BIography

HENRY THOMAS: OUR DEEPEST LOOK AT THE ROOTS

by Mack McCormick

It was one of those bright winter afternoons. I was standing on a corner in downtown Houston, waiting for a signal light to change, when I noticed an old man with a guitar making his way along the opposite sidewalk. He was a formidable person, a bulky figure with a matted hair who moved in a straight line through the crowd. People looked up at him, then gave him a quick second look and moved out of his path.

Whatever errand I was on was not at all important, and I set out after him, catching up with him at the corner of Crawford and Capitol. I had to call to him twice to catch his attention. He stopped and swung around to face me, the guitar held tight across his chest, a dusty mountain of a man. He must have stood all of 6'3" and the size of him was made all the greater by the enormous quantity of clothes in which he was wrapped. There were three overcoats, one on top of the other, all buttoned and flapping open in a chilly wind that seemed to govern down the street. The outer coat was streaked with mud and grime. The inner garments were worn smooth with wear and brushing.

Later, when a question started him in search of some item, he roamed through all the different pockets like a man searching the closets and drawers of his house.

He was a street singer, perhaps a beggar, but there was nothing deferential about him. He first glanced at me in a coarse voice and seemed about to brush me aside. Then he paused and broke into a surprisingly bright smile. Many of his teeth were missing and it was difficult to understand what he said. Only here and there a few words came through gruffly. He didn't make me understand that he'd arrived in Houston on a train that had pulled into Union Station only a few minutes earlier. He said he'd slept under a bridge in Palestine, Texas, the night before.

He agreed to play some music but what followed was a disappointment. His guitar strings were dead and terribly out of tune. He fiddled about at them almost indifferently, as if he'd lost the ability to discriminate tones. His voice had a gay life but only occasionally could it be said that he was up to par. Nonetheless, there was a compelling vigor in his performance. He used a flat metal, guitar-like instrument that he gripped in his mouth and blew, getting a curious buzzing sound from it—a sound with an energetic bite that carried up and down the sidewalk. He went through several pieces there on the street corner, at one point gathering a small crowd of pedestrians who tossed some coins in the mashed felt hat he'd set on the sidewalk.

I'd come across him a few years too late. He was far too old to be hobbling and sleeping under bridges. He was too old to be able to perform effectively. One could only wonder what he had sounded like before old age had worn him down.

For some years that encounter remained a memory, but isolated, incident. I never passed Union Station without looking to see if I could catch sight of him again. I'd seen him at a time when first-rank street singers were still a fairly common sight, yet there was an unforgettable quality about this man. I came to wish that I'd spent more time with him.

Moreover, that 1949 meeting was in what must now seem like the dark ages: a period in which there was no consciousness of interest in the music of itinerant black street singers. One exception was a hurdy-gurdy scholar in New Orleans named Orin Blackstone who had put together a series of books called Index to Jazz. Those bare and incomplete discographies represented the extent of information then available about the hordes of phonograph records on which so much music had been captured and then, through neglect, almost lost.

Jazz had earned some serious attention, but there was little interest in the broader subject of traditional American music as documented on commercial recordings. It wasn't until several years later that Harry Smith came along to spark that interest with his vast, remarkable, and somewhat madcap collection of old 78s, Anthology of American Folk Music, released on his long-playing records. That collection contained two items recorded in 1928 by a man named "Ragtime Texas" Henry Thomas, a fascinating performer who seemed to have a wealth of music at his command; an artist who offered a deep look at the black traditions that had taken shape in the 19th century.

By the time these records came to my notice I'd forgotten the name of the man I'd heard on the street. I had some vague recollection that he claimed to have made records and that I'd even found them listed in Index to Jazz but it was an uncertain memory. Much clearer is the memory of that gruff, towering man telling me he came from East Texas and bristling with pride when he said, 'I left out from home when I was eleven years old, and I been traveling ever since.'

Over the years a number of things have come along to suggest that the man on the street was in fact "Ragtime Texas" Henry Thomas. There are a striking number of similarities between the recordings and the man I'd stopped. Apart from the obvious Texas connection, there is the fact that both relied heavily on 3-formations chords and made unusual use of the capo, pushing it three to seven frets up the neck of the guitar. They were unquestionably men of the same age and period; and there is a hint of the blinginess in these records that is wholly consistent with and even suggests that dusty mountain of a man who'd played on the street corner that winter afternoon.
of the old recordings came to light it became apparent that Henry Thomas was a singular and important figure. He held a trial of 23 issued selections which represent one of the most significant contributions to the musical culture of the Old West. His songs were usually catchy and concise, with a message that reached out from another era: urban, rural, and the cowboy world. His stories were compelling and his singing was often accompanied by a guitar or banjo. It was a rare talent to be able to entertain an audience in such a unique way.

In the 1870s, Thomas was known as a troubadour who played his guitar and sang his songs. He became popular in the towns and cities where he performed, and his music was enjoyed by both the locals and the visitors. His songs were often about the hardships of the Old West, the beauty of the land, and the people who lived in it.

In the 1880s, Thomas became involved in the music business and started recording his songs. He recorded in a variety of styles, including country, folk, and popular music. His songs were widely distributed and became popular across the United States.

In the 1890s, Thomas began to write and perform his own songs. He became known as a songwriter and composer, and his music was increasingly recognized for its quality and style.

In the 1900s, Thomas continued to perform and record his music. He became a fixture of the music scene in the Old West, and his songs were enjoyed by generations of music lovers.

In the 20th century, Thomas's music continued to be recorded and performed. His songs were included in many music collections and were played on radio and television. His music was also used in movies and in advertising campaigns.

In the 21st century, Thomas's music is still enjoyed by music lovers around the world. His songs are celebrated for their beauty, their message, and their ability to capture the spirit of the Old West.

The music of Henry Thomas is a testament to the enduring power of music to capture a time and a place. His songs continue to inspire and delight music lovers everywhere.
No, his manner is not as polished or suave as one might expect from someone who has run a million-dollar corporation. His voice is clear and direct, and his manner is straightforward, but there is an undercurrent of intensity that suggests a man who is accustomed to getting things done.

He is dressed in a dark suit and a white shirt, with a pocket square that matches the color of his tie. His glasses are perched on his nose, and he carries himself with a confident air.

As we walk through the corridors of the Fortune building, we pass by a few individuals who pause to nod in his direction. There is a sense of respect and admiration that surrounds him, and it is clear that he is a man of considerable influence.

We reach his office, a large suite with floor-to-ceiling windows that offer a panoramic view of the city. The walls are lined with shelves of books and binders, and there is a desk in the center of the room with a laptop and a stack of papers.

He sits back in his chair and smiles warmly. "I'm very pleased to have you here. I hear you're interested in our company's growth and strategy."

I nod, taking in the environment. This is a man who has achieved great things, and it's clear that he is comfortable in his own skin.

He continues, "We've been growing steadily over the years, and we're poised for even greater success. Our products are innovative and our market position is strong."

I ask a question about our recent quarterly report, and he answers in detail, providing me with a comprehensive overview of our financial performance.

We discuss the company's long-term vision and the challenges we face in achieving it. He is frank and honest, sharing his goals and aspirations for the future.

As the interview draws to a close, he reaches out to shake my hand. "Thank you for your time. I'm confident that your insights will be invaluable to our company."

I return the gesture, feeling a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. This was a valuable opportunity to learn from a leader who has achieved so much.
III

In aggressively opening up new markets in the 1920s, the record makers began taking on literally anything that would sell. They hired pianos, teachers, choogle bands, country singer, tap dancers, organ grinders, jug bands, fiddlers, bayou blues, and in more than a dozen languages. They recorded the John Wiltborn Concertina Orchestra of New Ulm, Minnesota and the Detroit-based Henry Singer of Arkansas, Alabama. They bought blind street singers and home musicians in front of the microphones. In the process, Henry Thomas became — along with Artie Traum and John Mooney and Brin Crosby — a lot of crass commercialism bought by the Brunswick Company.

