

Ballads and Songs Resource

Below is a list of Hunter songs and ballads that are made mention of in the book. The catalog numbers are unique to individual audio file entries, whereas the Max Hunter Folk Song Collection (MFH) numbers remain stable throughout variants of the audio files.

For a comprehensive listing of all the songs in the collection, see Max Hunter Folk Song Collection (MHFSC), Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri, <https://maxhunter.missouristate.edu/>.

- “A Pretty Fair Maid in Yonders Garden.” As sung by William Eden, Monte Ne, Arkansas, January 20, 1960. Cat. no. 445, MFH no. 511.
- “Angel Band.” As sung by Ollie Gilbert, Mountain View, Arkansas, August 27, 1969. Cat. no. 853, MFH no. 18.
- “The Baggage Coach Ahead.” As sung by T. R. Hammond, Osceola, Missouri, September 17, 1958. Cat. no. 226, MFH no. 34.
- “Barbra Allen.” As sung by Almeda Riddle, Heber Springs, Arkansas, October 23, 1965. Cat. no. 586, MFH no. 38.
- “Battle of Pea Ridge.” As sung by Allie Long Parker, Eureka Springs, Arkansas, March 27, 1958. Cat. no. 12, MFH no. 23.
- “Battle of Prairie Grove.” As sung by Fred High, High, Arkansas, June 21, 1958. Cat. no. 125, MFH no. 25.
- “Bawdy Strawberry Roan.” As sung by Glenn Ohrlin, Mountain View, Arkansas, May 29, 1969. Cat. no. 733, MFH no. 604.
- “Blackest Crow.” As sung by Fleecy and Benson Fox, Leslie, Arkansas, September 18, 1972. Cat. no. 1462, MFH no. 107.
- “California Joe.” As sung by William Eden, Monte Ne, Arkansas, January 20, 1960. Cat. no. 446, MFH no. 103.
- “Careless Love.” As sung by Krisanne Parker, Springfield, Missouri, March 20, 1975. Cat. no. 1521, MFH no. 1009.
- “Charley Brooks.” As sung by Olive Coberley, Wheatland, Missouri, May 12, 1959. Cat. no. 33, MFH no. 96.
- “The Charming Beauty Bright.” As sung by Laura McDonald, Springdale, Arkansas, July 23, 1958. Cat. no. 205, MFH no. 89.
- “The Derry Dens of Arrow.” As sung by Lola Stanley, Fayetteville, Arkansas, December 30, 1958. Cat. no. 307, MFH no. 129.
- “The Dewey Dens of Yarrow.” As sung by Max Hunter, Springfield, Missouri, June 21, 1958. Cat. no. 127, MFH no. 129.
- “Down by the Greenwood Side.” As sung by Pearl Brewer, Pocahontas, Arkansas, November 12, 1958. Cat. no. 350, MFH no. 143.
- “Down in the Valley.” As sung by Harold Hunter and Max Hunter, Eldorado Springs, Missouri, October 7, 1958. Cat. no. 264, MFH no. 147.

