land," "Kansas Land," and so forth are just as revealing of Western American events and attitudes as are songs like "The Old Chisholm Trail," "The Mountain Meadows Massacre," or "Sam Bass," all of which have been traced and discussed. Probably, pioneer farmers' folksongs have been slighted simply because swatting fleas in sod houses has seemed less intriguing to scholars than driving dogies up the trails or pulling hand carts across the plains or describing a life of crime.

Particularly neglected among Western pioneer songs are the lyrical pieces. Ballads, such as "Joe Bowers," have attracted much attention, while songs centering on feelings rather than plot, like "Little Old Sod Shanty on the Claim," usually rate only generalized headnotes in the folksong collections. One such lyrical folksong of the plains settlers which prominent anthologizers like Sandburg, Botkin, and Lomax have included is generally known as "The Lane County Bachelor" or "Starving to Death on my Government Claim." Sung to the tune of "The Irish Washer Woman,"² this lilting piece renders into rustic verse common experiences of life in a homestead shack, such as those in the third stanza of the first example: "How happy I feel when I crawl into bed,/And a rattlesnake rattles a tune at my head" and so on.³ Surely we have here a clear instance of Mody Boatright's claim for a "buoyant" strain of frontier humor which employed "extravagant burlesque of the outsider's conception of the frontier" and which projected a resilient pioneer spirit rather than bleak despair.⁴ And surely it is worthwhile to learn more about a song which writers on American folklore frequently cite as a typical example of the Western folk worldview⁵ and which authoritative Western folklorists have characterized as "probably the most widely sung of the 'sodbuster' ballads."⁶

*A shorter version of this paper was read at the Western Americana/Folklore Section, Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association Convention, Santa Fe, N. M., October 23, 1976.

It needs to be reiterated, however, that "The Lane County Bachelor" is not a ballad, or at least it has not been indexed as such in the standard syllabus of native balladry. G. Malcolm Laws, Jr., did not see fit to include it in his section "Ballads of Cowboys and Pioneers," nor even in his appendix list of the less structured "Ballad-Like Pieces," although the song was printed by several of the authors Laws drew upon, and it has as much narrative content as, say, "The Dreary Black Hills," which is in Laws' syllabus. Lacking Laws' listing, one must gather published examples without the convenience of a special bibliographic aid.

We may assume at the outset that the major reference in the song is to the Homestead Act of 1862 under the provisions of which vast stretches of the Great Plains were opened in 160-acre parcels to anyone willing to pay a ten-dollar fee, reside on his claim, and cultivate it for five years. Details in the various texts of the song jibe well with the hardships of farming in these parts during the last three decades of the nineteenth century when inept administration of the lands combined with plagues of insects and a run of miserable weather to test the pioneers' mettle. The song fits these historic circumstances; we lack clear proof of it being widely sung on the plains early in the homesteading period, but there is reasonably convincing evidence for a tradition by the 1880's and the turn of the century.

Lane county in the song is the one in west-central Kansas (the only other in the U.S. being in Oregon). From Lane county, Kansas, we get the longest early version of the ballad. This is the "Kepner text" given in full below as it was written down and dated March 8, 1891, by Ed Kepner of Dighton, Kansas, and given in 1933 to the library at Fort Hays Kansas State College. The text remained there for some twenty years before being published in the *Dighton [Kansas] Herald* in the early 1950's after a Lane county resident accidentally discovered Vance Randolph's 1941 Library of Congress recording of an Arkansas version. At that time Ed Kepner delivered a copy of his manuscript to the newspaper for publication, and finally in 1961 it was also published in a local commemorative booklet⁹ and in a scholarly collection of Kansas folklore,¹⁰ then again in a general collection of Western folksongs in 1968.¹¹

THE LANE COUNTY BACHELOR

The Kepner text:

1. Frank Baker's my name and a bachelor I am,
I'm keeping old batch on an elegant plan.
You'll find me out west in the county of Lane,
I'm starving to death on a government claim.
My house it is built of the natural 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.

Hurrah for Lane County, the land of the free,
The home of the grasshopper, bed bug and flea
I'll sing loud its praises and tell of its fame,
While starving to death on a government claim.

2. My clothes they are ragged, my language is rough,
My bread is case-hardened both solid and tough.
The dough it is scattered all over the room,
And the floor it gets scared at the sight of a broom.
My dishes are scattered all over the bed,
They are covered with sorghum and Government bread.
Still I have a good time and live at my ease
On common sop-sorghum, old bacon and grease.

Then come to Lane County, here is a home for you all,
Where the winds never cease and the rains never fall,
And the sun never sets but will always remain
Till it burns you all up on a Government claim.

3. How happy I feel when I crawl into bed,
And a rattlesnake rattles a tune at my head,
And the gay little centipede, void of all fear,
Crawls over my neck and down into my ear,
And the little bed bugs so cheerful and bright,
They keep me a-laughing two-thirds of the night,
And the gay little flea with sharp tacks in his toes,
Plays "Why don't you catch me" all over my nose.

Hurrah for Lane County, hurrah for the west,
Where farmers and laborers are ever at rest.
For there's nothing to do but to sweetly remain
And starve like a man on a Government claim.

4. How happy am I on my government claim,
For I've nothing to lose nor I've nothing to gain.
I've nothing to eat and I've nothing to wear.
And nothing from nothing is honest and fair.
Oh, it is here I am solid and here I will stay,
For my money is all gone and I can't get away.
There is nothing that makes a man hard and profane,
Like starving to death on a Government claim.

