

I'll Meet You On That Other Shore

Field recordings from Alan Lomax's
"Southern Journey,"
1959 - 1960



SIDE ONE

A1. What's the Matter Now?

Fred McDowell, vocal and guitar.

Como, Mississippi. September 25, 1959.

Fred McDowell was a farmer who emerged from the woods on the first day of fall, 1959, and ambled over to his neighbor Lonnie Young's front porch in his overalls with a guitar in hand. Lomax had no idea what he was in for, but after McDowell's first song he knew he was in the presence of one of the most original, talented, and affecting country bluesmen ever recorded.

The question Fred asks here - "What's the matter now?" - is common in recorded blues of the 1920s and '30s, with the singer typically following the question with something along the lines of "You want to quit me, baby, and you don't know how" or "you don't mean me no good no-how." But this version, as with most of Fred McDowell's blues, is in text, delivery, and spirit very much his own. His wife, Annie Mae, taking issue with some of his insinuations, can be heard in the background while she sweeps up the porch.

A2. The Eighth of January.

Carlos "Bookmilller" Shannon, banjo.

Timbo, Arkansas. October 6, 1959.

"The Eighth of January" was originally entitled "Jackson's Victory" after Andrew Jackson's celebrated and unlikely triumph over the British at the Battle of New Orleans, on the eighth of

January, 1815. But, as Andrew Kuntz has written, Jackson's reputation suffered during the Civil War and the tune's name was changed to "The Eighth of January" to commemorate the victory rather than its commander. As widespread as it was, it became even more so as an adaptation by Jimmy Driftwood, Bookmilller Shannon's Ozark landsman, who added a few lines of verse and renamed it "The Battle of New Orleans." In 1959, the same year of this recording, it gave Johnny Horton a #1 Billboard hit on both sides of the Atlantic, and in the UK, on the battle's losing side, skiffle pioneer Lonnie Donegan rode it to #2.

A3. Old Gospel Ship.

Ruby Vass, vocal and guitar.

Hillsville, Virginia. August 29, 1959.

The Vass family were well-known song-collectors, musicians, and radio performers in Carroll County, Virginia. Ruby herself was a popular singer and guitarist, and had won second place for guitar at the Galax Fiddlers' Convention in 1955. This country gospel number made a successful record for the Carter Family, and Vass' performance of it betrays the influence of her famous fellow South-west Virginians. She also recorded the Carters' "Single Girl, Married Girl" for Lomax, as well as a version of the maudlin ballad "It's Sinful to Flirt," first commercially released in 1925 by Ernest V. Stoneman, also a Carroll County native.

A4. None But the Righteous.

Caleb Garris, lead vocal, with the Union Choir of the Church of God and Saints of Christ. Belleville, Virginia. April 30, 1960.

The Church of God and Saints of Christ was founded in 1896 by Prophet William Saunders Crowdy, who taught that African Americans are the true descendants of the Ten Tribes of Israel. Its members, often called the Black Hebrews or Black Israelites, observe the holidays of the Jewish calendar, keep the Sabbath, and wear yarmulkes; they also use elements of Christian ritual, like immersion baptism. The First Tabernacle of the COGASOC, located in Belleville, Virginia, outside of Suffolk, is home to an a cappella choir with a repertoire of unique spirituals, drawn from the Hebrew Bible and composed especially for use in the Church. "I myself have heard no group," Lomax wrote in 1960, that "combines in such an engaging way a repertoire of fresh and thoroughly inspired songs, a conventional choral technique, and which at the same time has not lost the rhapsodic, swinging style that ennobles and enlivens American Negro folk music." The Church describes their songs as being "borne of the personal and spiritual experience of their authors and also reflect the doctrine and history of our Organization. The lyrics are often taken directly from scripture and enwrapped in engaging melodies." This performance is a medley of three classic African American spirituals: "Didn't Old Pharoah Get Lost," "Rock of Ages," and "None But the Righteous."



Members of the Union Choir of the Church of God and Saints Of Christ. Belleville, Virginia.

A5. Why Must I Wear This Shroud?

George Spangler, lead vocal, with Thornton Old Regular Baptist Church congregation. Mayking, Kentucky. September 6, 1959.