- “Dying Soldier Boy—Mill Spring.” As sung by Raymond Sanders, Mountain View, Arkansas, May 12, 1970. Cat. no. 1057, MFH no. 261.
- “Fair Willie Drowned in Yarrow.” As sung by Almeda Riddle, Heber Springs, Arkansas, October 23, 1965. Cat. no. 584, MFH no. 129.
- “Four Marys.” As sung by Almeda Riddle, Heber Springs, Arkansas, October 23, 1965. Cat. no. 583, MFH no. 422.
- “Hangman, Hangman.” As sung by Pearl Brewer, Pocahontas, Arkansas, November 12, 1958. Cat. no. 290, MFH no. 248.
- “Heber Springs Tornado.” Composed by J. L. James and as sung by his daughter, Almeda Riddle. Greers Ferry, Arkansas, February 10, 1970. Cat. no. 968, MFH no. 282.
- “How Can a Boy Be Forgetful of Mother.” As sung by Herbert Philbrick, Crocker, Missouri, October 28, 1959. Cat. no. 420, MFH no. 252.
- “How Come That Blood on Your Coat Sleeve.” As sung by Clyde Johnson, Fayetteville, Arkansas, October 1, 1958. Cat. no. 253, MFH no. 175.
- “I Wish I Was a Little Bird.” As sung by Leander Witt, Hindsville, Arkansas, July 23, 1958. Cat. no. 221, MFH no. 688.
- “I’ve a Tender Recollection.” As sung by Herbert Philbrick, Crocker, Missouri, October 28, 1959. Cat. no. 421, MFH no. 641.
- “In a Hog Pen.” As sung by Fred High, High, Arkansas, February 12, 1958. Cat. no. 25, MFH no. 287.
- “In the Garden.” As sung by Ollie Gilbert, Mountain View, Arkansas, February 9, 1970. Cat. no. 960, MFH no. 304.
- “The Jew’s Garden.” As sung by Allie Long Parker, Eureka Springs, Arkansas, July 10, 1958. Cat. no. 184, MFH no. 316.
- “John Henry.” As sung by Odis Bird, Marshall, Arkansas, August 6, 1958. Cat. no. 161, MFH no. 313.
- “Johnny German.” As sung by Allie Long Parker, Eureka Springs, Arkansas, January 14, 1958. Cat. no. 10, MFH no. 307.
- “Johnny Lee Ballad.” As sung by Bessie Owens, Batesville, Arkansas, April 9, 1958. Cat. no. 55, MFH no. 310.
- “Kitty Wells.” As sung by Frank Pool, Fayetteville, Arkansas, January 6, 1958. Cat. no. 0015, MFH no. 338.
- “Lady Margret.” As sung by Almeda Riddle, Heber Springs, Arkansas, October 23, 1965. Cat. no. 587, MFH no. 364.
- “Little Billy.” As sung by Odis Bird, Marshall, Arkansas, August 6, 1958. Cat. no. 160, MFH no. 346.
- “Little Colleen.” As sung by W. H. Shelly, Cabool, Missouri, May 14, 1958. Cat. no. 100, MFH no. 351.
- “Little Darling.” As sung by W. H. Shelly, Cabool, Missouri, May 14, 1958. Cat. no. 101, MFH no. 352.
- “Little Darling Pal of Mine.” As sung by Floyd Holland, Mountain View, Arkansas, October 25, 1971. Cat. no. 1282, MFH no. 890.

- “Little Omie.” As sung by Harrison Burnett, Fayetteville, Arkansas, July 5, 1961. Cat. no. 593, MFH no. 383.
- “Lonesome Scenes of Winter.” As sung by Ollie Gilbert, Mountain View, Arkansas, June 25, 1969. Cat. no. 330, MFH no. 350.
- “Lord Thomas.” As sung by Pearl Brewer, Pochohantas, Arkansas, November 12, 1958. Cat. no. 278, MFH no. 40.
- “Mick Branagan’s Pup.” As sung by Goldie Schott, Mondell, Arkansas, April 13, 1958. Cat. no. 52, MFH no. 415.
- “Nightingale.” As sung by Benson Fox, Leslie, Arkansas, September 18, 1972. Cat. no. 1464, MFH no. 485.
- “Notchville Girl.” As sung by Betty Lou Copeland, Mountain View, Arkansas, May 26, 1969. Cat. no. 767, MFH no. 670.
- “O, Do Come Onc’t More.” As sung by Fred High, High, Arkansas, February 12, 1958. Cat. no. 34, MFH no. 462.
- “The Old Woman Lived on a Sea Shore.” As sung by Pearl Brewer, Pocahontas, Arkansas, November 12, 1958. Cat. no. 282, MFH no. 424.
- “O Miss, I Have a Very Fine Farm.” As sung by Joan O’Bryant and Max Hunter, Fayetteville, Arkansas, July 5, 1960. Cat. no. 523, MFH no. 473.
- “O Miss, I Have a Very Fine Farm.” As sung by Lizzie McGuire, Fayetteville, Arkansas, June 23, 1959. Cat. no. 360, MFH no. 473.
- “Orphan Girl.” As sung by Ethel Hunter, Springfield, Missouri, June 29, 1958. Cat. no. 174, MFH no. 467.
- “Orphant Child.” As sung by Almeda Riddle, Heber Springs, Arkansas, October 23, 1965. Cat. no. 588, MFH no. 467.
- “The Peaceful Old Farm.” As sung by Reba Dearmore, Mountain Home, Arkansas, January 7, 1969. Cat. no. 646, MFH no. 519.
- “Poor Boy.” As sung by Loman Cansler, Parkville, Missouri, October 18, 1957. Cat. no. 1, MFH no. 496.
- “Prisoner for Life.” As sung by Harrison Burnett, Fayetteville, Arkansas, August 18, 1960. Cat. no. 539, MFH no. 514.
- “Roll the Tater.” As sung by Fleecy and Benson Fox, Leslie, Arkansas, September 18, 1972. Cat. no. 1466, MFH no. 984.
- “Rome County.” As sung by Harrison Burnett, Fayetteville, Arkansas, July 11, 1958. Cat. no. 189, MFH no. 537.
- “Rosemary and Thyme.” As sung by Allie Long Parker, Eureka Springs, Arkansas, April 14, 1958. Cat. no. 60, MFH no. 535.
- “Salem Cyclone.” As sung by Iva Haslett, West Plains, Missouri, June 11, 1958. Cat. no. 114, MFH no. 577.
- “Shoot the Cat.” As sung by Fred High, High, Arkansas, February 12, 1958. Cat. no. 27, MFH no. 563.
- “Silver Dagger.” As sung by Raymond Sanders, Mountain View, Arkansas, May 12, 1970. Cat. no. 773, MFH no. 589.