Overall, this is rich human history, with the original "race records" representing a particularly enduring, vivid music. Through the network of networks the world and the recording of the original records is being increasingly possible to hear both of them. The effect is in the recording of the world, a great desire in which hundreds of people involved in the stories.

The early "race records" were made for, the most part, by relatively young people. Most of the artists were born between 1900 or later and were in their 30s or early 40s when they recorded. There were, however, a very small number of older performers who appeared on record and it is these people who provide the most direct evidence of the lack of black tradition as a creative generation or earlier. It is especially revealing to hear the in full that what is available of the earliest recordings, a rare, select group that includes Peg Leg Howell and Mr. Robert Johnson to Slim Gaither and Jim Jackson, a selection of Mississippi, Del Suhler and Huddie Ledbetter from Texas; Frank Tate from Tennessee; plus Irvin of Chicago, Joe Concannon and Charlie Johnson. All were born before 1910. And of these men, Henry Thomas is the oldest. He is not quite the 30-year-old who appeared on the early race records, but because of the widespread range of his music and because it does appear a solid sample of his youth and formative years, it is Henry Thomas who offers the deepest look at the roots of black traditions.

In one selection his guitar offers a combination of finger picking and slides and in some cases a high, ringing note on top of the church choir's baseline tuning. He has not found his way into the blues, and his songs are more strictly confined to his own. Of course, we may wonder at the fact that we are given by 20th-century writers who described "darker" with respect to "playing blues"...at least up to the point when we factor in that Chris Thomas even offers us a fragment of "Shining Boy, Rawhide.

That element is there; it was part of his time and perspective and tradition, but he put it in perspective and added alongside songs of a darker nature, songs of love and sorrow and invocation spee. He is a joking, happy man, and God damn it, we have a man who can entertain his friends by creating a train as the need arises. One feels in him an innocence, a naiveté, a history of slaves, and probably a wanderer as much as by circumstance, he was one of an inner circle who began to look around to others to listen to a kind of music. The results and the comic instrumental song gave way to the blues, and the blues a greater sharpening of his whole disposition, and a sort of sharpening of attitude. Instead of happily shying away the reward in the hereafter, there was the declaration "I'm gonna build me a heaven in over.

The ego moved in center stage and the singer spoke of his own passion and pain. The blues represented a dramatic shift in the private viewpoint and to the first person singular: I've got the warned blues, God, I'm feeling bad. What we have of Henry Thomas has been ruthlessly filtered. The recordings were supervised and selected with an eye to what the market would sell. Then the compiler collected what he wanted to put on the market and rejected others. You had to think that these people are influential to the success of our original record collections. Henry Thomas' recorded repertoire breaks down into the following anthropic catechism:

1. 1 monologue
2. 2 gospel songs
3. 4 compositions of songs, ballads, blues, square dance calls, fragments, etc.
4. 5 records of the four generally called "rags"
5. 10 blues

Although the largest entry is pure blues, still, it is misleading and limiting to characterize Henry Thomas as a blues singer per se. Our total picture is now sufficiently enlarged — through testimony, field recordings, and the records that have come together — to illustrate the key developments that occurred with each successive generation. It was Maurice Lawrence — born in 1885 but not recorded until 1914 — who described himself as a singer and that helped to reestablish the word once common used to describe the men and the song materials that were present before the blues became dominant.

Certainly, despite the fact that they came from widely separated parts of the South, the songsters shared a number of musical traits. Their blues may in close company with reels, ragtime, ballads, gargantuan and popular songs. Even Charles Patton, who is perhaps the most blues-oriented of that older group of performers, one hour, hours, and an hour and a half, version of a popular song like " enumerates.

Henry Thomas surmises us by singing The State of Arkansas is a song usually considered belonging exclusively to white tradition, it is worthwhile bearing in mind that we have no comprehensive idea of the actual distribution of this or of the others songs. The fact that a black performer sings it thereby suggests a need to reconsider where the color line has been drawn.

Indeed, a chief characteristic of the songster was a broad repertoire that included many songs shared by both black and white performers (I Shall Not Be Moved, The Bald Winnow, I Know). It has been remarked that Henry Thomas and his white contemporary, Uncle Dave Macon, had much in common. They were born within four years of one another, neither began recording until middle-age, and then they remained a member of the same circle of songsters. When The Train Comes Along, and a narrative of Jonah among others. There are parallels for the linking the two men, partly because Dave Macon's transcendent on the Grand Ole Opry were read by Texas, and partly because both recorded for the same company; however, a criticism of this is that they generally come not in distinctly different versions. The more probable situation is that both were using the same songs, and the same body of tradition which they shared with countless other performers who simply never had an opportunity to record.

As the tumbling process of reconciliation goes on, it's evident that the original "race records" were anything but the broadest ground of the song materials used jointly by white and black.12 At the same time it's clear that within black tradition there was a body of material that was exclusively black — expressing attitudes and perceptions that were not shared by the white community, and at the heart of this was the hard-core blues, an idiom that others might borrow but never fully possess: "Boogie's blues, Boogie's blues in my stall, and a "Lover's page in the Red River run, and you don't believe I'm sickin', look at what a hole I'm in".

The origin of such blues is one of those subjects probed over and over again with no single, satisfying answer to old and forgotten questions. It is an understandable curiosity: the blues have long been an enduring, fertilizing part of our culture and, as such, it is hard to fathom that no one was paying attention when they began.

Accordingly, there's a tendency to move more and more to that the handfull of performers who represent the sum of all the direct evidence; that the original black music was all, of fact, however, the earliest known blues are not to be heard at all. They appear in poems and early old journals where English teachers published bits of "folk poetry" they'd heard and jotted down. These published text collections are quaint documents, insufficiently presenting about their "informants," but they provide a unique body of material that can help to take the time that it would take to study these earliest reports is it possible to reconstruct — or to imagine that one can reconstruct — the blues tradition as it was in its infancy, 20 years or more before the first recordings.

It is a fascinating procedure. The publications are more limited to the bare texts and devoid of any information on the people who sang the songs. Yet the books and journals are stuffed with lines like One kind friend said to me, you give me one more chance and OH, don't you love me here and I'm a poor boy and a long way down from home which is my blues tradition as it exists. When "outiders first noticed such songs and observed that they represented a departure or a different style from the usual "slightly set-aside blues?

For anyone who has ever pursued over these impartial pages of song texts, the 123 recordings here will provide the focus and the depth of field. Henry Thomas illuminated what has been rarely written down, and he helped to bring music which was described in as "one-verse songs". He is the man that the songs themselves used this term so exclusively — a single line, repeated again and again, constituting the entire song (Italian ways). According to his descriptions any of the lines — such as those quoted above — might be repeated from two to six times, this being the entire song. The "great majority of blues songs," he wrote in an article published in 1911, "which are current now as 'one-verse songs'".

There's nothing quite so rudimentary from Henry Thomas but he does offer a variety of selections which could be regarded as a
series of "verse songs" stitched together to fill up a three minute record. Lovin' Bebe is perhaps an advanced use of the technique. It is a clever elaboration of themes, seemingly unrelated, yet graphically executing another type of sonata, or theme and variations.

Eventually the blues progressed into a much more sophisticated form. A variety of unstandardized verse structure (A-B-A') developed. In selections such as Red River Blues, Son House offers a variety of unstandardized antecedent forms. He illuminates those two crucial steps where the lines merge into one verse containing both question and answer, or statement and response. He shows how the lines, repeated two or three or four times, fall into sequence, each new thought evolving on what has gone before. The chain of logic is clear, ironic, unpretentious.

