

FOLK SONGS OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

GEORGE SWETNAM

PERHAPS there are a few here tonight who have memories long enough to recall that this is not the first program the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania has ever had on folk song. Believe it or not, about 1951 or '52, if I recall correctly, I spoke on the subject of the folk song of this area and brought with me a number of friends, some of whom are here tonight, who were in our folk-singing group. We really brought down the house. It must have been a success, because they have waited twenty years to ask for another talk on the subject.

Folk song is a term you all hear. It's commonly used in parlance. Every popular singer, nowadays nearly every rock singer, is referred to as a folk singer, and the new-style songs are referred to as folk, or folk rock, or, in the trade I guess, they call them "country and western," regardless of where they came from.

I want to talk to you this evening and present some of the genuine folk songs in the technical sense of the word. Properly, a folk song is a song of unknown or obscure origin which has been widely adopted as a part of a popular culture and usually has been considerably changed in oral transmission, either by preference, misunderstanding, a tin ear, faulty memory, or for other reasons. In case anyone may question how such wide changes may come about in tunes or words, or both, I'm asking Vivien Richman to trace how a Scottish border ballad about a young man who was murdered by his sweetheart came along, not rewritten by anybody but gradually changed in passing from person to person until it grew into a playground song familiar, I am sure, to nearly every Pittsburgh child, as to nearly every child in America — at least until the very latest generation when the radio and TV caused parents to stop singing to their children.

Vivien won't sing the whole ballad — just a portion of it to give you the flavor of "Lord Randall."

Where have you been all the day, Randall my son?

Oh where have you been all the day, oh my pretty one?

Dr. Swetnam, a feature writer for the *Pittsburgh Press* and a frequent contributor to the magazine, delivered this talk at the October 1972 meeting of the Society. Vivien Richman and Jo Davidson accompanied him with singing and guitar playing. This article was transcribed from tape recordings made at the meeting.—Editor

I've been to my sweetheart, mother.

I've been to my sweetheart, mother.

And somehow that song found its way into a Scottish nursery as a little song called "My Wee Cruden Doo," or "My Cooing Dove."

*Where have you been all the livelong day, my wee small
cruden doo?*

*I've been to see my grandmama, Mammy come make my bed soon.
And what did your grandmama give you to eat, my wee small
cruden doo?*

She gave to me a wee small fish, Mammy come make my bed soon.

And then the song crossed the ocean, I believe, and came to these shores with some of the early immigrants, and again we find an American version, "My Boy Willie," which Jo Davidson will sing for you.

Where have you been all the day, my boy Willie?

*Where have you been all day, Willie won't you tell me now?
I have been all the day, courting of a lady gay,
But she is too young to be taken from her mother.*

And, of course, you know the ballad, "Billy Boy." Why don't you sing it with us?

Where have you been, Billy Boy, Billy Boy?

Oh, where have you been, charming Billy?

*I have been to seek a wife, she's the darling of my life,
She's a young thing and can not leave her mother.¹*

Of course, if you remember "Billy Boy" as I do, there were about a million verses. Just to let you know how sharp is the ear of a person who has worked in folklore, we were singing this the other night and, just for the fun of it, we sang a number of verses, and I tossed in one that was made up in our family without any explanation.

Can she walk a plank fence, Billy Boy, Billy Boy?

¹ These songs can be found in B. H. Bronson, *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* (Princeton, 1959) on pages 204, 225, 231, 233.

*Can she walk a plank fence, Charming Billy?
She can walk a plank fence, but she's got more sense.
She's a young thing and cannot leave her Mammy.*

Jo immediately said, "That sounds like a Swetnam verse."

Now, we have to limit the scope of what we are talking about this evening, because if we included all these songs that have been sung as folk songs in this area, we would be here for weeks. It would go on and on. There is an immense body of such folk songs here.