- “Sing Low and Sing Lay.” As sung by M. L. Mercer, Springfield, Missouri, May 21, 1969. Cat. no. 725, MFH no. 603.
- “The Taylor Boys.” As sung by Emma Jean and Verda Fayes Hamilton, Gainesville, Missouri, April 29, 1958. Cat. no. 346, MFH no. 624.
- “Tell Ye the Story.” As sung by Olive Coberley, Wheatland, Missouri, July 29, 1959. Cat. no. 378, MFH no. 637.
- “Three Leaves of Shamrock.” As sung by Raymond Sanders, Mountain View, Arkansas, May 12, 1970. Cat. no. 1071, MFH no. 381.
- “Three Little Babes.” As sung by Ollie Gilbert, Mountain View, Arkansas, May 26, 1969. Cat. no. 768, MFH no. 672.
- “The Tiehackers Song.” As sung by T. M. Davis, Fayetteville, Arkansas, June 14, 1958. Cat. no. 120, MFH no. 630.
- “Time Enough Yet.” As sung by Olive Coberley, Wheatland, Missouri, September 9, 1959. Cat. no. 412, MFH no. 640.
- “Twenty One Years.” As sung by Chloe Bain, Elkton, Missouri, September 6, 1959. Cat. no. 404, MFH no. 639.
- “Two Sisters.” As sung by Ollie Gilbert, Mountain View, Arkansas, September 16, 1969. Cat. no. 903, MFH no. 424.
- “Western Water Tank.” As sung by Herbert Philbrick, Crocker, Missouri, October 28, 1959. Cat. no. 419, MFH no. 145.
- “Where the Ole White River Flows.” As sung by Virgil Lance, Mountain Home, Arkansas, April 15, 1969. Cat. no. 704, MFH no. 713.
- “The Wild Hog.” As sung by Pearl Brewer, Pocahontas, Arkansas, November 12, 1958. Cat. no. 288, MFH no. 692.
- “Will the Weaver.” As sung by Fred High, High, Arkansas, February 12, 1958. Cat. no. 28, MFH no. 698.

Author’s Supplemental Notes on the Ballads and Songs

The notes included below are not meant to be comprehensive. Several provide supplemental information that did not make it into the bigger narrative of Hunter’s life as a song chaser, while others include my personal responses to the Child Ballads.

(Ch. 3): “The Battle of Pea Ridge”

Before Hunter’s time, a Miss Simmons collected the lyrics to this “camp” ballad for Belden in 1903 from the singing of Ethel Doxey of Carroll County, Arkansas. For more on the history of the ballad, see Belden, *Ballads and Songs*, 368.