I'm gonna build me a heaven of my own
I'm gonna build me a heaven of my own
I'm gonna build me a heaven of my own
I'm gonna give all good time women a home
I'm gonna give all good time women a home
I'm gonna give all good time women a home
Get your hat, get your coat, get shaking down the line
Get your hat, get your coat, get shaking down the line
Get your hat, get your coat, get shaking down the line
Possibly to a greater extent than any other performer of his era, Henry Thomas gives us a cross-section of the early, evolving blues. Yet even that cross-section is at variance with the concept of having traced its course. The line When you see me coming keest your window high was reported from a black work gang heard in or near Vicksburg, Mississippi. In 1905, Vollaeger, on the strength of a successful popular song published in 1906 (by an author who readily admitted that he gathered his materials by listening to Southern Negroes), recorded an almost identical version and it remains a familiar part of the vocabulary of the blues up to the present day. But all of these are only selective hints, scattered points along the river, without final answers to its origins or actual sequence.

Because Henry Thomas offers so much to the subject, he inevitably presents a long laborious task to his originators and beginnings. The advent of the blues is traditionally discussed in terms of a procreative act, a sudden flowering, or birth. We've had one man standing in the sun as "Father of the Blues" (since 1926) the kingly abstractive imagery of The Birth of the Blues. Serious scholarship tends to accept much the same concept of blues origins. Evidence of the concept of sparks by certain tenets and needs. This line of thought naturally implies a specific historic period, something like the various states of Texas, Mississippi and different cities (Memphis, New Orleans) have endlessly pursued their arguments about "where the blues were born."

In respect to Texas, a mountain can be documented — through the combination of both early and more recent field work and recordings, through the old journals and diaries and newspapers, through a variety of entries on rag records, and so on. Thus the mountain itself appears to make its own argument, but that too is illusion. A detailed survey of all the early materials and testimony simply offers the support to any argument for primacy.

Lines and verses that Henry Thomas sings are reported from Mississippi in 1906, and from Georgia in 1906. Portions of his blues represent a mixture at an early date and throughout Kentucky and in Mobile, Alabama. He shared much, not only with Charlie Patton in Mississippi, but with William Moore in Virginia.

No such mountain is reported from the South, of a different kind. But what does seem apparent is that from whatever point or points the blues emerged, they gained quick consent and spread drastically through the country. The evidence suggests a specific event, sparked by certain tenets and needs. This line of thought naturally implies a specific historic period, something like the various states of Texas, Mississippi and different cities (Memphis, New Orleans) have endlessly pursued their arguments about "where the blues were born."

At every moment Henry Thomas is a firm exponent of the Texas branch of these movements, with deeply etched characteristics that identify him with local tradition. Moreover, he has a distinctive accent that is associated with a specific part of East Texas and with a particular group there. Nonetheless, beyond these traits, he is at the same time representative of an entire generation. In bearing him, one needs to imagine songsters scattered over 22 states who knew and sang the same songs, and enjoyed the same kinship with their audience.

While the evidence available gives only flimsy directions as to where traditions originated, how they traveled is more readily understood considering the estimate that there were as many as 75,000 out-and-out bums in this country by the end of the nineteenth century. Some of them carved animals in exchange for meals, others worked their way through the world with a guitar, moving from town to town, playing on the sidewalks with a cap or an upturned hat or coming to challenge local musicans. These movements between humankind meant that the challenging visitors were events of sharp local interest. New songs were expected to be heard and exchanged in a tough competitive spirit.

The three most outstanding aspects of Henry Thomas' songwriting were character at the center, which is that pieces of songs patched together, comprised into anthologies with an almost Jovean flavor. He worked on the assumption that his audience knew in full such standard songs as Let Me Bring My Clothes Back Home and The State of Arkansas and Traveling Man and thus he was free to merge them into a patchwork ending with a simple statement. It wasn't always apparent unless the listener is equally familiar with the songs quoted and alluded to.

One of these songs follows a gambling motif. Using a wisp of an Old Kentucky horse race ballad Run Middie Run as its title, it repeats the lines "She learned me how to deal those cards, / Hold that jack and trey" and then leads to the final stanza of a ballad, well known in Texas, where a young man en route from the Dallas jail to the state prison at Huntsville confesses to a life of sin and ends his sentence with the moral preachment, "They'll take you down to Huntsville to wear the ball and chain."

Another almost unique aspect of Henry Thomas' recorded legacy is his use of the "spoke" or the "tongue". The last one only came from a river bottom to be cut into tubes of progressively shorter length and bound together side-by-side to form an instrument. Until the era of the first World War virtually every Southern youngster seems to have made himself a set of these pipes or "quills" which was used in feasts in certain four note models up to sets of ten or more notes. Both Bill Monroe and Mississippi John Hurt have described making such instruments when they were children, turning them out by the score of little church children. All of these have not been recorded, Henry Thomas offers the only extensive sample of this once commonplace instrument.

Through the records of having made these records, Henry Thomas becomes a relic from the past, all of one that of flood of lesser things that we must come to treasure, or else discard because they clutter up our lives. As with any relic, it seems the role of the context and the role it placed in its own time, but ultimately the relic must stand on its own — holding our attention because it is a rich, human testament to our common history.

Through the years Henry Thomas' music has influenced countless people. The test of Henry Thomas is whether he can be heard and valued without prior information or interest. The strength of his art must be sufficient, it is not enough that he alters some preconceptions or sheds new light on the blues tradition. One cannot necessarily approach him with a large part of the archives or steeped in knowledge of his fellow musicians. Henry Thomas was born one hundred years ago. The relic is expected to bridge the years. Some small allowance can be made. For example the listener will be struck by Thomas' sincere and patient with his didactic speech — just as Henry Thomas would need patience with your curious speech. This exchange of patience can be regarded as a basic courtesy rendered between people of different worlds. Given the opportunity he carries the listener deeply into his world, his time and place, and immeasurably enhances one's sense of heritage.

He is a tough old hobo with songs that span most of life's more necessary passions.
NOTES

1. Index is based on his five volumes between 1983 and 1994: the last of which carries a listing of some of 'Reggie Truck-Thomas' records.

2. 'Bread Truck' is an open space in two instances that refer to the first two volumes of 'Reggie Truck Thomas' records.


4. This reference is noted in the 20th Century Fox soundtrack, 1992, p. 100.

5. This reference is noted in the 20th Century Fox soundtrack, 1992, p. 100.

6. The man leading the search was a fellow trucker, and on a different route.

7. The man leading the search was a fellow trucker, and on a different route.

8. The man leading the search was a fellow trucker, and on a different route.

9. The man leading the search was a fellow trucker, and on a different route.

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30. The man leading the search was a fellow trucker, and on a different route.
(John Henry)

Henry got a letter and his mother was dead
Put his children on a passenger train.
He gonna ride the blind, lady.
He gonna ride the blind.
Henry looked up on the railroad track, spotted two...coming down before I let that head driver beat me down.
She with that hammer in my hand
She gonna fill that hammer in my hand.

Henry went on the mountains top, gave his hand a blow.

Last words the captain said
"John Henry was a natural man.
John Henry was a natural man."

Henry had a woman, they were very red.

Going down on that railroad track
"Going where John Henry fell dead."
Yes, I'm going where John Henry fell dead."

Henry had a baby boy, hold it in his palm of his hand.

Last words that poor boy said
"I'm gonna learn to be a steel-driving man."

Ballad. The best known American ballad John Henry is curiously little known in Texas tradition. Among the rare exceptions are some verbatim account versions recorded in recent years by Reay and Atchison prison farms, and this 1927 recording by Henry Thomas.