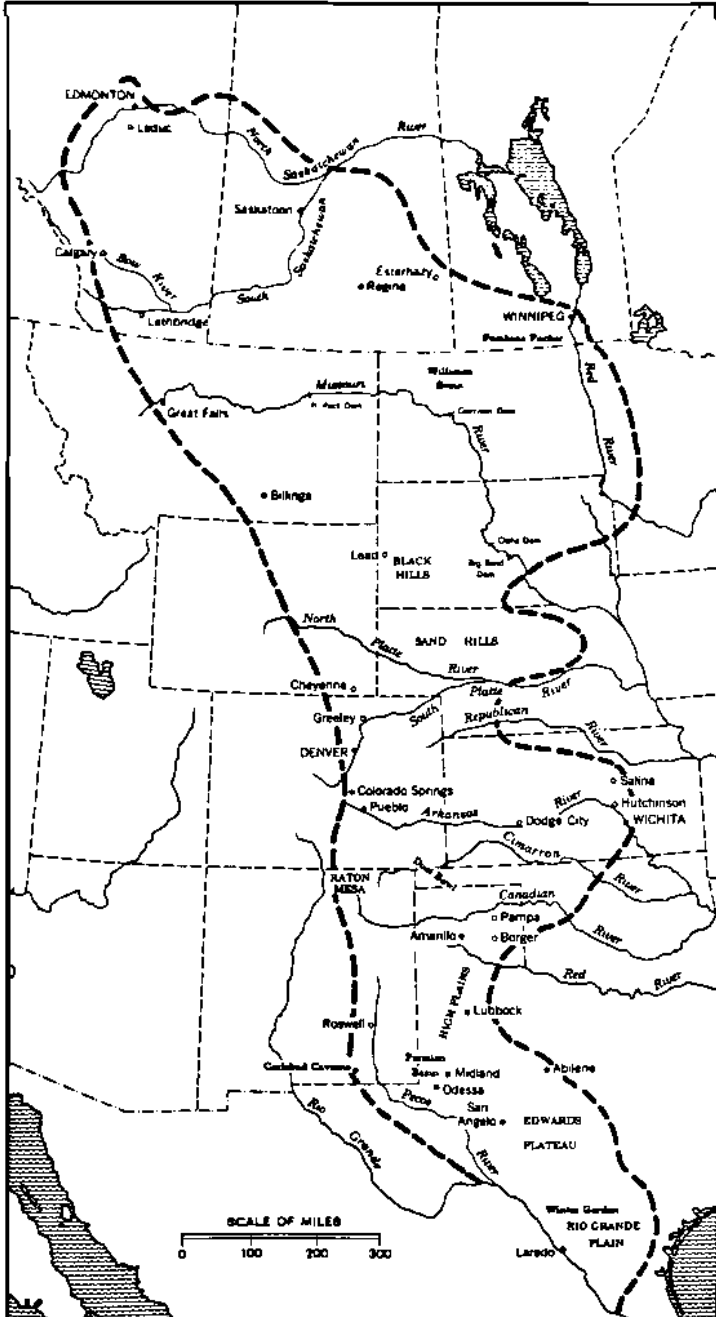
Hurrah for Lane County, where blizzards arise,
Where the winds never cease and the flea never dies.
Come join in the chorus and sing of its fame,
You poor hungry hoboes that's starved on the claim.

5. No, don't get discouraged, you poor hungry men,
For we are all here as free as a pig in a pen.
Just stick to your homestead and battle the fleas
And look to your Maker to send you a breeze.
Now all you claim holders I hope you will stay
And chew your hardtack till you are toothless and grey.
But as for myself I'll no longer remain
And starve like a dog on a Government claim.

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.

The evidence is good that a real Frank Baker did homestead in Lane county and there composed the words to the song which begins with his name, fitting his lyrics to a well known fiddle tune. Mrs. Bessie Prose Young, an old resident of the county, responded to a query from the Lane County Historical Society in 1944 giving the exact section numbers that Frank Baker homesteaded and the name of the other bachelor he lived with; she noted that "[he] composed a number of songs for our literary society."¹² Clint Hanna, in 1957 a Lane county college student doing research on the song, spoke to several old residents who remembered Frank Baker; Hanna concluded that the song was written between 1886 and 1891.¹³ It is believed by most who have investigated the matter that Baker had left the county early in the 1890's¹⁴; none of his relatives remain there or are known of elsewhere. In any case, Lane county residents have no doubts about his existence or his composition; their historical society even started a Lane County Bachelor Contest in 1974 to choose the local man who most resembles the person in the song, awarding him prizes such as a framed photo of the first sod house built in Lane county and a package of sunflower seeds. The contest is held annually during the Lane County Fair.¹⁵

I accept the Kepner text for its length, date, detail, coherence, location, and apparent solid link to an actual Western homesteader as a very likely base text for the whole tradition. It stands up well as a clever and well-organized folk poem, and it can plausibly explain all other known variants. The name "Lane county" appears in versions far removed from western Kansas, but that is where the only possible actual location may lie. The spirit of the song is cheerful (matching its tune), and the language is sprinkled with proverbial common-places (like "according to Hoyle") and with nicely ironic touches, such as "an elegant plan" (the Homestead Act itself?) and "nothing from nothing is honest and fair."