Standing in contrast to the tightly rehearsed, highly refined, and joyous spirituals of the Belleville Choir is the somber lined-out hymnody of the Old Regular Baptists. Lined hymns - in which a leader "lines out" a verse for the congregants to sing back, in their own fashion and their own time - are a rare hold-over of a once-widespread style of congregational singing. Dating to the middle of the seventeenth century, lining was practiced throughout the British Isles and New England, but by 1959 they were being sung in just a handful of

remote locales: in Presbyterian churches of Scotland's Gaelic-speaking Western Isles; among some African American Baptist (and, occasionally, Methodist) churches in the deep South; and in the Old Regular Baptist meeting-houses of the Central Appalachians. Alan Lomax read the text of "Why Must I Wear This Shroud" as a particularly apt reflection of the early American Revivalists' daily preoccupation with death. "The closeness of all mortals to the grave, the brevity of life, the relief from earthly sorrow offered by death - these were all perennial themes of our Protestant ancestors. This may seem morbid to us moderns, who are shielded from direct contact with death by the funeral director, but to the common folk of the past death was an everyday experience. War, plague, childbed fever, starvation, fatal work accidents, public executions, all were common experiences."

A6. Sing Anything.

Neal Morris, vocal and guitar.

Mountain View, Arkansas. October 6, 1959.

Neal Morris was the father of Jimmie Driftwood - singer, songwriter ("Tennessee Stud" was his composition), and de facto folk-music ambassador of the Ozarks - and himself a font of Ozark ballads, lyric pieces, and humorous songs like this nineteenth-century minstrel composition. Lomax was taken with Morris' use of the phrase "root, hog, or die," an aphorism traceable to Daniel Boone's times and especially evocative of the hard-scrabble lives of the Ozark frontiersmen. Morris explained: "There's been a saying among the mountain people that means if you don't work you don't get

anything to eat. The pig's got to root if he gets anything to eat." Shortly after Lomax's recordings with Neal, folklorist John Quincy Wolf turned up a nearly identical version of "Sing Anything" on the other side of the Ozark National Forest - sixty miles from Timbo as the crow flies and a long way in these mountains - perhaps testifying to its enduring relevance in the region.

A7. Black Woman (Wild Ox Moan).

Vera Ward Hall, vocal.

Livingston, Alabama. October 10, 1959.

Adele "Vera" Ward Hall (1902-1964), who worked all of her life as a washerwoman, nursemaid, and cook, was regarded by the Lomaxes as one of America's greatest singers. She first came to the attention of John A. Lomax in 1937, when Ruby Pickens Tartt, folklorist and chair of the Federal Writers' Project of Sumter County, Alabama, introduced them; Lomax recorded Hall during three separate sessions in 1937, 1939, and 1940, writing that she had "the loveliest voice I have ever recorded." She sang Baptist hymns with her cousin Dock Reed and other Livingston friends, but she was also willing to record blues, ballads, and "worldly songs" such as "Stagolee," "John Henry," and this proto-blues field holler learned from her friend Rich Amerson, and forbidden by her family. Alan Lomax met Hall in 1948, when he arranged for her and Reed to come New York City for an American Music Festival. Their time together resulted in six-and-a-half hours of recordings and the raw material for her oral biography, which Lomax published in *The Rainbow Sign* (1959). In that book Vera is



Vera Ward Hall, Livingston, Alabama.

called "Nora" to protect her identity and honor her confidences.

Amerson, who sang a passionate, innuendo-laden version of "Black Woman" for John A. Lomax in 1940, was characterized by Ruby Pickens Tartt as having "an inborn genius for melody: and his songs, spirituals or their half-brother, the blues, each born of sorrow and dream, have unique tenderness and appeal." The same can be said of Vera Ward Hall, whose more modest "Black Woman" is steeped in delicate pathos. Five years later Lomax wrote in her obituary in *Sing Out!*: "The sound comes from deep within her when she sings, from a source of gold and light, otherwise hidden, and falls directly upon your ear like sunlight.... It is from singers like Vera Hall that all of us who

love folk music in American have everything to learn. Her performances were all graced with dignity and love."

