

MUSICAL HERITAGE OF THE AMERICAN PIONEER

A Speech by Dr. John A. Lyons Chairman, Fine Arts,
Mt. Marty College, Yankton, South Dakota * May 8, 1985

[Dr. Jack Lyons taught music at Mount Marty College
for 33 years. >>>Jack & Margaret Lyons receive
Citizens of the Year Award 2010 in Yankton. [Click>](#)

The 1985 Mother Jerome Schmitt Address

{Mother Jerome Schmidt, OSB, served for 29 years as prioress of Sacred Heart Benedictine Monastery and under her leadership the community grew to over 500 members. She founded Mt. Marty College in 1936. In 1980, at the celebration of Mother Jerome as Yankton's Citizen of the Year, keynote speaker, Robert Karolevitz observed: "There is an unusual woman in our midst whose leadership and personal dedication have left a cultural and economic impact on Yankton almost unmatched in the history of the city." Five years later, as Mount Marty College celebrated its 50th anniversary, the Yankton Press & Dakotan congratulated the college in these words: "In terms of academics, athletics and the arts, Mount Marty's impact has been positive and significant. Yankton, without the Mount, would be far less rich as a community in areas that really count." [<NewsEvents Mother Jerome Schmitt, OSB, South Dakota Hall of Famie>](#)
www.yanktonbenedictines.org/NewsEvents_Jerome.html)

It is a pleasure for me to be here tonight as the speaker for this annual event named in honor of a truly remarkable South Dakota woman, Sister Jerome Schmitt.

A pioneer woman wrote in her diary one Wintry day in Dakota's Red River Valley;

“When God made man
He seemed to think it best
To make him in the East
And let him travel West.”

Henry David Thoreau while living in the woods in New England wrote "Eastward I go by force, but Westward I go free." There was also a popular American saying that "If hell lay to the West, Americans would cross heaven to get there." Many of us are here tonight due to the fact that our ancestors, for a multitude of reasons, travelled to the West and became "American Pioneers." During the summer of 1983, I developed a course, with the assistance of a Bush Foundation Grant, entitled "Music of the American Pioneers." Since that time I have criss-crossed the prairie of South Dakota speaking on the topic as a member of the Speaker's Bureau for the South Dakota Committee on the Humanities. In determining a definition of "pioneer music" I decided to study music associated with the Westward expansion which occurred around 1800 and ended with the Great Depression. Prior to the War for Independence (1776) virtually all music was imported from the Old World. As the Westward movement began to take place, after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, a truly American style of music started to evolve with new subjects such as railroads, wagon trains, cowboys and sod shanties.

The music of the pioneer generally falls into the category of folk music. Folk music may be described as expression in melody and rhythm of the racial feelings, characteristics, and interests of people without the benefit of musical training. The melodies and form of folk music are simple and the music is usually but not always passed from generation to generation by oral transmission.

Folk songs relate personal experiences which on a larger scale can be regarded as major historical trends or events. Music was a functional part of pioneers' life. Cowboys, for instance, sang in the saddle, not only to pass the time but to soothe the cattle to reassure them to announce the cowboy's approach and to keep the herd from spooking with the cry of a coyote or the crack of thunder. For homesteaders music was an outlet and diversion - a measure of keeping up their spirits when they were alone and a favorite form of entertainment when they joined their neighbors at a gathering. It was said that the most important possessions of the pioneers were a rifle, a bible a fiddle, and an axe.

Even though I will be talking primarily about pioneer folk music tonight I do not want to leave the impression that folk music was the only kind of music heard or performed during this period. As an example, in 1882 a Mr. L. P. Brockett of San Francisco wrote:

As to musicians and teachers of music, vocal and instrumental, there is no calling in greater demand. Nowhere is the performance of a really excellent brass band more thoroughly appreciated than in any of these western towns. The best opera singers receive a far more enthusiastic reception in the towns and cities of the Western region, than in the great cities of the East. Every church and hall has its choir, and every town of 3,000 has its music association.