The Great Plains in Outline

Corroborative evidence for its authenticity is furnished by other early western Kansas and Oklahoma texts, all shorter and exhibiting variations typical of oral tradition. Raymond Tillotson of Shields [Lane county], Kansas, found an undated pencil copy of thirty-two lines of the song among the papers of his father, a pioneer settler in the county. Folklorist S. J. Sackett has suggested that the gaps, spellings, and lack of line divisions here raise the possibility of its having been taken down from oral rendition.¹⁶ Curiously, the Tillotson text's unique closing reference to *Topeka* has been printed twice as the ending of the Kepner text, which actually names *Missouri*.¹⁷ Here is the last stanza of the Tillotson text as it was written:

Now all those good people
I hope they will stave &
chew there hard tack till they
Are toothless and gray
But as for My Self I'll No longer
remain and starve like a dog
on a gov clame
I'm going to leave the
West & travel back east to the
girl I love best I'll stop
in Topeka and get Me a
wife & there shall I stay
the rest of my life

Another handwritten text six lines shorter than the Kepner text was sent about 1889 to the North Topeka *Mail* but was only published in 1939 in the *Kansas Historical Quarterly*.¹⁸ The first stanza reads:

frank baker is my name
and a bachelor I am
ime keeping old bach
just like a man
youl find me out west
in the county of ford
a starving to death
on a government clame

The wording throughout includes many slight variations suggestive of oral transmission ("Hoyle" is spelled "hoil," for example), but the order of stanzas and choruses is very close to the Kepner text with the exception of the county name, which is Ford county (southeast of Lane

county, the location of Dodge City). Sackett has collected a modern fragment of the song in Hays, Kansas; it retains the Lane county reference but begins with another personal name: "Waterson's my name and a bachelor I am."¹⁹ A striking change in this text is in the "according to Hoyle" section:

My house it is built of the Lane County soil.
The walls are erected of the best kinds of soil.

repetitious, and certainly no improvement on the Kepner text, but probably derived from a faulty memory of it.

An important early Great Plains text of the song was collected by a most unlikely chance in Kentucky. In 1907 Josiah H. Combs of Transylvania University, Lexington, collected a full sixty-line text from Dr. Ernest Smith, a transplanted Oklahoman, living in Knott county, Kentucky.²⁰ Combs included eight lines of the song in his 1925 doctoral dissertation at the University of Paris,²¹ and he published it complete in 1939 with piano accompaniment in a song folio titled *Folk Songs from the Kentucky Highlands*,²² a designation that hardly fits! Ernest Smith used his own name in the opening stanza, a practice Combs identified as traditional with the song. The first stanza and chorus of the Combs text are as follows:

Ernest Smith is my name; an old bachelor I am;
I'm keeping old batch on an immigrant plan.
You'll find me out West on the high-road to fame,
A-starving to death on a Government claim;
My house it is built of rich, fertile soil,
My walls are engraved according to Hoyle.
My roof has no pitch, but it is level and plain,
And I'm sure to get wet if it happens to rain.

Hurrah for B. County, the land of the free,
The home of the bed-bug, grasshopper, and flea!
I'll sing out its praises and tell of its fame,
While starving to death on a Government claim.

While the subject matter of the Kepner text is intact, virtually every stanza has minor verbal variations on the order of "immigrant plan," "high-road to fame," "crew of all fears," and the unrhymed lines:

There's nothing that makes a man solid and firm,
Like starving to death on a Government claim.

an obvious variation in the direction of poorer wording from Kepner's version. The name "B. County" in the choruses is glossed by Combs

as "Beaver County," which lies in the Oklahoma panhandle south and west of Lane county, Kansas. Even more suggestive of a direct traditional link between these states is the concluding chorus:

Farewell to B. County, farewell to the West!
I'll travel back *North* to the girl I love best;
I'll go *back to Kansas* and marry a wife,
And live on corn-dodgers the rest of my life.
[Italics supplied]

The earliest known publication of "Starving to Death on my Government Claim" was another from Oklahoma collected in 1908, one year after Combs' text; it appeared first in John A. Lomax's famous book *Cowboy Songs* (1910) under the title "Greer County."²³ Its thirty-six lines begin, "Tom Hight is my name, an old bachelor I am," and the rest differs considerably from the Kepner text, both in structure and in phraseology.²⁴ The most striking new wordings are "country of fame," "elegant plain," "natural sod/according to hod," and in the final stanza a desire to "quit corn bread for the rest of my life," since this Oklahoma bachelor had been eating "corn dodgers" all along instead of hardtack or government bread.

The actual Greer county, Oklahoma, is directly south of Lane county and near the Texas border. The song "Greer County" has the earmarks of an interesting oral variation of the longer song, but neither John A. Lomax nor his son Alan ever commented on it in terms of this larger traditional context as they republished their text, often with inexplicable variations.

Reprinting it first as twenty-four lines in their book *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934), they footnoted the song only "Text from *Cowboy Songs*."²⁵ But a comparison shows that not only have we lost an even dozen lines (all of stanzas two, three, and five), but also some of the wording has been revised. In stanza one, for example, "county" has replaced "country," bringing the phrase to its normal form. In *Folk Song: U.S.A.* (1947) the Lomaxes titled their song "Starving to Death on a Government Claim," adding a piano arrangement plus the information that "John A. Lomax first recorded this sod-shanty complaint in 1908 from that hardy old Western cowboy and homesteader, Tom Hight, who could sing ballads all night and never repeat." However, the relationship between the text now presented and their supposed 1910 original becomes even more curious. This time there are thirty-two lines, since stanzas two and five have been restored; but now six has been shifted ahead of four.

In stanza one the term "country" is back, but elegant "plan" has replaced "plain." The "natural sod" of 1910 has been altered to "national soil" and rhymed with the familiar "according to Hoyle." In the last line "corn dodgers" have replaced "corn bread." Finally, in 1964, Alan Lomax in the *Penguin Book of American Folk Songs* presents his latest thirty-two line revision of the song, still presumably drawn from his father's earliest fieldwork, but now under the title "My Government Claim" and fitted out with a new piano arrangement.²⁷ He chooses the same stanzas as appeared in *Folk Song: U.S.A.*, but now stanza eight has been moved up to penultimate position and rewritten "cry quits on corndodgers the rest of my life." We have "county of fame" back again, but "elegant plan" remains.