(Ch. 3): *Informant Practices Regarding Lyric Modification*

In a thought-provoking paper written by John Quincy Wolf Jr., the folklorist discussed how Almeda Riddle, Jimmy Driftwood, and Fred High all admitted to altering lyrics to satisfy their artistic sensibilities. Wolf quoted Riddle as saying, “I’ll change any part of a song that doesn’t make good sense—though I deeply respect the very old ones—and if a word doesn’t make sense, I’ll put in a better one.” And while Driftwood’s songster father, Neal Morris, told Wolf that he substituted words only during moments of forgetfulness and purposely retained unintelligible words, Morris’s musically adept son frequently combined and recombined traditional lyrics to make songs his own. Wolf explained, “It is inevitable that a man with such a command of folksong, such compelling interests in folk music, and such unusual talents in composition should tend to re-create traditional materials.” Nor did such attitudinal differences toward lyric modification fall neatly along generational lines; Oscar Gilbert (Ollie’s late husband) “was her opposite in most respects,” not the least of which was his willingness to create his own versions of ballads. Observed Wolf, “As a folksinger, he was no zealot for precision, and approximations suited him well,” whereas his wife, who likely had a photographic memory, took a literal approach toward folksong lyrics. Most remarkably, noted Wolf, “Recordings of the same song sung by her on occasions several years apart show no important differences.” As for the gregarious and freewheeling Fred High, “The happy liberties which he was pleased to take with the English language mark him as an innovator who stood in no awe of tradition.” And none of these variations, Wolf said, were unique to singers in the Ozarks. See John Quincy Wolf Jr., “Folksingers and the Re-Creation of Folksong,” *Western Folklore* 26, no. 2 (April 1967), <https://home.lyon.edu/wolfcollection/re-creation.htm/>.

Banjo-picking songster Roscoe Holcomb had this to say about how he came up with “Across the Rocky Mountain”: “I’d heard these different songs and they had verses in them that I liked; and I got started playing some of the verses, and I’d switch one verse of one song into another, and I made it to suit me” (4). Quoted in John Cohen, “Interview with Roscoe by John Cohen,” *Roscoe Holcomb/The High Lonesome Sound*, audio recording transcript of interview with Holcomb, April 11, 1964, Folkways Records FA 2368, 1968, https://folkways-media.si.edu/liner_notes/folkways/FW02368.pdf/.

The fieldwork of Wolf and Cohen led them to the understanding that there was a broad spectrum of relationships between ballad singers and traditional

song, and these relationships hinged largely on whether the singers thought of themselves as artists. Hunter, intent on maintaining his own ground rules, never came to this realization.

(Ch. 3): *“The Jew’s Garden”*

Hunter collected three variants of “The Jew’s Garden,” two versions of which appeared in Belden’s collection and about which the Missouri scholar had much to say:

It has retained its popularity in America down to the present, as appears from the record of it listed below. The two themes are the miracle of Our Lady and the ritual murder of a Christian child by Jews. . . . A charge of ritual murder was brought against the Jews of Massena, New York, as late as 1928. What has kept the ballad alive in America is probably not, however, racial or religious animosity but the simple pathos of the little schoolboy’s death. The miracle of Mary . . . has almost entirely vanished from American versions. . . . The enticer of the little boy is however regularly a Jew’s daughter . . . and there is frequently a sort of formality about the killing. . . . Practically all the texts listed below . . . start with the boys playing ball and throwing their ball into the Jew’s garden, and most of them note that it was rainy weather.

See Belden, *Ballads and Songs*, 69–70.

Although one would like to agree with Belden on the absence of “religious animosity” as it pertains to the life of this ballad, it is, in the light of the late twenty-first century, hard to swallow. Given the times and society in which they lived, it is unlikely that Allie Parker, Fran Majors, or Ollie Gilbert sang this song with any apology, but if they did, it went unnoted by the collector.

(Ch. 4): *“Knoxville Girl” Variants*

Hunter collected a decade’s worth of this song that amounted to at least nine versions; thus it is little surprise that “Knoxville Girl” attracted the attention of scholar Julie Henigan:

The murder ballad “The Waxwell Girl” is at once a localized example of a British broadside, a classic murder ballad, and a “goodnight” or “gallows” ballad, putatively composed by the criminal on the eve of his execution. This song may date to as early as the 17th century, but it was certainly well-known in the 18th as a printed ballad called “The Berkshire Tragedy, or The Wittam Miller.” It subsequently became (vari-

ously) “The Oxford Girl,” “The Wexford Girl,” “The Knoxville Girl,” and, in the Ozarks, the “Waxford” or “Waxwell Girl.” The ballad tells of a miller who murders a girl whom he has defiled, of his subsequent arrest and repentance, and of his final warning to young people to shun his example.

See Henigan, “Ozark Ballads as Story and Song,” 161.