ALSO: A gentleman went to Leadville, Colorado, when it was in the formative plastic condition in 1878. There were few even frame buildings ... the majority were living in tents. The nearest accessible railroad station was 130 miles distant and the roads leading to it were horrible. A young woman asked the visitor to go home and dine with her if he could put up with "canned vittles." As she arranged the table in the tent, the visitor was astonished to see a Checkering Grand Piano which was brought piece meal on the backs of pack mules and which had cost nearly \$200 to transport.

Pioneer folk music derives its source from as many parts of the world as the people who settled in the West. It appears, however, that although some of the pioneer music was original, the majority of the music was based on the Old-World folk music traditions of English-Scottish-and Irish immigrants. The probable reason for this is because of the close ties in language, religion and literature with the British Isles. Other ethnic and religious immigrant groups influenced the pioneer music to a lesser degree. An analysis of music of the pioneers shows the development of certain traits generally associated with those who pioneered in the West, namely: rugged individualism, optimism, willingness to waste where there was plenty, quickness to invent where there was nothing, humor, an indifference to or suspicion of the intellect, and tall tales.

One of the problems facing the pioneers who travelled to the West was that they had no idea as to what life would be like in the new found land. Nor were they helped by songs such as "To the West" written by a Scottish author, journalist, and composer C.M. McKay. McKay never left the British Isles but his song reflects the belief that green waving forests as wide as all "England" and ocean sized lakes awaited pioneers just across the Mississippi. Some of McKay's lyrics are:

To the West, To the West to the land of the free,
 Where mighty Missouri rolls down to the seas,
 Where a man is a man if he's willing to toil,
 And the humblest may gather the fruits of the soil.
 Where children are blessings, and he who hath most,
 Has aid for his fortune and riches to boast,
 Where the young may exult and the aged may rest,
 Away far away to the land of the West.

To the West to the West where the rivers that flow,
 Run thousands of miles, spreading out as they go;
 Where the green waving forests shall echo our call,
 As wide as all England, and free to us all.
 Where the Prairies like seas, where the billows have rolled
 Are broad as the kingdoms and empires of old.
 And the lakes are like oceans, in storm or in rest-
 Away far away to the land of the West.

There were many corrective or parodies to songs. The parody to the song "To the West" is no more correct than the original song when it puts alligators in the waters of the rivers.

To the West, to the West, I once went, do you see,
 And one visit, I'm sure was sufficient for me.
 Oh the things that I saw there, they frightened me quite,
 And ever since then sirs, I've scarcely been right.
 My children got sick every day, sirs, almost
 And my wife took the chills, and got deaf as a post.
 Oh there's some may exult, but for me sirs, I'm blest
 If I haven't had as much as I want of the West.

To the West, to the West, where the rivers that flow
 Are full of big alligators, you know;
 Where the snakes in the forest make you feel precious queer,
 And you don't see a bar-room not twice in a year.
 And if 'cross the prairie you happen to go,
 You're sure to be tossed by some wild buffalo;
 Where the lakes are like children-they're never at rest;
 'pon my soul, sirs, I soon had enough of the West.

There are several songs with the theme "seeing the elephant." The phrase "seeing the elephant" was defined well in 1844 in Kendall's Santa Fe Expedition when it was stated that "when a man is disappointed in anything he undertakes, when he has seen enough, when he gets sick and tired of any job he may have set about, he has seen the elephant.

The lyrics from the song that I am now going to quote were written by D. G. Robinson a New England road-show trouper who opened one of San Francisco's first theaters. It expresses the immense disenchantment of one who failed at everything on the way from Marysville to the Southern mines. The tune for the song is borrowed from Dan Emmett's De Boatman Dance. Emmett was an early black-faced minstrel show performer and organizer. Some of the lyrics for "Seeing the Elephant" are:

When I left the States for gold
Everything I had I sold;
A stove and bed, a fat old sow,
Sixteen chickens and a cow.