Countless versions narrating the 1873 West Virginia contest between a steam-powered driving machine and a champion steel-driving man. This version is based on versions of the ballad preserved in the oral tradition of the working-class coal miners. The story as told by John Henry in the ballad is similar to the story of the steam-powered driving machine that killed many miners.

COTTONFIELD BLUES

I'm going to Texas, have to ride the mobs (2)
Just as sure the train leaves out of that Mobile yard.
If you see my name before I do (2)
Don't tell em' baby, what I'm about to do.

Hey, beat it up the stairs, and she won't come down.

If you see my name before I do (2)

I believe it's my soul, great God, she's in the water bound.

When I was in the East, and I looked to the West (2)
I'm gonna learn to be a steel-driving man.

Hey, you know you're gonna have, no, no way.

I'm gonna learn to be a steel-driving man.
Yes, I'm gonna learn to be a steel-driving man.

Ballad. The text is known variant of the ballad "John Henry." The story is set in the American South, where the ballad was recorded by folklorists and other collectors. The ballad tells the story of a coal miner named John Henry, who was killed in a contest with a steam-powered driving machine. The ballad is a popular folk song that has been recorded by many artists. The story as told in the ballad is similar to the story of the steam-powered driving machine that killed many miners.

1. There is a variety of version as to the name that apparently occurs here. Among several possibilities mentioned, it sounds most like Tatumtown (in Rock County, Texas), but the more probable is Louisiana, a plantation community on the Red River just south of Shreveport, in an area that Henry Thomas frequented.

Blues. Actually, a melody, this ballad with an elegant slow blues

And then gives rise to what may be a sort of that same melody about earache that people recall Henry Thomas singing. The reference to Mobile (which occurs again in "Railroad Blues"

not to the city of that name but rather to the Mobile & Ohio

Railroad yards, possibly in East St. Louis.)

ANKARAHSA

Do Roberta (sister) said, "Pick your trunk and go -

Yes, he came back home last night."
My wife said, "Honey, I'm done with beans —
I'm gonna catch a passenger train."
Oh, my little honey don't you make me go
I get a job, if you allow me, you know.
All my luck, I will show
Good little baby just let me work
When you fry chicken all I want is the bone.
When you buy beer I be satisfied with the foam.
I'll work both night and day. I'll be careful what I say.
Money, "Honey, "What!"
"Please let me bring my clothes back home"
Down the track this mornin' she did stroll.
Well, a accident; her feet got caught in a tude.
I'm gonna tell you the truth, a natural, ...[poor man?]

Night is young, dresses turn
The railroad track is ran
I'm gonna buy them all
Cigarettes, chewing tobacco — and by again.
I'd like to know how sultan does every poor man.
I am a gambler, gambling man
I gambled in every town.
I gambled this wide world over
I gambled this world around
I had my ups and downs through life
And bitter times I saw.
But never knew what misery was
Till l hit on old Arkansas.
I started out one morning, to meet that early train
He said, "You better work with me
I have some land to claim.
I'll give you fifty cents a day; your washing, heard and all
And you shall be a different man
In the State of Old Arkansas."
I worked six months for the rascal
Joe Merrif was his name.
He had me old corn-dodgers, they was hard as any rock.
My teeth is all got loosen, and my knees begin to knock.
That was the kind of hash I got
In the State of Arkansas.
Traveling man, I've traveled all around this world
Traveling man, I'll travel from land to land
Traveling man, I'll travel all around this world
Well, it taint no use, writing no news
I'm a traveling man.

Composite. This collection skitters through three or four songs; all deadbeats well know all the time: A Struggle version Baby, Let Me Bring My Clothes Back Home appeared in the Journal of American Folk-Lore, July-September 1913, p. 291, and a New Orleans version is in Caffin in the Guard, p. 61 (Austin: 1923). In both of these the duping wife decides "to pass for white."

Versions of The State of Arkansas are plentiful. See the references in Midtown Law, Native American Balladry. Early recordings run to over a dozen, including those by Uncle Dave Macon (available on Docuca 4168) and The Golden Melody Boys (available on Historical 2933-27). Traveling Man is equally well known with recordings by Coley James, Virgil Childers, Luke Jordan, Dock Walsh and Jim Jackson (this last available on Collector's Classics 3). Henry Thomas' role here seems to be that of an older, 討人 to bring together a sequence of comic songs to describe an odyssey — from the breakup of a home to trials of a wandering laborer.

THE FOX AND THE HOUNDS
Oh Liza, I'm going away
I'm going away
Yes I am, I ain't no use
Now.......what'll I do?
Got no woman, don't want you, goodbye
 Fare you well, Liza
Liza, Liza
Lock down the road, lock down the road
Possum man, big old gun
On his side, look like mine
Sally dog, let's get some
Catch it soon, you oughta go
Well mama, well mama
I've been gone sixteen years
I'll be home some of these days
If I live, don't get killed
Look down the road
Possum man, big old gun
Big old gun, look like mine
Sally dog, let's get some
Catch it soon, you oughta go

Companions, in searching out the somewhat elusive theme here a point to keep in mind is that, in Southern tradition, the fox chase and the pursuit of fugitives involved much the same social endeavor as well as the same loping sounds.

Red River Blues
Look where the sun done gone, (2)
Look where the sun done gone, poor girl
Look where the sun done gone.
Yes, it's gone, God knows where.
Look where the sun done gone down there
Look where the sun done gone.
Lowlife, I'm all out and down.
I'm all out and down. I'm laying to the ground.
Look where the sun done gone.
I'm a poor boy and a long way from home.
Poor boy and a long way from home.
I'm a poor boy and a long way from home, down here.
Look where the sun done gone.
Which-a-way do the Red River run? (2)
Which-a-way do the Red River run, poor boy?
Which-a-way do I die the Red River run?
Yes, it runs north and south.

River. The apparent rotation in the song's family can be more fully traced than usual. The question Which-a-way do that blood that Red ever run? was asked by the early spirituals. The refrain connected the line to their use and provided their answer with lines like it run from my back window to the rising sun. However, there are a number of specific rivers by this name, the largest being the Red River which runs east to west across the Texas-Oklahoma border and then making a sharp right turn, runs south and southeast through Louisiana. This "corner" itself seems to be described by Maurice Loppinthus in Which-a-way Do Red River Run? where his answer to the question is:

East, West, then run North and South.

These songs stretch from Biblical allegory (2 Kings 3:22) to literal references to the meandering Red River. Compare the present recording with the 1961 recording by Maurice Loppinthus (Reprise 7017) and the 1935 version by Huddie Ledbetter (Columbia 30035). Each of these is a blues variation in the Vee-Vee which has been consistently cited as having been current and widely known by 1905.

The Little Red Caboose
Oh, the little red caboose, little red caboose
Coming behind the train.
Little red caboose, little red caboose
Coming behind the train.
Oh, get your ticket and get on board.
Coming behind the train.
Just get your ticket and get on board.
Coming behind the train.
Yes, I looked down the road about forty miles.
Coming behind the train.
Yes, I looked down the road about forty miles.
Coming behind the train.
Yes, the little red caboose, little red caboose
Coming behind the train.
Just a little red caboose, little red caboose
Coming behind the train.

Yes, she's blowing her whistle both loud and strong.
Coming behind the train.
She's blowing her whistle both loud and strong.
Coming behind the train.
Little red caboose, little red caboose
Coming behind the train.
Yes, the little red caboose, little red caboose
Coming behind the train.
The little red caboose, little red caboose
Coming behind the train.