What might we conclude from this amazing history of a supposed single folksong text recurring in the works of two folklorists upon whom we are forced to rely for many important traditional items? Obviously, as John O. West also found in his investigation of a related matter in the Lomax corpus, there is strong evidence for tampering with the text beyond the limits of emendations or clarifications.²⁸

In 1964 in Ethel and Chauncey O. Moore's book *Ballads and Folk Songs of the Southwest*²⁹ a version of "Greer County" was published coming from a singer in the town of Mangum [Greer county], Oklahoma. But it seems impossible to credit their statement that "it was composed by a singing schoolteacher named George Crawford, who conducted classes in the AV schoolhouse on the AV Ranch before Oklahoma became a state" (that is, before 1907). Not only are there earlier and better authenticated texts, but this one is almost exactly John A. Lomax's 1910 version, with Tom Hight, "country of fame," "cornbread" and all. Either the informant has made some reference to the book *Cowboy Songs*, or Crawford wrote it for Tom Hight, or this is an unusual instance of communal re-creation of folksongs failing to operate in oral tradition. It is also interesting that the Moores give "Bee County" as a local variant of the song's title; there is no Bee county in Oklahoma. Likely this is the "B. County" of Combs' version, that is, Beaver county, where, incidentally, Tom Hight himself told Lomax that he had participated in singing contests during his boyhood—another nice hint of southward migration of the song from Lane county down into Oklahoma.³⁰

Now, where *did* John (or Alan) Lomax get different versions of the song? Unfortunately, as D. K. Wilgus has written, "even with the help of the Lomax manuscripts it is not possible to reconstruct all the links between the folk versions and the printed texts."³¹ Austin Fife inspected the Lomax papers but found no original text taken down from the lips of Tom Hight, but only a few "extra stanzas" sent to

John Lomax after the publication of *Cowboy Songs* by Professor Hubert G. Shearin, who was a sometime collaborator on folksong research with Josiah Combs of Transylvania University.³² These stanzas are recognizable as coming from the Combs' "Ernest Smith" version, complete with the very revealing "North to Kansas" chorus, but Lomax seems not to have noted this clue, although he may have plucked "according to Hoyle" and other wording from this very text.³³

We recognize so far from the late 1880's up to around 1907-08 a movement of the song southward from Lane county, into north and central Oklahoma, thence coming to the attention of certain professors in Texas and (very oddly) in Kentucky. Next let us briefly review other directions of migration. Ben Gray Lumpkin of the University of Colorado collected a thirty-line text in Boulder in 1961.³⁴ The singer said she learned it in her family about 1910, and it seems to be the Kepner "Frank Baker" text severely worn down by years of traditional circulation or faulty memory. Nebraska folklorist Louise Pound had collected a much more complete text—fifty-eight lines—in the opposite direction, from an informant in Hot Springs, South Dakota, back in 1914.³⁵ The only two lines of the Kepner text not found here are those concerning the sharp-tack-toed fleas in stanza three. It had bacon and *cheese* (rather than "grease") in the bachelor's menu (agreeing with Lomax) and refers to chewing the "hard rag" where "hard tack" is expected; other variations are minor. When Louise Pound's text was recently reprinted in Roger L. Welsch's book *A Treasury of Nebraska Pioneer Folklore*³⁶ and then again in Welsch's *Sod Walls: The Story of the Nebraska Sod House*,³⁷ a presumption is conveyed that this very text of the song was orally circulated in Nebraska, which is, of course, probably not true. (Welsch also mentions North Dakota as a place where the song was sung, without citing examples, and none has come to my attention.)³⁸

At about this point it is convenient to mention that sheet music and four stanzas of words for "Starving to Death on a Government Claim" were copyrighted in 1912 by O. S. Grant.³⁹ While a few phrases of the folksong tradition are recognizable here ("according to Hoyle," "Home of the grasshopper, bedbug and flea," and so forth), most of it is completely different and brings in such illogical references as "sagebrush and cactus." The opening line is completely original: "Don't ask me my name, a honyöcker⁴⁰ I am," and the conclusion follows suit:

Some day Uncle Sam will say, "well done,"
Here is a deed to the homestead that you have won.

We come now to probably the best known version, certainly the most widely reprinted, and heretofore the most mysterious as to source: Carl Sandburg's full sixty-line text from this 1927 book *The American Songbag* attributed rather vaguely to Iowa and Nebraska.⁴¹ Its opening sentence as printed, because of the name used and the spelling of a contraction, makes it immediately recognizable: "My name is Frank Bolar, 'nole bachelor I am." Once again the order of stanzas and choruses is very close to the Kepner text, the name "Lane county" is preserved, and the variations in wording are mostly those which oral tradition may account for. If we focus on just four of these changes which appear for the first time in this version (plus the opening line already quoted), we can easily trace the specific influence of Sandburg on later writers and singers—mostly writers. These changes are: 1) "*national* soil" (instead of Kepner's "natural" soil), a reading which appeared in a Lomax reprinting twenty years later; 2) "My *head* is case-hardened" (instead of my "bread"); 3) "A rattlesnake rattles his *tail* [instead of a tune] at my head"; and 4) "*tack/back*" as the rhyme in the flea couplet, instead of "toes/nose" (Kepner's text being rearranged). Texts naming Frank Bolar as the bachelor may be scored from zero to four with regard to these wordings, a higher score suggesting likely derivation from Sandburg. In brief, and chronologically, the reprintings (and I have probably missed some) are as follows:

- 1930—Sandburg's text reprinted straight (score four) in a work on *Kansas* folksongs. (No source given.)⁴²
- 1932—One stanza and chorus printed in a songbook, *The Cowboy Sings* (score one; other relevant stanzas lacking). No source.⁴³
- 1937—Full Sandburg text (score four) except for last chorus. (Source: "Old Song.")⁴⁴
- 1942—Three stanzas and choruses (score three) printed with numerous dialect respellings and piano music. (No source.)⁴⁵
- 1944—Reprinted with credit to Carl Sandburg (score four) in Benjamin Botkin's first *Treasury*.⁴⁶
- 1946 A University of Kansas M.A. thesis on "Northwest Kansas Folksongs": Sandburg's text (score four) except for dropping "Lane County" and substituting "this county." (Source: "A well known homestead song.")⁴⁷
- 1961—Published as sung by Manhattan, Kansas, professor William Koch; full Sandburg text (score three).⁴⁸ (Two shorter versions recorded by Koch for Austin Fife in 1959 score only two, and one of these has the name as

"Frank Boor." Koch is quoted: "I do not know where I got this version"; the chance seems good that he has mixed an oral-traditional family version with his reading knowledge of Sandburg and perhaps other writers.⁴⁹

1967—The William Koch published text (score three) credited as such and printed with piano arrangement and some minor spelling changes. (Source: "Words anonymous.")⁵⁰

The only two properly validated oral-traditional versions I have been able to find that relate to the Sandburg text were these: 1) From Westminster, Colorado, 1962. While it does name Frank Bolar as the bachelor, it scores only one on other distinctive traits, agreeing with the Kepner readings elsewhere;⁵¹ 2) Twenty-four lines included on a 1973 recording made by the Arizona Friends of Folklore in Clay Springs, Arizona; it has the name "Frank Bole" and scores two (out of a possible three for the stanzas included).⁵²

Carl Sandburg's 1927 headnote says that his text came from Edwin Ford Piper, concerning which source D. K. Wilgus has raised the general complaint that later folksong researchers lack further information about his collection.⁵³ Piper was a midwesterner, a student of Kittredge's at Harvard, who then returned to teach at the State University of Iowa. He dedicated his book *Barbed Wire and Other Poems* in 1917 "To the memory of my father and my mother, pioneers in Nebraska in the year Eighteen Hundred and Sixty Nine."⁵⁴ The Fifes, following the lead in Sandburg, tracked down in Ames, Iowa, Piper's "very haphazard array" of clippings and handwritten notes on American folksongs, and they estimate that he made this collection from about 1909 to 1917.⁵⁵ In their 1969 book *Cowboy and Western Songs* the Fifes first published Piper's unaltered original, which (as the manuscript shows) he collected from one "H. Cooper" (no date or place indicated).⁵⁶ What is most fascinating about this text is that it reveals how Sandburg the poet, *not* some anonymous folk muse, was responsible for two out of the four distinctive features I have traced; in other words, Piper scores only two on our Sandburg scale of four. Piper has "natural," not "national" soil; and "bread," not "head"; both agreeing with our old friend Kepner. Also interesting is that there are two other shorter versions of the song in the Piper collection which display unique (probably oral) variations:

- 1) Another "Mr. Cooper" text which names "Frank Baker"(!) and has unique lines like, "Whenever it happens I want to be fed, / I eat up some hard tack and dry gingerbread."⁵⁷
- 2) An "Oklahoma version" which names "Fred Barber" and "the county of Wood" (north Oklahoma, right on the Kansas border), the latter rhyming with "A starving to death on my government goods."⁵⁸

The first sound recording of "The Lane County Bachelor" was made in 1941 by Ozark folklorist (note, not *folk*!) Vance Randolph who sang it in a very unpolished manner for the Library of Congress Folksong Archive. The thirty-six line rendition was issued on an LC disc,⁶⁰ printed in Randolph's *Ozark Folksongs*,⁶⁰ and recently reprinted.⁶¹ Randolph learned the text in Hot Springs in 1917 from an informant who had learned it from a family living near Fayetteville, Arkansas. (We are not surprised to find this city in the extreme northwest corner of the state, near Oklahoma and Missouri.) While its length is close to Lomax's version, the wording is nearer to Kepner's, including even the "back east to Missouri" closing which would not make sense in Fayetteville. The name had evolved to "Frank Taylor". In general, Randolph's text represented a reduction by two-fifths of all the essentials of the long Kansas original—nothing inconsistent with the usual workings of oral tradition nor suggestive of interference from print. (It may be noted here that the only vulgar stanza ever associated with the song is a mere couplet recalled by Austin Fife from farmhands singing near Idaho Falls, Idaho, in the 1920's, and brought to mind by Fife's hearing of this Randolph record.)⁶²

One final unpublished text brings the record of oral tradition for the song up to 1925. In that year Harvey W. Cable, Presho, South Dakota, a reader of the column "Songs Old Men Have Sung" in *Adventure Magazine* sent his handwritten version to the writer of that column, the important American folksong collector Robert W. Gordon.⁶³ This version begins:

John Biggs is my name, an old batchelor I am,
 You'll find me out west on an elegant plan.
 You'll find me out west in that country of fame
 Starving to death on a government claim.

Hurrah for Mills county the land of the free,
 The home of the grasshopper, bedbug and flea,
 I'll tell of its praises, I'll sing of its fame
 While starving to death on a government claim.

Cable wrote that this was "a song I have heard sung by several different men." Mills county is a placename found only in Iowa and Texas. The order of material agrees with the Kepner text, but some wording is reminiscent of Lomax: "country of fame," "according to hod," and "live on corndodger no more in me life," for instance. A few lines are unique, such as "from nothing to nothing I've harvested air." It seems possible that either the Great Plains oral tradition stemming

from Kansas was influenced by someone's reading Lomax's *Cowboy Songs*, or else Cable may have had some Texas singers among his acquaintances.