SIDE TWO

B1. Dangerous Blues.

Floyd Batts, vocal.

Camp 11, Parchman Farm (Mississippi State Penitentiary), Parchman, Mississippi.

September 16, 1959.

Alan Lomax first experienced the group work songs of Southern black prisoners in 1933, when he was seventeen years old. He and his father John A. Lomax visited penitentiaries that year in Texas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Mississippi, making the first audio recordings of a music remarkable for its intensity, creativity, and nobility in spite of the brutal conditions in which it was spawned. The Lomaxes were initially interested in the remote, insulated prison farms as potential repositories of antebellum black song; as Alan Lomax, Bruce Jackson, and others have noted, they were for all intents and purposes twentieth-century replicas of the slave plantation, with unpaid black laborers working under the whip and the gun. One of the musical holdovers from those dark days was the field holler - the free-metered, unaccompanied solo song of protest and complaint that sired the blues. This holler makes plain the singer's fantasy for vengeance and escape:

"Everbody talkin, Lord, bout ol dangerous blues
If I had my Special, Lord, I'd be dangerous too
A 32-20, Lord, do very well
A .45 'mattie, Lord, is a burnin hell
Just don't know, Lordy, I believe I will
Make home, Lord, man, way in Jacksonville."

This song was also found among inmates of Parchman's women's camp. Alan and his father John A. Lomax recorded it sung by a group of female prisoners in 1933, and in 1939 Herbert Halpert recorded a solo version at the camp performed by Mattie May Thomas.

B2. Railroad Bill.

Hobart Smith, vocal and guitar.
Bluefield, Virginia. August 24, 1959.

Over a dozen years had passed since Lomax had last seen the talented multi-instrumentalist Hobart Smith and his gifted ballad-singing sister, Texas Gladden. In 1946 the siblings had left their homes in Southwest Virginia's Blue Ridge for a trip to New York, a concert with Jean Ritchie at Columbia University, and a session at Decca Studios, where Lomax was then serving as a producer of an American folk music album series. Lomax's first stop in 1959 was to visit the Smith family, although he found that failing health had somewhat constricted the abilities Texas had demonstrated in '46 and earlier, in 1941, when Alan first recorded her. Hobart, on the other hand, was still as spry as ever - on guitar, fiddle, banjo, even piano.



Hobart Smith, Williamsburg, Virginia.

Smith had learned "Railroad Bill" from an albino named Bob Campbell, whom Hobart had met as a young man in Saltville's Smoky Row, near the train depot. "He was a tenor," Hobart recalled to Fleming Brown. "Had white eyebrows.... Great big tall fellow. His eyes would just dance in his head when he played that 'Railroad Bill.' And of all my traveling since, of all the colored people I've heard play it, of all the men I ever heard play it, I've never heard a man could beat Bob Campbell playing 'Railroad Bill.' Ah, he was wonderful. Ain't no question about it." The song, originally inspired by bandit and murderer Morris Slater, was common throughout the American South and was sung and played by blacks and whites alike.

Lomax's 1946 sessions, released on Moses Asch's Disc label in 1948, and his 1959 recordings of Hobart Smith deeply inspired many young folk revivalists, who began earnestly copying Smith's fiddle, banjo, and guitar styles. As Stephen Wade has written of "Railroad Bill," "to be able to play it was a mark of expertise." Meanwhile, according to John Cohen, Hobart was "going on old-age pension and worrying about his future." In 1963 Alan helped arrange concerts for him at Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music, Club 47 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and for the Friends of Old-Time Music in New York; a Newport Folk Festival appearance came in the summer of 1964. In this period, John Cohen says, "Hobart Smith's music was as fine and as distinctive as it was when he made his early recordings, but his chances of achieving the stature of his contemporaries" - other heroes of the Revival like Clarence Ashley and Roscoe Holcomb - "were cut short by death." Smith's health began failing later that year, and he died in January of 1965.

B3. I'll Meet You On that Other Shore.

Unidentified woman, lead vocal, with St. James Primitive Baptist Church congregation. Huntsville, Alabama. September 4, 1959.