One of the things that we have been most neglectful about in this area is any effort to systematize, to organize, and to record the folk songs and folklore in which this area is so rich. I wish something could be done about it. I remember about twenty years ago, I put in a proposal for a grant for making up and publishing a collection of such materials, and nobody blinked an eye, and it never got to first base. The most popular of all our literature simply did not weigh an ounce.

Much of our folk song, like "Billy Boy," is not indigenous. Maybe it's more endemic, meaning, everybody knows it. But this evening I principally want to introduce you to our area's folklore — the folk songs which either originated here or were closely connected with and greatly affected by this area. And even so, if I tried to introduce you to them all, we would be here until Sunday. This evening, the best we can possibly hope to do is to limit the presentation to a representative sampling of some of the best and some of the most interesting, or both, of these indigenous folk songs.

Before the rise of modern popular song and music halls in this area, except for a few in the central cities, what did Pittsburghers sing about? Well, like anyone else they sang about the things they thought about, and the things they have talked about, and hoped for and feared, and grieved about. And this included their wide interests: love and hatred, war and disasters, politics and pride, crime, false lovers, and old men who wanted to marry young girls, and so on through the whole gamut of their living, the horror of Indian warfare, and the delights of love and of play.

We have a very large group of political folk songs in this area. I am deliberately leaving out "The Glooms of Ligonier," for although it was composed by an officer at the fort of that name in 1759, we have no evidence that it was ever sung popularly. It was published at that time in a New Jersey paper, since a New Jersey outfit was garrisoning Fort Ligonier at the time, and nearly one hundred years

later it was picked up by the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*.² It has been more or less accepted recently as a folk song, though it really isn't and never was. But we do have evidence on another, from James Smith the young man of eighteen who was captured over at Turkeyfoot. (By the way, Turkeyfoot captured Edgewood at football last week-end, I understand.) Smith was captured over at Turkeyfoot when helping to build a road for the advance of Braddock's army. He reports the song in a book he wrote later in life.³ You remember he was the one English subject, a prisoner in Fort Duquesne, who saw what happened to the captives of Braddock's army — saw it and lived to tell about it.

In the book he records a song about the Stamp Act and even tells the tune to which it was sung — and a very good tune it was. But, for the most part, our political songs here have been rather ephemeral. Usually they were connected with one question, or with one campaign. I remember when I was a boy in Kentucky, they still used to sing a few of the Henry Clay songs, but when we remember that Henry Clay ran for president three times over a space of nearly twenty-five years we know his songs had time to get pretty well ingrained. Most of our political folk songs we find in the newspapers of the time, but now for the most part they are long forgotten.

For their day, however, they were quite important, and you remember the sour comment of one of the Democrats after the election of William Henry Harrison in 1840 in assessing the campaign and why they lost. He said, "We were outlied, outspent and outsung." Except for allegations of outsinging, I suspect that neither party has changed much from the practices of 1840.

On the other hand, the war songs were long remembered for some reason, usually the longest of any. A singular man named Frank Cowan, one of the great geniuses and unsung heroes of southwestern Pennsylvania, did yeoman service in collecting and publishing "The Battle Ballads and Other Poems of Southwestern Pennsylvania" in *Southwestern Pennsylvania in Song and Story* in 1878; he did a fine job.

In one of his books, on a flyleaf, he announces that he had arranged in London for the publication of all the area's folk songs — the word had not then been used in America, but that was what he

2 "Notes and Queries," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 24(1900): 120.

3 James Smith, *Shakerism Detected* (Paris, Ky., 1810). 23.

meant. This was in 1878 and remember that the term, folklore, was not invented until 1846. Before that it was called "popular antiquities." The book was called *Rhyme and Relique*, with the words and the music. Regrettably, not one copy appears to have survived. If you ever find a copy of it, for heaven's sake cherish it, because it would be a pearl of great price.

Frank Cowan recorded many of our battle ballads of this area; the earliest of them, which was just 104 years old when he published it in 1878, was concerned with the battle of Point Pleasant, which was fought in Dunmore's War in 1774. You can see how highly colored against the Indians was the thinking of the people of the day who wrote such songs. They looked on the Indians completely as the aggressors, although Dunmore had been the aggressor and had turned on and deliberately provoked war with Indians who were living in peace with the settlers of this area until he came along and wanted to start trouble in order to grab this area away from Pennsylvania for Virginia.