Reel. In his notes for The Railroad in Folk-songs in the NCA Victor Vocalage series, Archie Greene commented "Rallations delighted in caboose ditties which echoed the warmth of a trainmane's home and the spirit of his final journey. Sometimes it's a humorous song, as in this tune which is a 1904 recording by the Pickard Family. The Pickard Family (Women 1089) which recorded this "Jollifly cabby" we will find if you come and see us in the little red caboose behind the train," and nothing outside in common with Red River Dave's 1944 recording (Muscadine 285) which tells a fictional story of a hobo man in a caboose and train whistle which kills the bird. Norman Cohen has observed in "Railroad Folk-songs on Record - A Survey" (New York Folklore Quarterly June 1979), "These are actually the last nine completely independent songs by this title that range between 1870 and 1930 in date of composition."

Bob McKinney
Went down Johnson Street, Bob McKinney came passing by
Goin' on down that Johnson Street, make trouble in that line.
Wan't I be bad? Yes, Wan't I be bad?
Bobby said to Margaret. "Come to me I said.
If you don't come in a hurry, I'll put a Jl through your head."
Wan't I be bad? Yes, Wan't I be bad?
Reddy said to Ben Devins. "I'n bound to take your life.
You caused trouble between me and my wife.
Wan't I be bad? Yes, Wan't I be bad?
Reddy says to the High Sheriff. "Don't think I'm gonna run,
If I had another load, man, and you'd have some fun."
Wan't I be bad? Yes, Wan't I be bad?
Oh my back, take me back.

How in the world, Lord, take me back.
Monday morning, won't be long.
You gonna call me, I'll be gone.
She turned around, two or three times.

Make my bed and take me back.

Take me back (2)

Make my bed and take me back.
Oh, make me a pallet on your floor.
Hey, make me one pallet on your floor.
Oh make (me a) pallet on your floor.
Wan't you make it so your man never know.
Wan't you make it so your man never know.

Hey, make it to your man never know. (2)
Ab make a pallet on your floor.

Wan't you make it so your man never know.
Yes, I'm looking for that bally lad me down.
Hey, I'm looking for that bally lad me down.
I'm looking for that bally, that bally, can't be.
Yes, I'm looking for that bally lad me down. (2)
I'm looking for that bally, that bally can't be.
I'm looking for that bally lad me down.

1. Line = row of lavens, barbershops, pool halls, etc.

Companions: Bob McKinney plays shelf at St. Louis through the mill town of Johnson Street. Although a case could be made for New Orleans, which also has an important street by this name, St. Louis figures in much of the balladry that grew out of the 19th century and the early social background for this has been described by Ann Bott Jamaica and Jack Conyngham in Amalgam But Here: There was a boomship and want in St. Louis of 1903. There was also crime and depravity. The Cleveland panic had done its work among across, they were leaving the South in endless streams, and St.
Louis was drawing more than its share of the migrants. The overcrowding which resulted produced intolerable conditions. Sitting space in pool halls became a real luxury. Thousands of vagrants slept on the cobblestones of the levee. Police brutality reached a point seldom equaled. Officers of the law carried night sticks a yard long and learned to hurl them at the feet of fleeing migrants in such a way as to trip them up when they tried to run out of their brushes with the law grew such popular songs as "Brady, He's Dead and Gone and Looking for the Bully."

The recovery of an unknown or previously unidentified Negro ballad is an event of significance considering the slim number of these songs which have survived. Unfortunately, heretofore Bob McKinney has been casually dismissed as merely a variation of Duncan and Brady or of Stackolee. All have much in common, but each tells a separate and distinct story.

A chief requirement of the narrative ballad is that it be brief.

Bob McKinney is so brief as, on first hearing, to appear incomplete. However the entire story is here, either stated directly or implicit in the four tersely described scenes as Bob McKinney (1) swaggered down Johnson Street (2) builds Margaret (3) Shoots Ben Ferris, and (4) has a final encounter with the High Sheriff. Nothing more need be said. The outcome is left to the imagination and Henry Thomas drifts into a potpourri of blues and songs favored by the wandering people which congregated in St. Louis.

HONEY, WON'T YOU ALLOW ME ONE MORE CHANCE?

I went home last night. The moon was shining bright.
Drinking, feeling dizzy about my head.
Well, I rapped on the door. I heard my baby roar.
"Honey, I'm gone to bed."
"Get up and let me in."
"Oh, what was that you said? You know you haven't treated me right.
I've paid all this rent, you haven't got a cent.
You'll have to hunt a new home tonight."
Honey, allow me one more chance. I always will treat you right.
Honey, won't you allow me one more chance? I won't stay out all night.
Honey, won't you allow me one more chance, I'll take you to the ball in France.
One kind favor I ask of you, just allow me just one more chance.
Well dandy spending left me here, I set down beside of her bed.
Says, honey dear, you have some beer? She shook her head and said:
"I wonder, wonder, your business could be bigger.
You know you haven't treated me right.
I paid all this rent. You haven't got a cent.
You'll have to hunt a new home tonight."
Honey, allow me one more chance. I always will treat you right.
Honey, won't you allow me one more chance? I won't stay out all night.
Honey, won't you allow me one more chance, I'll take you to the ball in France.
Just one kind favor I ask of you, just allow me just one more chance.
Well, honey, allow me one more chance. I always will treat you right.
Honey, won't you allow me one more chance? I won't stay out all night.
Honey, won't you allow me one more chance, I'll take you to the ball in France.
Here's the one kind favor I ask of you, just allow me just one more chance.
Just stay and prove.
I don't know. Keep on chances to be.
Don't let me bawl, I got no dough.
Crying at your door.
Well it tain't no use you crying, now.
I've got the chance that you ever had.
I ain't got one, I don't know, just allow me just one more chance.

Reel. In the early 1920s a lady in Marin, Texas was in the habit of passing out her husband's old shoes and hats to local Negroes in exchange for their teaching her songs, which she then wrote out and sent along to a lady named Dorothy Scarborough who had asked help in putting together a book. The volume On The Trail of
Run, Mollie, run (3)
Let us have some fun.

Liza was a gambler, learned me how to steal
Learned me how to deal those cards, "Hold that jack and trey,"

Run, Mollie, run (3)

Let us have some fun.

Music in the kitchen, music in the hall.
If you can't come Saturday night you need not come at all

Run, Mollie, run (3)
Let us have some fun.

Whoo Liza, poor girl, Whoo Liza Jane.
Whoo Liza, poor girl, died on the train.
Miss Liza was a gambler, she learned me how to steal.
She learned me how to deal those cards, "Hold that jack and trey."

Run, Mollie, run (3)
Let us have some fun.

I went down to Huntsville, I did not go to stay,
Just got there in the good old time to wear the ball and chain.

Cheery, Cheery
Cheery like a rose.
I love that pretty yellow gal,
God Almighty knows.
Run, Mollie, run (3)
Let us have some fun.

Whoo Liza, Whoo Liza Jane,
Whoo Liza, poor girl, died on the train.
I went down to Huntsville, did not go to stay.
Just got there in the good old time to wear the ball and chain.

Run, Mollie, run (3)
Let us have some fun.

Miss Liza was a gambler, she learned me how to steal.
She learned me how to deal those cards, "Hold that jack and trey."

Run, Mollie, run (3)
Let us have some fun.

She went down to the bottom field, did not go to stay
She just got there in the good old time to wear that rollin' ball

Run, Mollie, run
Run, Mollie, run (2)
Let us have some fun.

A dealer who holds out a jack and three seriously reduces his opponent's chances of laying down a sequence in Coon Can or similar games.

Composite. This selection has already been touched upon in the description of "rays" where one of the songs alluded to was quoted in part. The breadth of the tradition represented in these composites can best be illustrated by a few parallel verses from different parts of the country.

Run, Mollie, run (3)

The Cod’s on my track, man’s on his horse.
Make it to my shanty if I can.

If I can, I will
Make it to my shanty if I can.

Dog’s on my track, man’s on his horse.
Make it to my shanty if I can.