On the Platte we couldn't agree,
Because I had the di-a-ree,
We were split up, I made a break,
With one old mule for the Great Salt Lake

The Mormon girls were fat as hogs,
The chief production cats and dogs;
Some had ten wives, other none,
Thirty-six had Brigham Young

Being brave, I cut and carved,
On the desert nearly starved;
My old mule laid down and died,
I had no blanket, took his hide.

On I traveled through the pines,
At last I found the Northern mines;
I stole a dog, got whipt like hell,
Then I went to Marysville.

After several more verses of trials and tribulations he states;

When the elephant I had seen,
 I'm dammed if I thought I was green;
 And others say both night and morn
 They saw him coming round the Horn.

If I should make another raise,
 In New York sure I'll spend my days;
 I'll be a merchant, buy a saw,
 So good-bye, mines and Panama.

The reference in the lyrics about coming around the Horn refers to the route taken by many of those journeying to the Far West. The first Yankee visitors to the far West came around Cape Horn in General Washington's ship The Columbia. This sea route remained the most fashionable route until the completion of the transcontinental railroad.

A prolific composer of the gold rush era in California in the 1850's was John Stone. One of Stone's more famous songs, and perhaps the best known song of the Westward movement, is "Sweet Betsey From Pike." The song talks about travel along the Oregon trail, which partially ran along the Platte River. The song talks about those hardy pioneers Long Ike and Pike County Rose.

Oh don't you remember sweet Betsey from Pike,
 Who crossed the big mountains with her lover Ike,
 With two yoke of cattle, a large yellow dog,
 A tall shanghai rooster and one spotted hog.

One evening quite early they camped on the Platte,
 'Twas near by the road on a green shady flat,
 Where Betsey, sore-footed, lay down to repose -

With wonder Ike gazed on that Pike Count Rose.
The shanghai ran off, and their cattle all died.
That morning the last piece of bacon was fried;
Poor Ike was discouraged, and Betsey got mad,
The dog dropped his tail and looked wondrously sad.

Long Ike and sweet Betsey attended a dance;
Ike wore a pair of his Pike County pants;
Sweet Betsey was covered with ribbons and rings;
Says Ike, "You're an angel, but where are your wings?"

A miner said, "Betsey, will you dance with me?"
"I will that, old hoss, if you don't make too free;
But don't dance me hard; do you want to know why?
Dog on you. I'm chock full of strong alkali."

This Pike County couple got married of course,
And Ike became jealous-obtained a divorce;
Sweet Betsey, well satisfied, said with a shout,
"Good bye, you big lummoX, I'm glad you've backed out."

Homesteaders to the treeless prairie regions of the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, and the Oklahoma panhandle had one common problem - how to build a house when there was virtually no wood or stone available. The axe that built the Eastern frontiersman's log cabin was useless here. On many a prairie claim there was not a tree in sight, only waist-high bluestem or buffalo grass extending to the horizon in every direction. The settler put his ingenuity to the test and developed the sod house, taking advantage of the tough matted roots of the natural grasses that covered the landscape.

He hitched his horses or oxen to a special plow that turned over long strips of sod about a foot wide and four or five inches thick. Using a spade or axe, he chopped these into lengths he could handle and carefully piled them like bricks but without mortar, to form the walls of his new dwelling, walls that often were nearly three feet thick. The song "Dakota Land", is a classic among "Sodbuster" songs. It has been localized in half the states from the Mississippi to the Pacific coast. The song served the first settler to relieve his soul concerning the hardships of subjecting virgin lands to the plow. Its melody is found in numerous other songs: "Beulah Land," "Maryland My Maryland", and "Tannebaum. " The song goes like this:

I have reached the land of drought and heat,
Where nothing grows for a man to eat;
The wind that blows this awful heat,
In all this world is hard to beat.

CHORUS:

O Dakota land, sweet Dakota land,
As on the burning soil I stand,
And look away across the plains
And wonder why it doesn't rain,

Till Gabriel blows the trumpet sound,
And sad the rain has gone around.

The farmer goes out in his corn,
And there he stands and looks forlorn;
He stands and looks and is most shocked
To see the corn has missed the stock.