I'll sing you a verse or two of this. And don't be alarmed; I know I can't sing. I have no voice, I have a tin ear, and I can't carry a tune. I wouldn't think of singing anything but a folk song, but with folk songs, you know, if you happen to discover that you have started a little too high or too low and suddenly switch keys in the middle of a verse, or drop down or go up an octave, or suddenly blank out on some of the words and fill in with some of your own, you haven't, as some of our young people today would say, goofed. You have, in the words of the folk-song collector, "created a new version." This one runs something like this — at least it has helped me in my history to remember the date of the battle of Point Pleasant.

*D'ye mind the Tenth day of October
Seventy-four, which caused woe,
The Indian savages they did cover
The pleasant banks of the Ohio.*

*The battle beginning in the morning,
Throughout the day it lasted sore,
Till the evening shades were returning down
Upon the banks of the Ohio.⁴*

⁴ Frank Cowan, *Southwestern Pennsylvania in Song and Story* (Greensburg, Pa., 1878), 337-38.

There are some verses in it that are dillies, such as :

*Oh, bless the mighty King of Heaven,
For all his wondrous works below
Who hath to us the victory given
Upon the banks of the Ohio.*

See, even in that day God was always on the side of the person who was making up the song. And every war that we took part in was right, and if you think I mean something, you can look at this peace symbol on my necktie and you'll know what I am talking about. If you disagree with me, you can slap my face after the meeting is over, and I won't slap you back.

One of the best and most widely known of the songs was commonly called, "Sinclair's Defeat." It was about the disastrous, punitive expedition that Sir Arthur St. Clair (whose name, among the Scots of this area, was pronounced as it still is in most Scottish areas, "Sinclair") led into Ohio. It there ran into an Indian force, and his army was literally cut to pieces. Actually, they didn't lose quite as many as the song indicates, but they lost a lot of good men who had been recruited to try to take the pressure off the border. This is another one that will help you remember the date of the battle. I am going to ask somebody who sings much better than I do to sing for you perhaps one of the greatest and most historic of our folk songs of this area, "St. Clair's Defeat."

*'Twas November the fo-urth, in the year of 'Ninety-one,
We had a sore enga-ge-ment, near to Fort Jefferson;
Sinclair was our comman'd'er which may remember'd be,
For there we lost nine hundred men in the Western Ter'torie.⁵*

Other verses in the song tell about how many of our Western Pennsylvania officers were killed, including Major General Richard Butler for whom Butler County and Butler Street and a few more things in this area were named. In that day, a ballad was pretty much a record of the event that was being reported.

In view of the importance of the rivers here it's surprising that we have so few boating songs. Oddly enough those are mostly from the keelboat era, songs like "Heigh-Ho, the Boatmen Row"⁶ and

⁵ Ibid., 364-67.

⁶ Carl Carmer, ed., *Songs of the Rivers of America* (New York, 1942), 155.

"Handsome Mary, the Lily of the West."⁷ These are better remembered than the steamboat-era songs. I can't explain why except that perhaps they were better than most of the steamboat songs of this area.

Another branch of our folk song, and one quite important here, was industrial. With the rise of industry and industrial songs we get the first, true protest songs with the one exception that I mentioned of the protest against the Stamp Act. One of the first was a song of the old National Pike. The teamsters in that day were pretty much like the teamsters in this, and if something came along to take some of their work away from them, they were ready to fight at a drop of the hat.