Aside from its many appellations, this ballad is a prime example of variations at work, even within one region. Most American versions of this ballad combine the same seeds in a predictable sequence: there is the “falling in love” verse early on; the eternally popular and hazardous walk by the river; the murder stanza (or two), which proceeds in gruesome detail; the return-home verse (most often with a mother present); the lighting of a candle (the light perhaps symbolic of the murderer’s sudden awareness of guilt); verses that make mention of a sleepless night, often in the flames of Hell; and the final warning verse. Psychologically speaking, it is the shift in narrative voices between songs that grabs one’s attention; while the majority of variants start in the first person, several of them shift to the third person by the time the murder takes place, as though the song bearers unconsciously needed to distance themselves from the violence that unfolds.

For more on this sequence, see McNeil and Clements, *Arkansas Folklore Sourcebook*, 11.

(Ch. 4): “Pretty Polly” Variants

Depending largely on when they were recorded, certain songs in the Hunter collection do not fall squarely into one category or the other (Variants: 0777 *Pretty Polly Come Go Along with Me*; 0832 *Pretty Polly*; 1329 *Pretty Polly*; 1401 *Molly, Pretty Polly*). The one that comes first to mind is “*Pretty Polly*,” whose British roots have been traced to Child Ballad 4, listed as “*Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight*,” in which the female character triumphs over her would-be assassin by tricking him into looking away while she disrobes, thus pushing him into the water instead. However, in the American version, Polly (sometimes Molly or Mary) does not triumph over her so-called lover and instead ends up the victim. Song scholar Beth Brooks has explored the possibility that the American variants of “*Pretty Polly*” are directly connected to the “*Gosport Tragedy*” broadside, a song that was based on an actual event.

See Beth S. H. Brooks, “*Pretty Polly*: A History of a Folk Song,” *Missouri Folklore Society Journal* 27–28 (2005–2006): 124–45.

(Ch. 4): “Old Bangum” Variants

Both Brewer’s version and a later one from Donna Everett of Huntsville, “Old Bangum,” make reference to the ferocity of the razorback, Everett’s being the most evocative: “He’ll eat your meat an’ suck your blood.” However, little can compete with the hyperbole found in this line from Brewer’s fragment: “Rode around that wild hog’s den / Spied the bones of a thousand men.” Everett’s variant contains more British elements, such as the familiar reference to “hickory, oak an’ ash.”

Folklorist W. K. McNeil had much to say about the British origins of razorback mythology and its appearance in the Ozarks:

The identification with the hog is no aberration for an Anglo-Saxon culture. The wild boar was magic and was sacred to the early Norse and to the Celts: it was an animal of fierce power. . . . The other-world feast of the *sidh* (Celtic gods) is alleged to be sustained by magical boars, which, no matter how often they are cooked and eaten, are whole and alive again on the next day, ready to be slaughtered fresh for the next feast. . . . What was transplanted to the Arkansas hills and Deltas was not just a story from the old country, but an archetypal symbol of power, a metaphor for survival. The razorback externalized the early Arkansan sense of self, a link with a transcendent power source originating far from the Arkansas earth.

See McNeil and Clements, *Arkansas Folklore Sourcebook*, 156–57.

When a student of Belden’s collected this song in 1916 from a Miss Josephine Casey of Kansas City, we learn that the boar hunting song (which included elements of the supernatural) was used as a lullaby in the informant’s family:

Miss Casey is a grandniece of General Zachary Taylor of Mexican War fame. . . . General Taylor and President James Madison were great-great-grandsons of James Tyler, who came from Carlisle, England, to Orange County, Virginia, in 1638, and both were hushed to sleep by their negro “Mammies” with the strains of *Bangum and the Boar*. . . . The air itself is even older than the words. A Danish maid in the service of Miss Casey’s sister burst into tears when she heard the song. When asked the reason she said, “It makes me homesick. In Denmark, we young people used to dance to that air, which is a very old one.”

See Belden, *Ballads and Songs*, 29.

(Ch. 4): *"Brown Girl" Variants*

Many of Hunter's highest-profile informants, like Jimmy Driftwood and May Kennedy McCord, had their own versions of this song, and Belden's comments on its relationship to other songs amounted to a veritable alphabet soup of offshoots. That said, he had no difficulty tracing its history: "Child had nine versions of this ballad . . . all but one of which are Scotch. This one ['Lord Thomas and Fair Annet'], [version] D, is an English broadside of the seventeenth century, frequently printed since and current also in oral tradition. From it have come all the American versions as well as most of those gathered from oral tradition in Great Britain since Child's time" (37).