The remaining handful of texts is marginal in terms of locale, date, and details; these all seem to show printed influence or are self-conscious parodies. Others are simply too fragmentary or anonymous to trace to any clear folk source. For example, the Canadian version, "The Alberta Homesteader," collected in 1958 in Ontario (?), simply relocates the events and furnishes appropriate details of Canadian weather and crops.⁶⁴ A 1951 unpublished recording of a singer from Albuquerque, New Mexico, turns out to be pretty close to the Lomax text and is credited to Greer county, "a little county down in Texas."⁶⁵ A 1959 Arizona text is an obvious southwestern parody which omits the sod house description and adds ranching and Spanish-American touches: "I'm going to Old Mexico and get me a wife,/And live on tortillas the rest of my life."⁶⁶

Last of all, in the two large but very miscellaneous northwestern collections of folksong notebooks and clippings which Austin Fife discovered, a few random texts occur. In the Stella Hendron collection from Kooskia, Idaho, there are three undistinguished and unidentified handwritten or typewritten texts plus one with unique military language and references to "Camp Borden" (wherever that is).⁶⁷ In the Pacific Northwest Farm Quad collection (Spokane, Washington) Fife found two texts, one a fragment apparently based on Sandburg, the other probably related to one of the many that follow from Kepner.⁶⁸

In analyzing this maze of material, much of it of rather doubtful accuracy and unknown origin, I have had an advantage over previous commentators of possessing every important published text of the song plus back-up material from archives and private collections.⁶⁹ I have tried to deduce from these sources when oral tradition created variations and when the hand of an editor or writer was at work. It has been possible to estimate fairly reliably the influence of printed versions upon oral performances. The patterns that develop are quite clear, and conform closely to what residents of Lane County, Kansas, have maintained for some time.⁷⁰ That is, the song seems to have originated with one of their own pioneers and achieved considerable popularity elsewhere in the west, both through folk and published circulation.

The main reliable early western traditional texts consist of just nine, by my count; they range from late nineteenth-century Kansas (Kepner, Tillotson, and Ford County) down into Oklahoma by 1907-08 (Lomax) and north through Iowa and Nebraska (Piper) and as far as South Dakota (Pound) in the 19-teens. Probably via Okla-

homa the song found its way, before 1920, into Arkansas (Randolph) and even Kentucky (Combs), but by 1925 printed influence was already becoming evident (Cable). Altogether the song has been associated with twelve states (mostly of the Great Plains) and Western Canada. Of thirty-three texts known to me (of which eight are fragmentary), only thirteen have been published, but these have been reprinted, often without credit, a total of thirty-six times. Lomax's version (published six times in different variations) continues to be heard from singers in Oklahoma and further southwest up to the present. After 1927 Carl Sandburg's revision of one of Piper's texts (published eleven times so far) influenced some oral versions of the song. Beyond these two, the most often reprinted texts have been Kepner's and Pound's (four each) and Randolph's (three). In recent years and at the furthest periphery of the song's distribution, printed influence (especially from Sandburg) is the major trend, and parodies are sometimes composed. Possibly Pete Seeger's recording¹¹ or Randolph's have been influential on some folk singers, bypassing the paths of both oral and printed circulation.

It is deplorable, but true, that almost every step of the way collectors and editors of the song have altered or obscured the record. These efforts range from the obvious falsifications by the Lomaxes and the poetic (or possibly just careless) rewordings by Sandburg down to the many unacknowledged reprintings and resings of previously published texts which have tended to inflate the count of supposedly verifiable traditional versions. But I am greatly impressed at the same time by the crucial importance of just a few first-hand written records of the song taken down by college professors and early folk listeners alike. Also, the sheer good luck of several texts being preserved and rediscovered raises the whole question of what else lies unnoted in private files or has been lost forever.

In any case, "The Lane County Bachelor" does exhibit sufficient distribution, variation, and folk-group possession to be termed a valid example of Western folksong. Although it does not prove to have been common knowledge among the early homesteaders themselves, still it comes from the folk, and it handles authentic materials of Plains pioneer life in a manner consistent with frontier humor. Probably its misadventures in the hands of self-styled folksong authorities are not unlike what has happened to many another American folksong. All I can say, in conclusion, is:

There's nothing that makes a man hard and profane,
Like tracking a song to the county of Lane.

NOTES

1. The major modern students of Western American folksongs are Austin E. and Alta S. File of Logan Utah, to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude. They generously furnished me with numerous references and many copies from their copious archive. Items integrated into their personal collection are labelled FAC (File American Collection) below; other excerpts from their collections are individually identified in notes.

I also thank the following for sending me important information and texts: Joseph C. Hickerson, Head, Archive of Folk Song, The Library of Congress; Rachel Christopher, Reference Librarian, Forsyth Library, Fort Hays Kansas State College; Professor Samuel J. Sackett, Fort Hays Kansas State College; Richard Gilbar, Reference Librarian, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence; R. J. Tillotson, Shields, Kansas; and Ellen May Stanley, Dighton, Kansas.

The Inter-Library Loan section of the Marriott Library, University of Utah, was most helpful in locating and borrowing several scarce publications.

2. Sigmund Spaeth in *A History of Popular Music in America* (New York: Random House, 1948) writes that the first American printing of "Yankee Doodle" (1795) used it as the finale for a medley that included "The Irish Washer Woman" (page 17). It is among the tunes that "Pa" plays on his fiddle in *Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House On the Prairie* (1935, rev. ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 68. For a recently-collected traditional rendition, see *Cowboy Songs*, Vol. II, a disc issued by the Arizona Friends of Folklore (Flagstaff, Ariz. [1972]), Side B, No. 3.