There were a number of songs when the railroads began to come in, very angry songs, such as the one about the railroads which wound up:

*Come, all ye old wag'ners that have got good wives;
Go home to your farms and there spend your lives.
When your corn is all cribbed and your small grain is sowed,
You'll have nothing else to do but just to curse the
damned railroad.*⁸

One of the biggest bits of industry to hit this area in the early period was when "Colonel" Edwin L. Drake in 1859 drilled the first, genuine oil well up here at Titusville. It created a terrific impression and brought forth a spate of oil songs, some of them music-hall songs, some of them genuine folk songs, which began as music-hall songs. You know everything starts somewhere, and many of our folk songs today are music-hall songs that gradually outgrew their lowly origin. I want you to hear one of the best of the oil songs of that halcyon era. It's called, and quite truly, for practically everybody in and around Pittsburgh at that time had the malady — "Oil on the Brain."

*The Yankees boast that they make clocks
that "just beat all creation."
They never made one could keep time
with our great speculation.*

⁷ Cowan, 412-44.

⁸ George Korson, ed., *Pennsylvania Songs and Legends* (Philadelphia, 1949), 256-57.

*Our stocks like clocks go with a spring,
wind up and down again;
But all our strikes are sure to cause—
oil on the brain!*⁹

Coal mining was also one of our big industries here from a very early period, and, of course, people sang about that. They sang about the mine disasters, they sang about the work of the mine, they sang about the different mines, and they sang about the bosses. There were songs of all types. The late George Korson did a very fine piece of work, nearly forty years ago now, in gathering the coal-mine songs from all over Pennsylvania, which he published in a number of books. Perhaps the best known of these books are *Minstrels of the Mine Patch* and *Coal Dust on the Fiddle*. The songs are good, and, I might say that except where the individual mines are mentioned, it is very hard to trace the origin of these, and about many of them we cannot swear definitely. Some of them we know are not from this area. Of many we cannot be sure where they arose. But here is a little representative medley of coal-mine songs, at least one, I am sure, not indigenous but all part of this area's folk-song tradition.

*Come all ye good fellows, so young and so fine,
Oh seek not your fortune in a dark, dreary mine,
It will form a bad habit and seep in your soul,
Till the stream of your blood runs as black as the coal.
It's dark as a dungeon and damp as the dew,
Where the dangers are doubled and the pleasures are few.*¹⁰

* * * *

*Roll on, buddy (won't you roll?),
Don't you roll so slow (roll so slow),
How can I roll when the wheels won't go?*¹¹

* * * *

*Union miners, stand together,
Heed no operator's tale,*

⁹ George Swetnam, *Where Else but Pittsburgh!* (Pittsburgh, 1958), 164-65.

¹⁰ Jo Davidson.

¹¹ Alan Lomax, *Folk Songs of North America* (Doubleday, 1960), 276, 284.

*Keep your hand upon the dollar
And your eye upon the scale.*¹²

I might mention that we can date that last one reasonably well, from the fact that it was based (as some of you who grew up in the "old-time religion" churches probably recognize) on a song called, "Life's Railway to Heaven."¹³

I might mention that this was a trail that worked both ways, in more ways than one. For instance, I remember as a child I had heard a verse or two of "Roll On, John," as it was with us, instead of "Roll On, Buddy." My mother warned me against singing it because, as I discovered later, it was used very widely as a bawdy song. On the other hand, many of these folk songs were rewritten for religious purposes. Perhaps you are familiar with the beautiful, "What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul," which, of course, was written by a Georgia preacher who had heard "My name was Captain Kidd, when I sailed, when I sailed. / My name was Captain Kidd when I sailed," and so on. I can't sing that one, as you by now have come to realize. And it's not because of what it says, but because I simply have too narrow a range for that splendid tune.

I might mention that one of John Wesley's followers in 1836, the Reverend Alfred Brunson at Pittsburgh, published a book of camp-meeting songs, titled *The Sweet Singer of Israel*. One song in it — remember this was 1836, only thirty-seven years after Campbell in France in exile had written, "There came to the beach a poor exile of Erin." And in this book, only thirty-seven years later, way back in the wilds of the camp-meeting area of the Pittsylvania country, they were singing, "There fell from God's presence two exiles of Eden."