Belden found distinct differences between the British and American narratives: "Thomas never sends a messenger to Eleanor, as in Child [variants] CEFHI, but goes himself" (37). In addition, "In the great majority of modern texts the lovers consult their respective mothers only . . . [on whether] to prefer the fair girl to the brown" (37). Then there's the sheer violence: "Two elements of realism—or perhaps we should say brutality—are evidently valued, for they persist in almost all the American versions: after Thomas has cut off the brown girl's head he kicks it against the wall; and when he remarks on Eleanor's pallor she asks him if he cannot see her own heart's blood come trickling down her knee" (37). Belden had a plethora of "Brown Girl" variants from which to choose but ultimately whittled them down to five. More than seventy years on, it is difficult to judge the sincerity of the note accompanying version E in that it reads like a racial apology: "In this as in a good many other texts the brown girl is apparently understood to be a girl of that family name" (39):

*The Brown girl has her house and lands,
Fair Elinor has none;
So let me charge you, with my blessing,
To bring the Brown girl home.*

But by verse 10, the narrator makes an obvious complaint about her appearance:

*"Lord Thomas," she said, "is this your bride?
It seems that she's terribly brown;
You once could have married the fairest lady
That ever trod on the ground."*

And so the meaning becomes clearer. See Belden, *Ballads and Songs*, 37–40.

(Ch. 4): "Jesse James" Songs

Mrs. Shepherd never did share her "Jesse James" song or any other with Hunter. However, Riddle once sang him what she described as a "family version" of the ballad. And although she claimed that it was a unique variant that she had "never seen in any of the collections," the one Riddle sang for Hunter (and for Wolf eight years earlier) was almost identical to the ballad bestowed upon Belden in 1906 by Missourian George Williams.

As observed by Belden, "Most of the Jesse James songs seem to have sprung from one original, marked by the refrain about 'that dirty little coward that shot Mr. Howard and laid poor Jesse in the grave.'" See Belden, *Ballads and Songs*, 401.

In Riddle's preamble to the ballad, she commented that Jesse was himself a singer, and she also seemed to suggest that her uncle Robert James, a Baptist minister, was Jesse's father. When she first sang the song for Wolf, she claimed, "And to be fair, I had better tell you that my father never allowed me to sing this or mention it in any way, and I don't do it very well." Although this ballad is listed in his collection, Hunter made no mention of Riddle's commentary (Frederick Danker, interview with Almeda Riddle, 1970).

(Ch. 4): "The Dewey Dens of Yarrow" and Variants

Hunter's collection would eventually include three variants of the Child ballad he first learned from Philbrick, and any singer would be hard-pressed to choose one over the other. "This rare and beautiful ballad is one of the first that Max got after he began to use a tape recorder. . . . It derives partly from 'The Braes of Yarrow' (Child 214), and partly from 'Rare Willie Drowned in Yarrow' (Child 215)," commented Parler and Randolph in their liner notes to *Ozark Folksongs and Ballads Sung by Max Hunter*. In the Philbrick version, sung by Hunter himself in June 1958, the slain lover has no name but is one of five brothers who engaged in the Battle of Yarrow. The song includes the most dramatic moment of the ballad, in which the mournful lover who has been left behind wraps her "yellow" hair around her dead sweetheart's waist to drag him out of the Yarrow stream. It also includes a verse about the wine of Yarrow as the blood of the five slain brothers. In Hunter's version, the singer confides to her mother her death-tainted dream of harvesting "green" heather; the green is significant because it was often associated with death in ballads of British origin. See Lowry Charles Wimberly, *Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1965), 241.

About six months later, Hunter recorded Lola Stanley of Fayetteville singing another variant, which had morphed into "The Derry Dens of Arrow" and in which the five brothers had been replaced with "nine noble cowboys."