Lomax recorded this remarkable short-meter hymn during a baptism service at St. James, in which members "getting happy" and shouting are heard rising from the congregation's steady, stately march of sound. Shirley Collins recalls that the Reverend's fifteen-year-old daughter was among the baptismal candidates of the day, and of the

recordings being made he remarked: "It's a great opportunity to send our voices to New York. I haven't got a ticket, but this way I'm glad to go." This hymn, a variant of the more common "The Other Shore," was given the guitar-evangelist treatment several times in the late 1920s. Elders McIntosh and Edwards recorded it in 1928 as "Take A Stand." The next year Blind Willie Johnson and his wife cut a version entitled "Take Your Stand," and it was the basis for Charley Patton's "I'm Goin' Home."

B4. Moses Was A Servant of the Lord.

Charles Barnett, vocal and washtub.

Weems, Virginia. May 5, 1960.

Lomax met Barnett, a former roustabout on the Rappahannock River steamboat wharfs, in the Northern Neck fishing town of Weems. Accompanying himself on a metal washtub, the 84-year-old Barnett giddily ran through a set of minstrel tunes, reels, and spirituals like this obscure piece, probably of local origin. Arnold Fisher, a member of the Bright Light Quartet - the vocal group of menhaden fishermen whom Lomax had traveled to the region to record - recalled Barnett as a well-known and colorful character around the area; a great dancer who "could jump in the air and click his heels twice before he came back down."



Spencer Moore. Chilhowie, Virginia.

B5. The Girl I Left Behind.

Spencer Moore, vocal and guitar; Roy Everett Blevins, mandolin.

Chilhowie, Virginia. September 3, 1959.

When Lomax visited him in 1959, Raymond Spencer Moore was farming tobacco on his small acreage in Southwestern Virginia. "A family man," Alan wrote of him later. "Hospitable, slow-spoken, and as genuine as a rail fence." Although Lomax only made four recordings of him, Spencer has been said to know over five hundred songs - including blues, hokum, minstrel material, play-party ditties, contemporary country compositions, and a few topical pieces of his own devising. He also had quite a repertoire of ballads of recent vintage and re-

gional application (such as "The Lawson Family Murders"), as well as this Americanized variant of a widely sung (and oft-parodied) item, first published in Dublin at least as early as 1806. As a child in Laurel Bloomery, Tennessee, Spencer was bounced on the knee of legendary fiddler G.B. Grayson, who would stop by to visit with Spencer's father, James Moore, himself a fiddler and banjo player. In the late '30s, Spence and his brother Joe organized a close-harmony duet in the style of the Blue Sky Boys and the Delmore Brothers, appearing at dances and tent shows as far away as New York and Pennsylvania, and on one occasion sharing the stage with the Carter Family. After service in World War II, Spencer and his wife settled near Chilhowie, where he continued to farm and play music with his brother, friends, and neighbors for many decades, only recently (mid-2009) moving into a nursing home at the age of ninety.

B6. Goodbye Honey, You Call That Gone.

Lucius Smith, banjo.

Senatobia, Mississippi. September 22, 1959.

Lucius Smith was approaching ninety years when Alan Lomax last saw him in 1978, and he could still pick out on his banjo some antique black country dance tunes like "Walking In the Parlor," "New Railroad," and this old breakdown. Smith was for many years the partner of the Mississippi Hill Country's musical patriarch: multi-instrumentalist, band-leader, and composer Sid Hemphill. Smith, Hemphill, and their string band played at dances and picnics for rich and poor, black and white alike, for over fifty years, until Sid died

in 1963.

"Good-bye, Ma Honey, If You Call That Gone" was a coon song composed by a moderately successful black songwriter named Nathan Bivins and published around 1900, although this tune of Lucius' is related in name only. It's closer melodically to the famous minstrel piece "Old John Booker" that black banjo pioneer and Hill Country native Gus Cannon recorded on several occasions as "Old John Booker, You Call That Gone." However, the lyrics that Lucius recites at the end, to the party's general amusement, aren't found in extant versions of "Old John Booker" or Bivins' original and he or Sid Hemphill might well have adapted them to the tune. (This isn't to suggest that either composed them. "I can't see how my money get away from me" is a bit of far-fung folksay, although Lomax also turned it up in a Parchman Farm work song just three days earlier).