Unionization brought in a lot of protest songs and antiprotest songs, such as the jeering songs they sang at the time of the first cotton-mill strike here. In about 1814 or '15, they jeered at them with a song whose tune I don't know but it began,

*Cotton bumpers in a pen,
Never get out till nine or ten;
When they get out
They get buttermilk and sauer kraut.*¹⁴

¹² John Greenway, *American Folk Songs of Protest* (Philadelphia, 1953), 16.

¹³ Homer A. Rodeheaver, *Gospel Solos, etc.* (Winona Lake, Ind., 1925), no. 103.

¹⁴ Leland Baldwin, *Pittsburgh, the Story of a City* (Pittsburgh, 1937), 226.

There's one I don't want you to miss. You'll all recognize the popular song on which it was based. It's not necessarily an indigenous one here, but very likely so. Certainly I never heard — and I've heard a lot of folk songs — it used as a union song until after I came to Pennsylvania in 1936. It's made by the common method of adapting a previous song. If we may add a small note of scholarship, I think the words were made by the great American folk poet, Woody Guthrie. The tune is a familiar one. You'll recognize it as "Red Wing" and we invite you to sing the chorus, if you are so inclined.¹⁵

Steel provided a lot of songs, some protest songs, some otherwise, from the boastful "The Twenty-Inch Mill" which the workers sang about 1870 when Andrew Carnegie introduced a mill that was so big that it could roll plates twenty inches wide.

*Come all you iron workers and listen to my song!
It's all about the twenty-inch; I won't detain you long.
Our troubles they are numerous; we have a noble crew;
All things go right when we're by night, we make
a gallant show.*¹⁶

Tremendous, I tell you, but it was for that day. Is Jake Evanson here tonight? Jacob Evanson, for many years head of vocal music in the Pittsburgh schools, has done a great deal of work in collecting and preserving the industrial songs here, or the songs of Pittsburgh as an industrial city. I'm sorry he isn't here tonight, because I think he deserves credit, along with Cowan and Korson, as the three men who have done more for collecting and preserving the indigenous folk songs of this area than any others, except perhaps for me.

It's hard to tell whether some of these songs are indigenous or not. One that I dug up from a doorman at an Elks Club one night, unquestionably is. You perhaps have heard — it's fairly well known — the song about the Homestead Strike of 1892 — "We are asking one another as we pass the time of day, / Why workingmen resort to arms to get their proper pay."¹⁷ But that's a little bookish. This one is, I think, a little more of the folk. I only got a fragment of it, just two verses. It ran something like:

Say, comrades, did you hear about the towboat, Little Bill,

¹⁵ *The Peoples Song Book* (New York, n.d.), 70.

¹⁶ Korson, 430-31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 443-46.

*That caused so much excitement at Carnegie's Homestead mill?
With model barges well equipped, Billy Rodgers, sly and slick,
Brought Pinkerton assassins there, employed by H. C. Frick.*

*'Twas on the 6th July, '92, just at the dawn of day,
The Pinkerton marauders tried to land at Fort Frick bay.
But here they met their Waterloo, from Vulcan's brawny sons,
Who repulsed them in a moment, and stifled all their guns.*

Of course, after the song had been written, they came to discover they may have won the battle but the war was lost.

There was another type of steel song, and I think Mr. Evanson gets the credit for having found some of the best of these — the plaintive songs of the lonely, homesick, ethnic workers who had been brought to America, or who had come to America with the expectation of quick riches, and found a lot of difficulty in making as much money as Mr. Carnegie and Mr. Frick. This is a translation that was made by Pete Seeger of a Slovak song that was collected by Jake Evanson; he found it in McKeesport. It had been made in the Slovak language, and the story was not an uncommon one around the turn of the century. This man had come over and found work in the steel mills and had carefully saved his money and finally sent for his wife and children whom he had left in the old country. As they were traveling here to America he was killed in an accident in the mill, and his friend came to the railroad station in downtown Pittsburgh to meet the widow and the orphaned children. He said, "I hardly knew how to break the sad news to them. Then I made this song. . . . But she cried very hard. . . ."