In this variant, the narrator tells her father of her ill-omened dream, “I’m afraid it will bring to me sorrow,” and once again the male lover is dragged out of the stream by his sweetheart’s long hair. Stanley’s rendition is modal in melody, and she includes two verses that contain practically cinematic imagery. When the daughter learns of her lover’s death:

*She run her hands all thru her hair
Her jewels being many
She pulled them off, a laid them down
And started away for Arrow*

Again we get a vivid illustration of the singer’s feelings of hopelessness:

*O, Father dear, seven sons have you
You may wed them all tomorrow
But th’ very ole bloom, that sprung in June
Is th’ one I lost on Arrow*

While Stanley’s version most certainly reflects regional differences, the song’s basic bone structure remains the same. In October 1965, informant Almeda Riddle sang her characteristically artful version, titled “Fair Willie Drowned in Yarrow,” in which the narrator now confides her dream to her sister. Riddle includes yet another frantic verse:

*She searched for ’im up stream, searched for ’im down
With much distress an’ sorrow
And found ’im where willows grew
On th’ bonnie banks of Yarrow*

And again, the repudiation of future marriage:

*Last night my bed was made full wide
Tonight I’ll make it narrow
No man shall ever sleep by my side
Since Willie’s drowned in th’ yarrow*

(Ch. 4): “Bawdy Strawberry Roan”

This song, which began its life as a poem by Curley W. Fletcher, who first “published in the *Arizona Record* of December 16, 1915 under the title ‘The Outlaw Broncho.’ Two years later, Fletcher published a reworked version under the title ‘The Strawberry Roan’ in his book of poems *Rhymes of the Roundup* (1917).” (Page H. Stephens, “The Case of Missing Folk Music: A Study of Aspects of Musical Life in Stone County, Arkansas, from 1890–1980,”

Mid-America Folklore 10, no. 2-3 [1982]: 58-69.) It is unclear who first set it to music. For more on this song's evolution, see John I. White, *Git Along Little Dogies: Songs and Songmakers of the American West* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 137-47.

(Ch. 4): "John Henry"

According to mentors Parler and Randolph, this is a song that got mixed up with a different ballad about John Hardy, "a bad man who was executed for murder in McDowell County, West Virginia, in 1894. 'John Henry, the steel driving man' was another character altogether, but the ballads about them have become confused." (Parler and Randolph, liner notes to *Ozark Folksongs and Ballads*).

(Ch. 4) "Little Billy" and Variants

Belden himself collected at least eight versions of this ballad as far back as 1903, and Odis Bird's lyrics contained particulars in common with Belden's, chief among them the suggestion that Polly should steal gold from her father and money from her mother; mention of the dapple gray; the request that Billy "put his eyes on th' leaves of th' tree" while she undresses; the threat that Polly will be the seventh girl to be drowned; and the comparison of Polly to a "parrot" that will reveal tales of her lover's cruel intention. And then there is the way in which it was sung: Bird's variant of Child Ballad 4 is lively and interesting both for its repetitions at the end of line four of each stanza and for the singer's ornamental syncopations. Although there is no reference to Bird or other family members being instrumentalists, Odis sang in the long but punctuated bow strokes of a fiddler, and nowhere is this more apparent than in his musical rendition of the confessional sundown ballad "Rose Connelly."

(Ch. 4): "The Bailey's Daughter" and Variants

When Hunter recorded Coberley's variant as "The Bailey's Daughter" in 1959, the "youth" in the story was no longer a fiddle player, and his "coal-black" horse had faded to an "ole gray steed." In addition, Coberley made no mention of Islington or London. That said, the emotional core of the song remains the same—a long-lost lover has returned, although she is at first unrecognizable and must plead with her former lover:

*Go saddle me the ole gray steed
Go saddle him, also
That I may go to some foreign country
Where no one does me know*

*O, she's not dead, th' lady said
O, she's not dead, she cried,
She's standing at your horse's head
Waiting for to be your bride*

(Ch. 4): "*Silver Dagger*" and Variants

"Silver Dagger," with its cautionary verses about how forbidden love leads to tragedy, has always enjoyed a vigorous life among ballads, largely because of its literary qualities. A full thirty years or more before Hunter ever recorded his first variant, Belden observed, "Although from its style and content this seems clearly to be a product of the professional ballad-maker, I know of no ballad print of it either British or American. . . . It is recorded only from traditional singing, and that only from the South and the West." Belden named at least ten states in which the song had been found. Hunter himself had five variants of this ballad, all of which included the sleeping parent who holds the weapon and the closing tragedy of suicide. Each version has its unique virtues: Sanders's highly efficient rendition had the quality of a plot summary, complete with mesmerizing sonorities; Mrs. George Ripley's had striking similes such as "her cold black eyes, like diamonds opened"; while Allie Parker's "Lost Henry" is characteristically magnificent due to its fullness of description and dialogue:

*We'll eat of nothing but weeping willow
And drink of nothing but flowin' tears
He being on th' roadside near her
A hearing of his true love's voice.*

*He ran, he ran, like one distracted
Saying, my love you are quite low
O, go love, go, and ask your Mother
If you this night, my bride can be.*

As expressed by Kay Brewer (who also contributed to the oral histories), "We didn't just record the song, but recorded what they said before and after." Kay Brewer, interview by author, phone, January 7, 2017.