We have no wheat, we have no oats,
 We have no corn to feed our shoats;
 Our chickens are too poor to eat,
 Our hogs go squealing down the street.
 Our fuel is of the cheapest kind,
 Our women are all of one mind;
 With bag in hand and upturned nose,
 They pick the chips of buffaloes.

Our horses are of broncho race,
 Starvation stares them in the face;
 We do not live, we only stay,
 We are too poor to get away.

The words for the song "Great Grand-dad" were written by a California journalist Lowell Otus Reese who published the words in the Saturday Evening Post in February, 1925. Eventually, the owner of a dude ranch, Romaine Lowdermilk put music to the words and the song was passed along in the oral tradition until it was finally published in a folio entitled "The Lonesome Cowboy." Aaron Copland used the music for Great Grand-dad in the opening scene of the ballet "Billy the Kid." Here are the lyrics:

Great-grand-dad, when the land was young,
 Barred his door with a wagon tongue;
 For times was tough, and the redskins mocked,
 And he said his prayers with his shotgun cocked.

Great-grand-dad was a lusty man,
 Cooked his grub in a frying pan,
 Picked his teeth with his hunting knife,
 And wore the same suit all his life.

Twenty-one children came to bless
The old man's home in the wilderness.
Doubt this statement if you can
That great-grand-dad was a busy man.

Twenty-one boys and not one bad.
They never got fresh with their great-grand-dad!
If they had, he'd been right glad
To tan their hides with a hickory gad.

He raised them rough, but he raised them strong.
When their feet took hold on the road to wrong,
He straightened them out with the old ramrod
And filled them full of the fear of God.

They grew strong in heart and hand,
A firm foundation of our land.
They made the best citizens we ever had.
We need more men like great-grand-dad.

Grand-dad died at eighty-nine;
Twenty-one boys he left behind.
Times have changed, but you never can tell;
You might yet do half as well.

Miners and adventurers poured into the Black Hills region after the announcement that Custer's troops had discovered gold there. For the most part the only harvest was the suffering and exploitation described in the following song, "The Dreary Black Hills" composed by Dick Brown in 1876. The blend of irony, social criticism and humor found in this song are typical of many frontier songs.

Kind folks, you will pity my horrible tale;
 I'm an object that's needy and looking quite stale;
 I gave up my trade, selling Wright's Patent Pills,
 To go digging for gold in the dreary Black Hills.

CHORUS:

O don't go away, stay home if you can,
 Far away from that city, they call it Cheyenne,
 For old Sitting Bull and Comanche Bill
 Will raise up your hair in the dreary Black Hills.

In Cheyenne the Round House is filled up every night
 With Pilgrims of every description in sight.
 No clothes on their backs, in their pockets no bills,
 And yet they are striking out for the Black Hills.

When I came to the Black Hills, no gold could I find;
 I thought of the free lunch I left far behind;
 Through rain, hail and sleet, nearly froze to the gills -
 They call me the orphan boy of the Black Hills.

Oh, I wish that the man who first started this sell
 Was captive and Crazy Horse had him in - well, f
 There is no use in grieving, or swearing like pitch,
 But the man who would stay here is a son of a bitch.

So now to conclude, this advice I'll unfold;
 Don't come to the Black Hills a-looking for gold,
 For Big Wallapie and Comanche Bill
 Are scouting, I'm told, in the dreary Black Hills.



Black Hills of South Dakota

Another example of problems encountered by miners is indicated in the song "Somebody's Boy We Know", published in 1909 by the S. R. Smith Music Company in Lead, S. D. The song dedicated to Homestake Mine Veteran says in part:

Way out among the tall western pines,
Down in the perilous mines,
Men brave and bold are digging for gold,
Nor counting their lot in hard lines.

Just toiling on for mother and home,
A dear wife and babes of their own,
A flash, then a dash, with a terrible crash.
Some brave boy's labor is done.

He may not be your boy, we know,
He may not be my boy, oh no,
Who mangled and torn, to the surface is borne,
But he's Somebody's Boy we know.