Lucius' music was already rare in the Hill Country in 1959, and was certainly unrepresented outside of its vernacular context. As he tells Shirley Collins here, "you hear on the radio - ain't nobody play 'em like that." David Evans wrote in 1978 that "the banjo has practically died out in the folk music tradition of Tate and Panola Counties, and Lucius Smith may be the last competent player yet." Lucius Smith died in 1980, and the local banjo tradition indeed died with him.

B7. Moses, Don't Get Lost.

John Davis, lead vocal, with Joe Armstrong, Jerome Davis, Peter Davis, Bessie Jones, Henry Morrison, Willis Proctor, and Ben Ramsay.

St. Simons Island, Georgia. October 12, 1959. Lomax first visited the Georgia Sea Island of St. Simons in 1935, a trip for which his collaborator Zora Neale Hurston blacked his face with walnut juice oil so as not to call attention to their interracial research group. He found there a remarkable ensemble called the Spiritual Singers of Coastal Georgia, organized by Lydia Parrish (wife of painter Maxfield Parrish) two years earlier. Parrish was devoted to the task of preserving the spirituals, ring-plays, and shouts of the island's rich, isolated folk culture, with its roots running deep through the Antebellum South to West Africa.

Alan later wrote of the Sea Islanders that they "kept to the speech of their ancestors and, in

Sid Hemphill with quills;
Lucius Smith with banjo.



some places, still speak dialects in which many African words and syntactical features survive. Their folk and animal tales show a rich admixture of European and African traits at an early stage of blending. Their funeral customs, their religious ceremonies, indeed, their whole way of life bear the stamp of antebellum days. Yet this is no decadent culture. It has simply grown strong around a conservative base that is part pioneer, part planter gentility, and part African."

Among the members of the Spiritual Singers that Lomax met in 1935 were fisherman Henry Morrison and Big John Davis, a former sailor and stevedore, and a singer with an extensive repertoire of chauties, roustabout songs, slavery-era ring-plays, and religious material. Davis told Lomax then that he knew six separate songs concerning Moses but joked that "if I give them all to you now, you won't come back." And Alan recalled that when he did return, "twenty-five years later with a stereo rig adequate to record this multipart music, I was greeted as an old friend." This spiritual, exhorting Moses not to lose heart as Pharaoh pursues him, was one of two Moses-related songs Lomax collected in 1959 and is of obvious slavery-era origins.

B8. Rainbow Mid Life's Willows.

Almeda Riddle, vocal.

Greers Ferry, Arkansas. Early October, 1959.

For decades one of America's foremost traditional singers was Almeda "Granny" Riddle of Cleburne County, Arkansas, renowned for her singing and

her song-collecting. Although tornados - a common scourge of Northwestern Arkansas - had killed her husband and son, destroyed her home, and wiped out her treasured hand-written collection of ballads, she was still dedicated to seeking out and preserving the old songs. "Rainbow Mid Life's Willows," the macabre tale of a young woman imprisoned by her family to keep her from her lover, is also known in America as "Locks and Bolts," and it is descended from a British broadsheet published in 1631 as "The Constant Lover." Riddle discovered the text in a notebook kept by a girl who had been dead for over forty years; it was stored away among her effects in the girl's grandmother's attic. When Almeda brought it home, she found that her father could recall its first and last verses, as well as its tune, which she sings here. Granny Riddle became a fixture on the folk-festival circuit from the mid-1960s through the early '80s, and made a number of albums reflecting her huge collection of ballads, lyric songs, children's material, and hymns. Lomax's 1959 recordings were her first. She died in 1986.



All recordings made by Alan Lomax on an Ampex 602-2, "Suitcase Model" tape machine. Assisted by Shirley Collins (1959) and Anna Lomax (1960). Photo of Alan Lomax and Wade Ward by Shirley Collins. All others by Alan Lomax.

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Front cover photo: John Dudley, Dairy Camp, Mississippi State Penitentiary (Parchman Farm).
This page: Sid Hemphill with fiddle;
Lucius Smith with banjo.

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