(Ch. 4): *Raymond Sanders*

Harrison Burnett's voice gave color to every note, and he had an uncanny ability to turn every ballad into a landscape of its own. Take, for example, the complex modalities of "Sailor Boy," which are full of the swells and valleys of a reckless and uncaring ocean:

A sail-ers life is a dre-a-ry life It
 draws fair maid-ens with their hearts de-light It
 caus-es them for t' weep and to mourn Th
 sake of³ a true love that'll nev-er re-turn It caus-es them for t'
 weep and to mourn Th sake of³ a true love that'll nev-er re-turn

G's are sometimes sung very close to G-sharp, especially when part of an ascending melodic line.

a: G frequently appears on the beat here in later verses.

b: This beat is sometimes sung on F-sharp in later verses.

Speaking of one of Hunter's most gifted informants, Ted Anthony said, "Since I first heard him sing and listened to Max Hunter rhapsodize about him, I have wanted to learn more about Harrison Burnett." Anthony found particular inspiration in Burnett's rendition of "Rising Sun." Burnett's version never mentions New Orleans. Instead, it begins, "There is a house in yondos town." In the middle of the song, Burnett offers this verse:

*Oh mama, oh mama, what makes you treat
 that ramblin' gambler so?
 I'd rather be that rambling man
 than anyone else I know.*

Then comes Burnett's final verse, an exhortation for kindness toward a man that is living on the fringes:

*Dear friends take care of that rambling man
 to him be nice and kind
 you'll never know what trials you'll meet
 you may travel the same old line.*

See Anthony, *Chasing the Rising Sun*, 126.

(Ch. 5): “*Three Little Babes*” and Variants

It’s easy to understand Ollie Gilbert’s attachment to this piece. Several elements combine to make this a knock-out ballad. First there is the modal musicality of the tune itself, which was a perfect fit for Gilbert’s vocal delivery. Beyond that is the almost haunting alchemy between the spiritual world, in which the ballad refers to “our Saviour dear, to Him we must appear”; our earthen existence: “Cold clods lies under our heads, dear Mother / And also, one at our feet”; and the permeable boundaries between life and death. And then there is the primal gut punch of separation and a mother who cannot feed her children: “I don’t want none of your bread, dear Mother / Nor neither want your wine.” All of the above were constant themes in this singer’s life.

Belden had much to say about Child Ballad 79, which he listed as “The Wife of Usher’s Well,” “The Lone Widow,” and simply as “Song Ballad, From the Civil War diary of Jacob Bess.” Belden discovered that the song had few variants in the British Isles, unlike those in the United States. He noted the persistence of religious motifs on both sides of the pond, but while one British version includes “stalwart sons,” American versions refer to mere “babes.” The sending away of the children for schooling is also unique to the stateside variants. Nor does the striking image of the “winding sheet” (absent in Gilbert’s version but present in the other variants) appear in the Child versions. See Belden, *Ballads and Songs*, 55–57.

Hunter collected three other versions of this song: Riddle called it “Lady Gay” and said, “It does teach that you shouldn’t grieve overlong. . . . We can never return to the past and it’s best to bury the past.” See further commentary in Riddle, *Singer and Her Songs*, 114.

Fred High called it “The Woman That Lived in the West Countree” and told Hunter he learned it “when he was about 8 years old,” while Allie Long Parker sang it as “The Lady from the North Country” and said she learned her verses from her father.

(Ch. 5): “*Orphant Girl*” and Variants

Here’s what Riddle had to say about “Orphant Girl,” a ballad taught to her by an elderly neighbor she called Aunt Sally Bittle: “I loved it then and I still do. I think it’s one of the most beautiful ballads I’ve heard.” See Riddle, *Singer and Her Songs*, 96.