Songs of the cowboys have always had a universal appeal. In general, cowboys sang. They sometimes sang for the pure joy of singing and sometimes for the pleasure of the cattle. They sang of cows and life in the cow country, of round ups, stampedes, prairie dogs, rattlesnakes, bad men, Indian fights, and Tom Sherman's saloon in Dodge City, the cowboy capital. They sang of mothers, and home and sweethearts.

A peculiar form of cowboy song for quieting cattle is the yodel, most famous of which is called "The Texas Lullaby."

A cowboy who knows his business will always approach cattle at night with a call or song. The original use of the cowboy song was to soothe and steady cattle. For this the note of plaintiveness is most effective. But other causes have given to most cowboy songs and ballads a tune of sadness, even dreariness. The cowboy was, and is, sentimental. He led a solitary life. He had time for many memories. The memories were frequently tinged with sadness.

Many cowboy ballads, like many of the old English and Scotch ballads tell of tragedies. One of the best-known cowboy tragic ballads is called "When Work Is Done This Fall." The ballad begins thus:

A group of jolly cowboys
Were discussing plans one day.

Then, as the tale runs, one of them began to tell of the home and mother he was soon going back to:

When the roundup is over,
And the shipment's done this fall,
I'm going home, boys,
Just to see them all.

That night this cowboy stood guard.

It was an awful dark night, boys,
And storming very hard.

In the darkness of the storm the herd stampeded and the cowboy's horse fell, fatally crushing the rider. After the run was checked the cowboys found their dying companion, and as they gathered around him, he resumed the theme of home and mother. These final words express well enough his kindly nature:

Send my wages to my mother,
 All that I have earned,
 For I am afraid, boys,
 My last steer I have turned.
 George, you take my saddle,
 And, Billy, you take my bed,
 And, Fred, you take my pistol
 After that I am dead.

Think of me kindly, boys,
 When you look upon them all,
 For I'll not see my mother
 When the shipment's done this fall.

Themes of death and dying were popular in Victorian literature especially in ballads. Songs were appealing when worked into the tradition of home songs where a wandering youth enumerates the joys of home as death overtakes him. George Allen's "Ocean Burial," first published in 1850, is a prime example of this genre.

For six long verses a youth on ship is dying (homesickness or seasickness) we don't know. He ruminates on home, parents, sisters, and the desire to be buried in the family grave.

After Allen's setting had travelled West an anonymous poet altered the text giving relevance to life on the frontier in the well-known song "The Dying Cowboy." Some of the stanzas are:

"Oh! Bury me not on the lone prairie!"

These words came low and mournfully
From the pallid lips of a youth who lay
On his dying bed at the close of day.

Oh! Bury me not on the lone prairie
Where the wild coyotes will howl o'er me,
Where the rattlesnakes hiss and the crow sports free -
Oh! Bury me not on the lone prairie.

He had wasted and pined till o'er his brow
Death's shadows were gathering thickly now;
And he thought of his home as the end drew nigh _
And the cowboys gathered to see him die.

Oh! Bury me not on the lone prairie
In a narrow grave just six by three,
Where the buzzard waits and the wind blows free -
Oh! Bury me not on the lone prairie.

Cowboy songs have probably extended over a larger area than any other class of folk songs. It is a long way from Brownsville to Butte, but many a cowhand was as familiar with the Bad Lands of South Dakota as with the 'mesquitals' of the Rio Grande. That is why the same songs were sung all up and down the line. They were carried from man to man and from camp to camp by word of mouth, almost never by the printed word. Now they are collected in books and it is a wonder that the versions don't differ more than they do.

The words for a well-known cowboy song "The Railroad Canal" were written by a Yankton native, Joseph Mills Hanson. The scene described so aptly by Hanson recalls the great trail-driving period in the Southwest that began shortly after the Civil War and continued for more than two decades.