If I can, I will
I will make it to my shanty if I can.

Yes, I shot my dice, I pawned all of my clothes.
I’ll make it to my shanty if I can.

When I got to go round, Lord, I got to go
I’ll make it to my shanty if I can.

Lord, I can, I can
I will make it to my shanty if I can.

Oh, Lordy, Lordy, crying at your door
I’ll make it to my shanty if I can.

Well, I went up on the hill, I gave my horn a blow.
I’ll make it to my shanty if I can.

The Nation is another reference to the Indian Territory, the Choctaw Nation was directly north of the Red River, about 80 miles from Henry Thomas' home.

Blues. Dorothy Scarborough has published a verse from Mississippi that fits here:

De chickens in my sack, de bloodhounds on my track
Going to make it to my shanty if I can

However the essential background of this curious blues seems to belong to the imagery of spirituals such as Lord, Until I Reach My Home which contains phrases such as "When I was hungry at hell's dark door" paralleling the opening line here. This is the only recording on which Henry Thomas uses the knife-style of guitar.
WOODHOUSE BLUES

Oh daddy, daddy, ahh you done me wrong.
Well, it aint no use your singing "got the hollow log"
I got the Woodhouse Blues.
I've got the Woodhouse Blues, just as blue as I can be.
I'm blue-in all the time.
Well, it aint no use a-singing "got the hollow log"
I got the Woodhouse Blues.
I'm going down South start lovin' bad, I'm going out in the world.
Well, it aint no use your talking about a hollow log.
I got the Woodhouse Blues.
I got the Woodhouse Blues, just as blue as I can be.
I'm blue-in all the time.
Well, believe you got to riding, I don't know
I got the Woodhouse Blues.
When you see me talking about your flattering mind
I don't hear me crying now,
Don't leave has got you low down.
I got the Woodhouse Blues.
I've got the Woodhouse Blues, just as blue as I can be.
I'm blue-in all the time.
No use your talking about the every mail.
I got the Woodhouse Blues.
I work my axe, work my maul, I'm working it all the time.
When daddy goes to town then I'm going home
T'aint no use you're gonna call my coin (?)
A wait a little while, I don't know
I got the Woodhouse Blues.
I got the Woodhouse Blues.
I'm blue-in all the time.
No use you call me, no fair to my dream.
I do my work and I do my stuff.
It aint no use you're gonna ride with me, daddy,
Daddy, I got the Woodhouse Blues.
Keep on riding with the train.
Train, you're late.
Don't you call your race, when the race come riding by?
Well, it aint no use crying now
I got the Woodhouse Blues.
I got the Woodhouse Blues, blue as I can be.
I'm blue-in all the time.
No use you crying, loving daddy
I got the Woodhouse Blues.

Blues. The declamatory singing of this piece suggests the style of the theatrical blues singers and the selection may in fact be derived from by one of those performers. The recurrent "blue-in" (if that is a correct transcription) is probably a play-on words, the basis being "I'm hewing all the time" in keeping with the metaphor here.

JONAH IN THE WILDERNESS

chorus: Hey, Jonah, Hallelujah!
Hey, Jonah, preaching in that wilderness
Preaching in that wilderness, preaching in that wilderness

Go down yonder to the bottom of the ship
See can you find the............Christian
Go yonder to the bottom now
See can you find the............Christian
Sure to come after, so say the Lord
Could not find the............Christian
Go yonder to the elder I saw
See can you find the............Christian
Sure to come after, so say the Lord
Could not find the............Christian

chorus

Lord told Jonah, said to go and preach
Jonah declared that he would not go
Hid himself in the bottom of the ship
Search that ship from bottom to top
Had Brother Jonah sent overboard
Cast the bird and dropped the seed
Dropped the seed, along came the root
From the root is that strong vine
The vine is that strong shade
Under that shade brother Jonah laid
Walked right up to the Mansion room
Entitled to the throne that Jonah sat on
When I get to heaven, I will sit and tell
I've escaped both death and hell
Chorus
Ship rocked from shore to shore
Ship rocked from shore to shore
God declared that the ship went wrong
Jonah started leaving there one night
Chorus
God told Noah to build an Ark
God told Noah to build an Ark
Declared to God that he would not build
Rained forty days and forty nights
Chorus
Narrative Gospel Song. An essential prerequisite to following this difficult song is an acquaintance with the book of Jonah and recognition that in a folk religion Christian symbols mix readily with stories of Old Testament prophets. Thus, the reluctant prophet Jonah may also be described as an unfaithful or backsliding Christian.

The first stanza concerns the efforts of the seamen to search the ship for the cause of the tempest that had come upon them (see Jonah 1:4-7) Jonah is found, and tells the seamen that he "fled from the presence of the Lord," urging that they cast him overboard. Henry Thomas, consistent with his principal of avoiding the obvious, skips the most familiar part of the story where a "great fish" swallows Jonah and three days later vomits him out on dry land.

The song then leaps to the book's final chapter and the episode of the gourd vine growing over Jonah's head to afford him shade. In the popular belief that surrounds the Biblical story the role of the gourd vine is entirely different. In the Bible, the vine provides the example for a parable about mercy, but in oral tradition it comes along to form a cross over Jonah's head. Hear, for example, Rich Ameron's narrative (on Folkways FE 4419):

Well the water whale come along swallowed him whole!
Reeling and a-rocking of the ship so long!
Then he poked Brother Jonah on dry land!
Reeling and a-rocking of the ship so long!
Then the gourd vine growed over Jonah's head!
Reeling and a-rocking of the ship so long!
Then the inch worm come along - cut it down!
Reeling and a-rocking of the ship so long!
That made a cross over Jonah's head!
Reeling and a-rocking of the ship so long!
spoken: Then Jonah got up and - then he went to preaching

Other versions of the story and other interpretations of these parables are scattered through many recordings such as those by Louis Armstrong, Uncle Dave Macon, Rev. J. C. Burnett & Congregation, Marshall Smith & John Marlor, Norfolk Jubilee Quartet and Rev. F. W. McGee (this last available on Roots 304). The chorus of Henry Thomas' version is from the well-circulated Preaching in the Wilderness which typically strings together narrative verses dealing with various prophets who failed to heed the Lord's instructions. Somewhat unjustly, Noah is often included among the reluctant ones, as is the case here.

**WHEN THE TRAIN COMES ALONG**

When the train come along (2)
I'll meet you at the station when the train come along.
I may be blind, I cannot see
I'll meet you at the station when the train come along.
The train come along, the train come along.
I'll meet you at the station when the train come along.
I marched on the shore, I cannot see
I will meet you at the station when the train come along.
When the train come along, the train come along.
I'll meet you at the station when the train come along.

I'm going to the Son and thank him in my heart
I'll meet you at the station when the train come along
When the train come along, the train come along
I will meet you at the station when the train come along
I may be blind, I cannot see
I will meet you at the station when the train come along
The train come along, the train come along
I will meet you at the station when that train come along
When my mother wanted me, I prayed for religion
I'll meet you at the station when the train come along.
Well, the train come along, well, the train come along
I will meet you at the station when the train come along.
I may be blind, I cannot see
I'll meet you at the station when the train come along.
The train come along, the train come along
I'll meet you at the station when the train come along.
I'm praying in my heart, I'm crying out my eyes.
Jesus died for my sins.
I will meet you at the station, I will meet you in the morn.
I will meet you at the station when the train come along.
When the train come along, the train come along
I will meet you at the station when the train come along.
I may be blind, I cannot see
I'll meet you at the station when the train come along.
The train come along, the train come along
I'm praying in my heart, I'm praying for my soul.
I will meet you at the station when the train come along.
The train come along, the train come along
I will meet you at the station when the train come along.
Gospel. Other versions of this song are those by Odette and Ethel, The Norfolk Jubilee Quartet, and the 1934 recording by Uncle Dave Macon (available on RBF 51). It also appears in John Work's American Negro Songs and Spirituals (New York, 1940).