*Ah, my God, what's in America?
Very many people are going over there.
I will also go, for I am still young;
God, the Lord, grant me good luck there.*

*I'll return if I don't get killed
But you wait for news from me.
When you hear from me
Put everything in order,
Mount a raven-black horse,
And come to me, dear soul of mine.¹⁸*

¹⁸ Ibid., 437-38.

Then, of course, there were the disaster songs; there was at least one song for practically every disaster. There were a good many disasters — floods and fires and mine cave-ins. We have a very wide selection of these, and I want to introduce you to one that I found by doing a little cheating in a story I wrote in the *Press*. It was actually a sort of want ad for anybody who knew any folk songs that I didn't. In writing about folk songs I mentioned a few that I was sure nearly everybody that knew any folk songs at all would know. I mentioned a song, among others, of the Johnstown Flood. Well, of course, it's been published and used a good bit, and it's not a very good song. Incidentally, it was originally a bawdy song, and I understand — and this may be folklore — that they had a competition for a song about the Johnstown Flood, and one of the preachers in the area adapted the one we used to sing about "In the merry month of May, / When the jacks begin to bray" and made it "On a balmy day in May, when nature held full sway" and went on to tell about the disaster of the Johnstown Flood.¹⁹

I got a few replies to the story and among them a letter from an old lady in Ohio who said that her mother had a song about the Johnstown Flood, and she sent me a copy of it. She said it was sung to the tune of "Sweet Hour of Prayer" which it would sing to, although I couldn't see any connection, but later on when the old lady came to Pittsburgh, in fact to Oakland, to visit her son, I went out and recorded the song, and when she started to sing it, it didn't quite sound like "Sweet Hour of Prayer." It sounded something like this:

*Let truth and wisdom guide my pen,
While writing to the sons of men,
A sad disaster to relate,
Concerning ten thousand people's fate.*

*Dark clouds of tempest had arose,
Their fearful contents to disclose;
Bright forked lightning flashed around,
While awful thunder shook the ground.*

I said, "I thought you said it was to the tune of 'Sweet Hour of Prayer.'" She replied: "I thought it was till I started to sing it."

Then a surprising verse:

¹⁹ Ibid., 456-59.

*The flood was on the first of June,
When summer flowers were in full bloom;
That fated day and month and time
In eighteen hundred and eighty-nine.²⁰*

I scratched my head a little and wondered if the little old lady lived far enough down the Ohio River that the flood got there on the first of June, although it was in May — the last day in May — in Johnstown. I rather accepted that as the explanation until some time later I came upon a ballad from Crawford County, collected up there by a professor of English at Allegheny College in Meadville, and there seemed something strangely familiar about it.

*Let truth and wisdom guide my pen,
While writing to the sons of men,
A sad disaster to relate,
Concerning three young ladies' fate.*

*Dark clouds of tempest had arose,
Their fearful contents to disclose;
Bright forked lightning flashed around,
While awful thunder shook the ground.*

*'Twas on the twenty-fourth of June
When summer flowers were in their bloom;
That fated day and month and time
In eighteen hundred and forty-nine.²¹*

Then as I went down through other verses and recognized many more familiar ones, I realized that the true folk process had been operating and that somebody had taken a Crawford County folk song about three young ladies being drowned while coming home from a church service when there was a flash flood in Gravel Run just near where it runs into French Creek. Somebody had taken this and adapted it to the Johnstown Flood, and, because one of the best verses rhymed on bloom, or nearly rhymed on bloom, they just made the Johnstown Flood be in June instead of in May. But, a couple or three years later, the crowning bit of it came when I discovered in an old newspaper published in Indiana County virtually the same song, written about

²⁰ George Swetnam, "Genesis of a Ballad," *Keystone Folklore Quarterly*, 4(1959) : 46-50.