The close of the war found the vast cattle-breeding regions of Texas overstocked with the famed Longhorns but short on satisfactory ways of getting the meat crop to market. Old trails to eastern Kansas and Missouri used by drovers prior to 1861 were closing down as the area filled up with farmers. A farsighted twenty-nine-year-old Illinois cattle dealer named Joseph G. McCoy began building corrals at a siding at Abilene, Kansas, on the new Kansas Pacific Railroad.

McCoy advertised widely in Texas. Before his stockyard was completed, mile-long herds of from two to three thousand rangy steers were strung out along the Chisholm Trail from San Antonio Abilene. Abilene at that time consisted of fewer than two dozen log houses and stores plus a six-room hotel. On September 5, 1867, a locomotive's whistle signaled the beginning of an era as the first trainload of live beef, twenty cars long, chugged off McCoy's siding headed for Chicago. Although Abilene prospered from its new business, after five years the neighboring farmers grew tired of having their fences and crops trampled, and the town fathers were fed up with the vice and gunplay attendant on the annual influx of wild cowboys from Texas. Accordingly, in 1872 the trail drivers were advised officially to go elsewhere. Wichita and Ellsworth were quick to take advantage of Abilene's abdication. Later, Dodge City became the greatest and wickedest cow town of them all.

During the 1880's many large herds of young Texas-born stock also were driven North as far as Wyoming and Montana for fattening on the lush pastures there before being shipped to market. This helped Miles City, Montana, earn a reputation as a wild cow town second only to that held by Dodge. By the end of the 1880's the number of Texas trail herds was dwindling rapidly as barbed wire fences and farming homesteaders blocked off the routes and concurrently the railroads began serving West Texas directly.

We are up in the morning ere dawning of day
 And the grub wagon's busy and flap-jacks in play;
 While the herd is astir over hillside and swale
 With the night riders rounding them into the trail.

Come, take up your cinches
 And shake up your reins;
 Come, wake up your broncho
 And break for the plains;
 Come, roust those red steers from the long chaparral,
 For the outfit is off for the railroad corral!

The sun circles upward, the steers as they plod
 Are pounding to powder the hot prairie sod;
 And, it seems, as the dust turns you dizzy and sick,
 That you'll never reach noon and the cool, shady creek.

The afternoon shadows are starting to lean
 When the grub wagon sticks in a marshy ravine;
 And the herd scatters further than vision can look,
 For you bet all true punchers will help out the cook!
 But the longest of days must reach evening at last,
 When the hills are all climbed and the creeks are all passed;
 And the tired herd droops in the yellowing light;
 Let them loaf if they will, for the railroad's in sight! _

So flap up your holster
 And snap up your belt;
 Come, strap up the saddle
 Whose lap you have felt;
 Good-by to the steers and the long chaparral!

There's a town that's a trump by the railroad corral! It has been said that the stanzas for the song "Old Chisholm Trail", which went from San Antonio to Abilene and Dodge, written end-on-end would stretch farther than the trail itself. One person said, "the more whiskey, the more verses!" The Chisholm trail was named after Jesse Chisholm a cattle driver who is responsible for having blazed the trail. A few stanzas of the song are:

Well come along boys boys and listen to my tale,
 I'll tell you 'bout my troubles on the old Chisholm Trail
 Come a ti-yi-yip-pee yip-pee yay,
 Come a ti-yi-yip-pee yip-pee yay,
 I woke up one morning on the old Chisholm Trail,
 Soap in my hand and cowby the tail.
 Oh its bacon and beans 'most every day,
 I'd as soon be a-eatin prairie hay.

Although his poem was never put to music, Badger Clark, a South Dakota poet laureate for about 20 years, described the end of the cowboy era on the prairie in "A Cowboy's Prayer, published in "Sun and Saddle" in 1915.

Oh, Lord, I've never lived where churches grow.
 I love creation better as it stood
 That day You finished it so long ago
 And looked upon Your work and called it good.
 I know that others find You in the light

That's sifted down through tinted window panes,
 And yet I seem to feel You near tonight I
 n this dim, quiet starlight on the plains.