3. A similar description in prose is quoted in Robert C. Steensma, "'Stay Right There and Toughy it Out': The American Homesteader as Autobiographer," *Western Review*, 6 (1969), 16, from Martha L. Smith, *Going to God's Country*, a woman's chronicle of life on the Great Plains spanning the years 1890 to 1910.

4. *Folk Laughter on the American Frontier* (1949, rpt. New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 169.

5. See Russell Ames, *The Story of American Folksong* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1955), pp. 52-53, and Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), p. 292.

6. Austin E. and Alta S. File, *Cowboy and Western Songs: A Comprehensive Anthology* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1969), p. 58.

7. See *Native American Balladry* (Philadelphia: AFS Bibliographic and Special Series, vol. 1, 1950; reissued, 1964).

8. I have two undated xerographic copies of clippings from the *Dighton Herald* sent to me by Ellen May Stanley; she writes that they date from the 1950's.

9. *An Historical Record of Lane County, Founded June 3, 1886* ([Dighton], 1961, second printing, 1976), sent to me by Ellen May Stanley, pp. 123-26.

10. See Henry H. Malone, "Folksongs and Ballads," in S. J. Sackett and William E. Koch, *Kansas Folklore* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 146-148.

11. Richard E. Lingenfelter, Richard A. Dwyer, and David Cohen, *Songs of the American West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 459.

12. Xerographic copy of a handwritten letter from Bessie Prose Young to Esther Fineman, March 4, 1944, sent to me by Ellen May Stanley.

13. Quoted in *An Historical Record*, p. 123.

14. However Ellen May Stanley found this entry in the diary of a Lane County pioneer, dated July 19, 1897: "Walter and Frank Baker came awhile this afternoon." There is no evidence that this is the composer of the song (Letter dated July 27, 1976).

15. Xerographic copies of *Dighton Herald* (1974), *Garden City Telegram* (1974) and *Hutchinson News* (1975) sent to me by Ellen May Stanley.

16. Malone (in Sackett and Koch), pp. 148-149.

17. Both Malone and Lingenfelter, Dwyer and Cohen print the Topeka version. *The Dighton Herald* and the Lane County *Historical Record* print the Missouri version, which is also as Austin File reports it (FAC II 408).

18. See Myra E. Hull, "Cowboy Ballads," *AHQ*, 8 (1939), footnote 23, pp. 52-53. Other unusual wordings include "whitening sap sorghum potatoes and greas," "play rattle loggetchem all over my nose," "where the wind is never lenehed and the fall never dies," and "tile stop in mossouru."

19. FAC II 538. Collected from Charles C. Waterson, eight lines plus a four-line chorus.

20. See Hubert G. Shrout and Josiah H. Combs, "A Syllabus of Kentucky Folk-Songs," *Transylvania University Studies in English* 2 (Lexington, Kentucky: Transylvania Printing Company, 1911), p. 15.

21. *Folk-Songs of the Southern United States*, D. K. Wilgus, ed. and tr. (Austin, Texas: American Folklore Society Bibliography and Special Series, vol. 19, 1967), p. 78, listed in appendix as no. 171, p. 223.

22. (New York: G. Schirmer), "Schirmer's American Folk-Song Series, Set 1," pp. 32-34. Other curious wording includes "scarce hardened," "robbers and beggars," "help tell us fame," and "fatten your fleas."

23. Rpt. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1922), pp. 278-279.

24. Material corresponds with the Kepner text as follows: St. one (lines 1-4) + ch. one = st. one (5-8) + st. four (1-4) - st. three (1-4) - st. five (2-5) + st. two (1-2) - 708 = ch. four (1-2) = ch. two (2-4) = ch. five.

25. (New York: Macmillan), p. 434.

26. (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce), p. 227, song on pp. 229-239. The same book with the same pagination also appeared in 1947 as *Best Loved American Folk Songs* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap). John Lomax also mentioned collecting songs from Tom Flight in his *Adventure of a Ballad Hunter* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 48.

This one seems closest to the text recorded by Pete Seeger on *Frontier Ballads* (New York: Folkways FP 5003, n.d.) It was also reprinted without credit to Lomax but with only a few changes (such as inserting the name Lane county) in Paul Glass and Louis C. Singer, *Songs of the West* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966), pp. 34-35