²¹ J. R. Schultz, "Crawford County Folk Ballads," *Folklore Quarterly*, 4(1959) : 3, 11.

five young people, who were drowned in a flash flood up in the Kiskiminetas Valley. This flood was "On the ninth of June / When summer flowers were in their bloom, / That fateful day and month of time, / In eighteen hundred and twenty-nine."²² So, the Crawford County ballad maker had operated by the same method. He had taken a ballad and adapted it to the disaster he wanted to sing about. And that's a good deal of what folk song often turns out to be about.

There are a lot of other songs. I wish we could go on all night, but we are not going to try to. There are a couple more that I think we ought to pass along to you — just songs about Pittsburgh. One in its present form was rounded off by the late Woody Guthrie, who used as his basis an older I.W.W. song used when the Industrial Workers of the World were making a vain effort to organize the workers in Pittsburgh, around the time of World War I. Whether that was also taken from an earlier song, I haven't found out. This one is popularly known, and I think it has one of the best possible titles — an amazing song about an amazing city — "Lord God, Pittsburgh!"

Years ago, maybe twenty years ago, I made the acquaintance of an old lady who lived out on East End Avenue, Julia Means, who sang some very interesting folk songs. One of them I have traced and found that it goes back to 1855 when the first liquor-license law was passed in Pittsburgh in an effort — in this blue-law town — to close the saloons at midnight on Saturday.

Everything else was closed on Sunday. You remember, even at a later period, we couldn't have a symphony concert on Sunday. In fact, the entire Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, you may recall, was arrested for playing a concert on Sunday. Of course, we couldn't have baseball — major-league baseball games — on Sunday, for a long time here. I guess the blue-law people felt that maybe they oughtn't to have the saloons open all night on Saturday night. Mrs. Means told me that back in the days when her father was working an eighty-four-hour week, seven twelve-hour days for \$11.65 a week, that when he was off the night turn he would go and sing around the bars in Soho and pick up more money sometimes on Saturday night than he did all week long, just from the money people would throw him for singing around the bars. He took her along from the time she was a good-sized toddler, because a man was not likely to be rolled and robbed in the rougher areas of Pittsburgh if he had a little girl with him, there being at that time, at least, some honor among thieves in Pittsburgh. The

²² Undated clipping in writer's file.

song — and it is a dilly, a true folk song — is about the area where Mrs. Means's father used to sing it, Soho, an area which, at that time, was rougher than the pig iron that they used to make there.

*They tell us in Soho on Saturday night,
Most ev'ry person you meet they are tight;
The men with their bottles, their wives with a can,
And young girls go prowlin' around like a man.*²³

I would like to say, in conclusion, that the folk-song tradition in Pittsburgh has not ended. We have with us tonight a man who has contributed a number of songs, a great many charming songs, some of which unquestionably will become folk songs before their race is run. Bob Schmertz, will you come forward, and Gretchen? I warn you, Bob, that when they become folk songs, you won't get royalties on them any more. I don't know whether Bob can sing without his banjo or not. In case there might be somebody in Pittsburgh who hasn't heard it, I think it would be very fine if he and Gretchen and the rest of us would sing you one of his most delightful, "Monongahela Sal."

*She was born in an old Monessen alley,
And her maw and her paw, they called her Sal;
She grew up to be the pride of the valley,
A typical Monongahela gal.*

*Roll on, Monongahela,
Roll on to the Ohio,
Roll on, past Alliquippi, Down to the Mississippi,
Clear to the Gulf of Mexico.*²⁴

²³ Korson, 432-33.

²⁴ Ibid., 462-65.

ACCESSIONS

A recent accession at the Historical Society is the manuscript diary of a coal-yard superintendent who probably lived in or near Buena Vista. The sixteen volumes cover the period from 1883 through 1903, with the exception of 1884, 1889, 1890, 1894, and 1898 which are wanting. The diarist was a methodical person who recorded the weather and the stages of the river every day. There are records of strikes, floods, and other local disasters in its pages. Research has not yet revealed the man's name, but we are still hoping to locate an annual report which he filed.