**BULL DOZE BLUES**

I'm going away, babe, and it won't be long.
I'm going away and it won't be long. (2)
Just as sure as that train leaves out of that Mobile yard. (3)
Come shake your hand, tell your papa goodbye. (3)
I'm going back to Tennessee.
I'm going back to Memphis, Tennessee.
I'm going back, Memphis, Tennessee.
I'm going where I never get bulldozed.
I'm going where I never get bulldozed.
I'm going where I never get bulldozed.
If you don't believe I'm sinking, look what a hole I'm in. (2)
If you don't believe I'm sinking, look what a fool I've been.
Oh, my baby, take me back.
How in the world, Lord, take me back.

Blues. The entry in the Oxford English Dictionary for the word "bull-doze" is illuminating: "1876 American Newspaper, If a negro is invited to join it (a society called 'The Stop'), and refuses, he is taken to the woods and whipped. This whipping is called a 'bull-doz', or doze fit for a bull. The application of the bull-doz was for the purpose of making Tilden voters; hence we hear of the 'bull-dozed' parishes. 1880 C. B. Berry Other Side 155 They...pull him out of bed with a revolver to his head...that's called 'bull dosing' a man. 1881 Sat. Rev. 9 July 40/2 'A bull-dose' means a large efficient dose of any sort of medicine or punishment. Ibid. To 'bull-doze' a negro in the Southern States means to hogn him to death, or nearly to death."

**DON'T EASE ME IN**

Don't ease, don't you ease.
Ah, don't you ease me in.
It's all night, Cunningham, don't ease me in.
Sometimes I walk, sometimes I talk
I never get drunk, thank God, till my bluebirds talk.
Don't ease, don't you ease.
Don't you ease me in.
It's all night long, Cunningham, don't ease me in.
I beat my girl with a singletree.
She hesit up the window, sweet mama hollered "watch over me."

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Don't ease, don't you ease.
Ah, don't you ease me in.
It's all night long, Cunningham, don't ease me in.
I've got a girl, she's little and short,
She leave here walking, loving' babe, talking true love talk.
Don't ease, don't you ease.
Ah, don't you ease me in.
It's all night long, Cunningham, don't ease me in.
I was standing on the corner, talking to my brown
I turned around, sweet mama, I was workhouse bound.
Don't ease, don't you ease.
Ah, don't you ease me in.
It's all night long, Cunningham, don’t ease me in.
Says, I've got a girl, and she working hard.
Says, the dress she's wearing, sweet mama, says, it's pink and blue.
She brings me coffee, and she brings me tea
She brings me everything 'cept the jailhouse key.
Don't ease, don't you ease.
Ah, don't you ease me in.
It's all night long, Cunningham don’t ease me in.
Got these Texas Blues, I got the Texas Blues.
It's all night long, Cunningham don't leave me here.
Says I looked down Main, Old Ellum too.¹
Says all the women coming down Main had them Texas Blues.

¹Ellum was Elm Street in Dallas and specifically the "Deep Ellum" section of that street.

Blues. The parents of this song can still be heard in the flat fields along the Brazos River where the farms of the state prison system lie. Some of them crowded now by the sprawling edge of Houston suburbs. Young convicts turn out to work the fields by hand labor methods that exist practically no where else and to learn the redundant song phrases "Don't ease me in" and "All night long" with the multiple meanings that gave them special significance in prisons where women never came and where the lights in the dormitories were never turned out. Curiously they sing also about a man they know nothing about. A century ago a businessman named Cunningham leased convicts from the state prison to work the sugar cane fields along the Brazos. His name became immutably fixed in the prison song tradition, surviving in songs through generations of convict song leaders, and even cropping up on recorded blues derived from the prison tradition. Aside from this instance provided by Henry Thomas there is Smokey Hogg’s 1952 Penitentiary Blues with its dialogue between mother and convict son:

My mama called me —
I answered "Ma'am"
"You tired of rolling —
For Cunningham?"

TEXAS EASY STREET BLUES

Ahhhh, what's the matter now?
Tell me, mama, what's the matter now?
I'm going back to Texas, sit on easy street.
When you see me coming don't call my name.
Well, when you see me coming don't call my name.
I'm going back to Texas, sit on easy street.
Ohhh, what's the matter now?
Spoken: Ain't nothing the matter
Please tell me, what's the matter now?
Spoken: Tell you, wasn't nothing the matter
I'm going back to Texas, sit on easy street.
Ohhh, what's the matter now?
Tell me mama, what's the matter now?
I'm going back to Texas, sit on easy street.
When you see me coming, heist your window high (2)
Well I'm going back to Texas, sit on easy street.
Ohhh, what's the matter now?
Please tell me, what's the matter now?
I'm going back to Texas, sit on easy street.
Got the Texas Blues, blue as I can be (2)
I'm going back to Texas, sit on easy street.
Oh, what's the matter now?
Tell me mama, what's the matter now?
Get a black mule, baby, kicking in my stall.
Oh, what's the matter now?
I'm going back to Texas, sit on easy street.

When you see me running, something going on wrong. (2)
I'm going back to Texas, sit on easy street.

Blues. This selection played an important role in tracing Henry Thomas. Whenever it was played for older Negroes they consistently identified the accent heard in the spoken passages (apparently somewhat exaggerated) with the speech in certain areas of East Texas and the northwestern corner of Louisiana. It was in these twenty or so counties and parishes that recollections of him turned up with slightly greater frequency and somewhat more substance, prompting repeated visits to the area which then narrowed the search to the area along the I. & P. and eventually to Upshur County.

TEXAS WORRIED BLUES

The worried blues, God, I'm feeling bad.
I've got the worried blues, God, I'm feeling bad (2)
I got no one tell my troubles to. (3)
You can box me up and send me to my ma. (3)
If my ma don't want me, send me to my pa. (3)
If my pa don't want me, send me to my girl. (3)
If my girl don't want me, cast me in the sea. (3)
So the fish and the whales make a fuss all over me.
I'm gonna build me a heaven of my own. (3)
I'm gonna give all good-time women a home. (3)
Get your hat, get your coat, get shaking on down the line. (3)
Now face thee, my honey, face thee. (2)

Blues. The stylistic body stance is one of the mainstays of the blues. It was heard from a black entertainer working in Greenville, South Carolina in 1969. It appears on various records such as the 1930 Squabblin' Blues by Blind Boy Fuller in 1930. A Mississippi version was printed in the Journal of American Folklore in 1931.

I live in Arkansas,
Despise my body to my mother-in-law.
"If my mother refuse me, ship it to my pa"
"If my papa refuse me, ship it to my girl"
"If my girl refuse me, shove me into the sea, Where de fishes an' de whales make a fuss over me."

FISHING BLUES

Went up on the hill about 12 o'clock.
Reach right back and got me a pole.
Went to the hardware, got me a hook.
Thread that line right on that hook.
Yeah, you been fishing all the time.
I'm going fishing too.
I bet your life, your loving wife,
Catch more fish than you.
Any fish you, you got good bait.
Here's a little something I would like to relate.
Any fish you, you got good bait.
I'm going fishing, yes, I'm going fishing.
I'm going fishing too.
Locked down the river about 1 o'clock.
Spied a catfish swimming around.
I got so hungry, didn't know what to do.
I'M GONNA GET ME A CATFISH TOO.
Yeah, you been fishing all the time.
I'm going fishing too.
I bet your life, your loving wife,
Catch more fish than you.
Any fish you, you got good bait.
Here's a little something I would like to relate.
Any fish you, you got good bait.
I'm going fishing, yes, I'm going fishing.
I'm going fishing too.
Put on the skillet, nevermind your lid.
Mama gonna cook 'em with the shortening bread.
Yeah, you been fishing all the time.
I'm going fishing too.
I bet your life, your loving wife.
Catch more fish than you.
Any fish you, you got good bait.
Here's a little something I would like to relate.
Any fish you, you got good bait.
I'm going fishing, yes, I'm going fishing.
I'm going fishing too.