27. (Baltimore: Penguin Books), p. 111.
28. See "Jack Thorp and John Lomax. Oral or Written Transmission?" *Western Folklore*, 26 (1967), 112-118.
29. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), pp. 282-285.
30. See John A. Lomax, *Adventures*, pp. 49-50, describing Tom Hight writing to him twenty-five years after singing folksongs for him in an Oklahoma City hotel concerning his memories of singing "near Beaver City in the old neutral strip, or No Mans Land, just north of the Texas Panhandle"
31. *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1959), p. 158.
32. See note 20. The texts sent by Shearin are numbered in the File collection JL 8 and 145.
33. Some scraps of more recent Oklahoma oral tradition of the song do exist. File's collection includes three fragments from archival sources: 1) FAC II 454, "Frank Baker" in "Woodward County" (close to Beaver county, northwestern Oklahoma), eight lines, Oklahoma City Library, dated December 27, 1949; 2) FAC II 110, a single chorus sent by George W. Boswell, Austin Peay State College, Clarksville, Tennessee, January, 1959, labeled "Clay county, Oklahoma" (no such county in that state), said to have been collected in 1932, and 3) FAC II 131, two isolated stanzas from Charles M. Gould Collection, University of Oklahoma Library, source on faculty of University of Oklahoma from 1900, died in 1949
- In an apparent case of Oklahoma references moving north, the File collection also contains a 1959 text from Kathy Dagle of Augusta, Kansas, which is a slightly shortened version of the Lomax "Tom Hight/Greer County" version. (FAC 118)
34. See *Colorado Folksong Bulletin*, 1:1 (January, 1962), 3.
35. "Folk-Song of Nebraska and the Central West. A Syllabus," *Nebraska Academy of Sciences Publications*, 9.3 (Lincoln, 1915), 30-31, and *American Ballads and Songs* (New York: Scribners, 1922), pp. 178-180.
36. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 46-48.
37. (Broken Bow, Nebraska: Purcells, Inc., 1968), pp. 170-173.
38. *Sod Walls*, p. 170
39. (Washington, D.C.: H. Kirkus Dugdale Co., Inc.). Xerographic copy furnished by the Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress
40. Defined as "a farmer, c 1877-1941" in Harold Wentworth, *American Dialect Dictionary* (New York: Crowell, 1944). A 1941 supporting quotation from the *Saturday Evening Post* reads "'Honyocker,' the Yankee neighbors called them [immigrants from central Europe] 'Honyocker' came to be . . . generally applied to any farmer who tries to raise grain and livestock in the high prairies of the Northwest"
41. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World), pp. 120-122
42. Edna Reimbach, *Music and Musicians in Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1930), pp. 24-25
43. Kenneth S. Clark, ed. (New York: Paul-Pioneer Music Corp., 1932), p. 71.
44. Ruth A. Barnes, *I Hear America Singing: An Anthology of Folk Poetry* (Chicago: John C. Winston Co., 1937), pp. 85-86. Although other texts in the book are labelled *The American Songbag*, this one is not; the first line alone shows variation "I lone bachelor I am"
45. Satis N. Coleman and Adolph Bergman, *Songs of American Folks* (New York: John Day, 1942), pp. 32-34.
46. *A Treasury of American Folklore* (New York: Crown, 1944), pp. 314-316.
47. Mildred M. McMullen, *The Prairie Songs: Northwest Kansas Folksongs*, M.A. thesis, University of Kansas, Lawrence, 1946, pp. 133-135
48. Bill and Mary Koch, "Kansas History and Folksong," *Heritage of Kansas*, 5 (1961), 10-11.
49. FAC I 531, II 127
50. Irwin Silber and Earl Robinson, *Songs of the Great American West* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 224-228. The illustration with this text shows a man standing in the doorway of a log house
51. See *Colorado Folksong Bulletin*, 2 (1963), 33.
52. *In an Arizona Town*. AFF recording No. 33-3 (1973)
53. Wilgus, *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship*, pp. 215-216
54. (Iowa City: The Midland Press, 1917).
55. Letter from Alta File dated January 21, 1975
56. The text is numbered PC-F 116 in the Fifer's collection; the publication is in *File and File: Cowboys and Western Songs*, pp. 58-61
57. PC-F 118 is written in black ink on lined paper; PC-F 119 is the same text typewritten on plain paper
58. PC-F 117, typewritten on plain paper and labelled "The Homesteader" with "Starving to Death on a Govt Claim" in pencil
59. Duncan Emrich, ed., *Songs of the Mormons and Songs of the West* (Washington: Library of Congress AAFS L30 [n.d.]), side B, no. 2.
60. Vol. II (Columbia, Mo.: State Historical Society, 1948), pp. 190-191
61. Duncan Emrich, *American Folk Poetry, An Anthology* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), pp. 627-629
62. FAC I 875, "My name is Frank Taylor, my cock is a whaler, / My bollux weigh forty-nine pounds."
63. Xerographic copy of item 881 in the Gordon MSS., Library of Congress. Dated January 10, 1925, on Harry W. Cable's own letterhead. A reply from Gordon thanking Mr. Cable, dated Feb. 15, 1925, from Cambridge, Mass., is also part of item 881. Gordon remarked on the "several points of difference which interest me greatly."
64. Edith Fowke, Alan Mills, and Helmut Blum, *Canada's Story In Song* (Toronto: W. J. Gage, 1960), pp. 144-145, 221. Referred to by Edith Fowke in "American Cowboy and Western Pioneer Songs in Canada," *Western Folklore*, 21 (1962), 252

65. FAC I 181. Copied from the collection of Donald Robb, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. May, 1949.

66. FAC II 422. Copied from mss. in University of Arizona Folklore Archive, collected in February, 1948; said to have been written and sung by Clyde Baldwin at Nogales radio station.

A Utah parody, "The Contented Bachelor," was recorded about in the early 1950's by the Rhythm Wranglers of Vernal, Utah. It was reissued on *The New Beehive Songster*, Vol. II (Salt Lake City, Okehdokee Records, 1976), pp. 8-9 of accompanying notes. This version begins "My name is Tex Ross an old bachelor I am," but the tune is different and the details are local. Only at the very end does the parody return, with the line, " go right on starving along with the rest."

67. In the Fife collection these are numbered Hendron 625, 626, and 1182 "Hurrah for Camp Borden" is Hendron 399. Another item from the Lomax files in the Fife collection, JL 473 is a similar parody apparently from the Petersburg, Virginia, Federal Reformatory Camp. Beginning "McGee is my name, an old bachelor I am," it furnishes details of prison life. Most likely the composer had a Lomax published text in hand.

68. Numbered PNEQ 240 and 436 in the Fife collection.

69. Two published versions I have been referred to have not been located, so far. These are in Curson J. Robinson, *World's Greatest Collection of Mt. Ballads and Old Time Songs* (Chicago: M. M. Cole, 1930), pp. 30-31, and as sung by Bill Bonyun on Folkways record FC 7402.

70. See Clini Hanna's summary in *An Historical Record*, p. [25].

71. See note 26.