I thank You, Lord, that I am placed so well,
 That You have made my freedom so complete;
 That I'm no slave of whistle, clock or bell,
 Nor weak-eyed prisoner of wall and street.
 Just let me live my life as I've begun
 And give me work that's open to the sky;
 Make me a pardner of the wind and sun,
 And I won't ask a life that's soft or high.

Let me be easy on the man that's down;
 Let me be square and generous with all.
 I'm careless sometimes, Lord, when I'm in town,
 But never let 'em~ say I'm mean or small!
 Make me as big and open as the plains,
 As honest as the hase between my knees,
 Clean as the wind that blows behind the rains,
 Free as the hawk that circles down the breeze!

Forgive me, Lord, if sometimes I forget.
 You know about the reasons that are hid.
 You understand that gall and fret;
 You know me better than my mother did.
 Just keep an eye on all that's done and said
 And right me, sometimes, when I turn aside,
 And guide me on the long, dim trail ahead
 That stretches upward toward the Great Divide.

I would like to conclude with a song entitled "The Little Old Sod Shanty in the West!"
 The lyrics reflect a backwards lance on the settlement of the West through "rose colored
 glasses." The old settler speaking in the song decides that all of the hardships probably weren't
 as bad as they seemed at the time.

The family of songs sired by "The Little Old Shanty", is as numerous and varied as the folks at a
 Mormon family reunion. There are vine-clad cottages, little adobe casas, log cabins and dugouts.
 There are answers to "The Little Old Shanty" and answers to answers.

It appears that the song was written in 1871 for W. S. Hays. It was imitated in 1879 by the poet-scout Jack Crawford in a song written and localized in Custer, SD. Within five years, new songs were appearing in a score of mid-western newspaper. This version was published in the Dakota's Farmer (Aberdeen) in 1909.

You may sing about the little old log cabin in the lane
Or or little German homes across the sea,
But my little old sod shanty that I built upon my claim
Has become the dearest spot on earth to me.
I built it in my poverty upon my prairie claim,
And after toil it gave me sweetest rest;
Safely sheltered from the blizzards and all the storms that came
In my little old sod shanty in the West.

CHORUS:

It makes a pleasant memory that I shall not forget,
Of all our western homes it suits me best,
And often now I wish that I were living in it yet,
In my little old sod shanty in the West.

We had hungry wolves and coyotes for our nearest neighbors then,
The buffalo and deer supplied our meat;
And where the black and prowling bear would fall before our men,
We would live like kings upon the game so sweet.

The only town we knew for miles, by prairie dogs was made.
They yelped and sported 'round our little nest,
And sometimes they took a tumble before the rifle's raid,
And such we thought was sport out in the West.

Our path was full of troubles, nor were they little ones,
For sure the pioneers were single boys.
Then every man's own body guard was two good shooting guns
With ropes and lariats to use as toys.
We sometimes hunted down the thief who stole from us a horse,
A little neck-tie party did the rest;
The morning sun shown grimly as its rays fell on the corpse
Near my little old sod shanty in the West.

The miners built their cabins, the ranchers lived in "shacks,"
And some were forced to make a log stockade,
For then the wildest red skins came like wolves in packs
To drive us from the homes that we had made.
Ah! Those were times that tried men's souls and sifted out the chaff.
Each fight would make the man we called the best,
And some proved weak and left us - it must be more than half;
The others held their shanties in the West.

But all things change; those stirring times have long since passed away,
And churches, schools and cities followed on,
Along the trail we tracked with blood back in that early day,
And others hold the fields that we have won.
But we have saved a little cash, so we will not complain,
Tho' others of our fruits shall reap the best;
But we hope they will remember not to treat us with disdain,
Because we built the shanties in the West.

Where once the cabin graced the gulch or shanties marked the plain,
With signs of wealth the homes and mansions rise.
The wigwam, too, has passed away.
The braves are with the slain,
In happy hunting grounds beyond the skies.
When 'round our winter fires we meet, not made of twisted hay,
We recount the past before we seek our rest.
The stories of our struggles will hush the children's play,
And their dreams will be the shanties in the West.

THE END