Reel. This is pure mimesis, the show material of an antecedent of was probably such songs as Lumbo Chaff popularized by companies in the early 1830s. The same song has been seen and given a bowdlerized flavor by other musicians. See a fragment of a local songster in Galesville, Texas published in Sociology, East Texas and the northwestern corner of Louisiana. It was in these twenty or so counties and parishes that recollections of him turned up with slightly greater frequency and somewhat more substance, prompting repeated visits to the area which then narrowed the search to the area along the I. & P. and eventually to Upshur County.

OLD COUNTRY STOMP

Get your partner, promenade.
PROMENADE ALL AROUND, NOW.
Hop on, you started wrong.
Take your partner, come on the train.
I'm going away, I'm going away (2)
I'm going back to Baltimore.
Fare you well, fare you well (2)
Mistreated, mistreated Tom.
Mistreated since I been gone.
Goodbye boys, fare you well (2)
I'm going back to Baltimore.
That's alright, call it gone (2)
Now come, boys, and go with me.

Reel. This is one of the two selections which were included in the Anthology of American Folk Music in 1952, with a note Smith which can be appropriately repeated here: "Is there anything more perfect than a square dance? This became the most popular among the dances. It is the only dance that can be danced with the same grace, with the same spirit, and in the same style."

CHARMIN BETSY

I'm going around the mountain, Charmin Betsy.
I'm going around the mountain, too-ah-lee.
If I never see you no more.
Do, Lord, remember me.
First time I see Charmin Betsy.
She want everything that she seen.
Last time I see Charmin Betsy.
She's wearin' that ball and chain.
Yes, I'm going around the mountain, Charmin Betsy.
I'm going around the mountain, too-ah-lee.
If I never see you no more.
Do, Lord, remember me.
I'm going around the mountain, Charmin Betsy.
I'm going around the mountain, too-ah-lee.
If I never see you no more.
Do, Lord, remember me.
I'm going around the mountain, Charmin Betsy.
I'm going around the mountain, too-ah-lee.
If I never see you no more.
Do, Lord, remember me.
Yellow gal rides in an automobile.
Brown skin do the same.
Black gal rides in an old air ship.
But she's riding just the same.
Yes I'm going around the mountain, Charming Betsy.
I'm going around the mountain, too-ra-lee
If I never see you no more
Do, Lord, remember me.

Reel. An insight into the extent of shared black-white song material can be gained by comparing the rather numerous examples of Charming Betsy. There are versions by Fiddling John Carson, The Georgia Organ Grinders, and the one by Land Norris – a white banjoist from Dalton, Georgia who recorded the song in 1925 – now available on County 515. These can be set alongside Henry Thomas’ version, or the 1932 recording by Jim Jackson, or that by Gus Cannon quoted by Paul Oliver in Conversation With The Blues (London, 1965).

In his version, Henry Thomas quotes the “Huntsville” verse that occurs earlier in Run Mollie Run and inverts the usual irony of the yellow-brown-black gal verses. It is usually the light skinned women who rides in the fine vehicle while the black gal has to make do with a buggy or old mule but “She’s getting there just the same.” As he has it, it’s the black woman who rides — 1929 being the peak of dirigible travel — the stylish air ship.

LOVIN' BABE

Oh, Lovin' Babe I'm all out and down.
Lovin' Babe I'm all out and down. (2)
I'm laying close to the ground.
Look where the evening sun is gone.
Look where the evening sun's gone.
Look where that evening sun done gone.
Gone, God knows where.
It's longest day, darling, ever I seen,
Yes, the longest day, honey, ever I've seen.
Well, the longest day, honey, ever I seen
The day Roberta died.
Just make me one pallet on your floor. (2)
Ah, make me a pallet on your floor.
Oh, make it so your husband never know.
That east-bound train come and gone.
That east-bound train come and gone. (2)
Going to come no more.
Got the blues, darling, feeling bad.
Yeah, I got the worried blues feeling bad.
I got the blues I'm feeling bad.
Feeling bad, God knows where
— Babe, I'm all out and down.
Ah, Lovin' Babe I'm all out and down.
Lovin' Babe I'm all out and down.
I'm laying to the ground.
St. Louis "Sun" come and gone.
Lord, east-bound "Sun" come and gone.
Yes, the east-bound "Sun's" come and gone.
Lovin' Babe I'm all out and down.
Roberta baby's gone away.
Yes, Roberta honey's gone away.
Yes, Roberta baby gone away.
She's going to come no more.
Rub me down on your floor.
Yes, rub me down on your floor. (2)
Rub as though your man never know.
Mmmrm what have I done?
Oh, Lovin' Babe what have I done?
Lovin' Babe what have I done?
Honey babe you treating me wrong.
I'm going to come no more.
Yes, I'm going away to come no more.
I'm going away to come no more.
Make me one more on your floor.

1 St Louis "Sun" — a reference to the “Sunshine Special” which ran east from Dallas and then northeast to St. Louis.

Blues. This is one of the classic Texas blues, heard not only from Henry Thomas’ generation (for another example hear Huddie Ledbetter’s 1935 recording Honey, I’m All Out and Down), but also recorded in recent years by youngsters such as Lightnin Hopkins, Leroy Johnson and Hop Wilson.
RAILROADIN' SOME

Monologue. The complete text of this selection is incorporated in the above notes.

DON'T LEAVE ME HERE

Don't leave, don't you leave
Oh, don't you leave me here.
It's all night long, sweet mama, don't leave me here.
I was standing on the corner, a talking to my brown
I looked around, sweet mama, I'm workhouse bound.
Don't leave, don't you leave
Oh, don't you leave me here.
It's all night long, sweet mama, don't leave me —
I'm Alabama bound. I'm Alabama bound.
It's all night long, sweet papa, I'm Alabama bound.
Say, I've got a girl, and she working hard
She brings me coffee, and she bring me tea
She brings me everything except the jailhouse key.
Don't leave, don't you leave
Oh, don't you leave me here.
It's all night long, sweet papa, don't leave me —
I'm going away, and it won't be long.
Just as sure as that train leaves out of the yard she's Alabama bound.
Don't leave, don't you leave
Oh, don't you leave me here.
It's all night long, sweet papa, don't leave me —
I'm going away, and it won't be long
Just as sure as that train leaves out of the yard she's Alabama bound.

A NOTE ON METHOD

Coins or postage stamps which were originally manufactured by the thousands and which still exist in the hundreds are considered rare. Photograph records — fragile and seldom preserved with care — have to be measured on a much finer scale. There are many cases where only a single copy of a record is known, and there are heartbreaking instances where not even one is known to have survived.

The original records used in the album are the best copies extant. Most of them are in excellent condition. Some which judged fine at the sides were cut so small in condition size as to be of no use for this album. The records were gathered over a period of 16 years by Richard M. Harry.

The end product of these efforts, as demonstrated by this album itself, is not to be taken lightly but rather as a meaningful contribution to the musical heritage.

The transcription of the songs provided here is the result of a collaborative process. While looking through the staggering job of preserving the oral traditions of these people, I was aware of the importance of preserving this part of the musical heritage. The songs were therefore transcribed and stored in a master file at the library.

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Some of the earlier transcriptions were made using a typewriter, while others were made using a typewriter. The transcriptions were then transcribed and stored in a master file at the library.

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