

Dreary Black Hills

As sung by
Winfield Moody
08-27-1940 Plainfield, WI

The Dreary Black Hills

Kind friends, pay at - ten - tion to a ver - y sad tale; I'm an ob - ject that
~~need - y~~ a look - ing quite ~~stale~~. I left off my trade, boys, sell - ing rat traps and
pills, For to go and dig gold in the drear - y Black Hills. Then don't you
go, boys, stay, stay a - way if you can, Far from the cit - y they call Chey -
enne, Where the great Wall - a - fee, and the great com - rade, Bill, They'll take off your
scalps in the drear - y Black Hills.

Text retyped on Copy I

Verse 1.

Kind friends pay attention to a very sad tale,
I'm an object that's needy, a-looking quite stale,
I left off my trade, boys, selling rat traps and pills,
For to go and dig gold in the dreary Black Hills.

Chorus

Then don't you go boys, stay, stay away if you can,
Far from the city they call Cheyenne,
Where the great Wallafee, and the great comrade Bill,
They'll take off your scalps in the dreary Black Hills.

Verse 2.

When I got to the Black Hills, no gold could I find,
But I thought of the free lunch I left far behind,
Oh, the rain here and snow, boys, goes up to the gill,
And they call you the orphan boy, oh, of the Black Hills.

Verse 3.

It's Cheyenne to the roundhouse, there she's filled every night,
With bummers of ev'ry description and plight,
Not a rag on their backs, in their pockets no bills,
But still they'll keep striking out for the Black Hills.

Transcription and lyrics from the Helene Stratman-Thomas Collection.

Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by Peters, p. 116, and HST.

HST notes:

In the "Professional Papers series:

Sung by Winfield Moody, age 70, Plainfield, 1940.

This song tells the disappointment of many of the prospectors who looked for gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota. In Mr. Moody's version the orphan of the Black Hills gave up his trade of selling "rat traps and pills"; in other versions he gave up selling "Wright's patent pills." Scalpers "Wallifee and Comrade Bill" probably come from the Walapai tribe and Comanche Bill.

Editor's notes:

Flanders et. al. write that this text was first printed on a broadside, an original of which is in the Barry Collection of Ballad Prints (Flanders 109). They claim that the tune's first publication was in Lomax, *Cowboy Songs* (Flanders 109); however, this tune is different from Mr. Moody's. Many different tunes have been collected; for example, the tune Sandburg recorded is in 6/8 meter while Mr. Moody's is in 3/4.

Sources:

Flanders, Helen Hartness, Elizabeth Flanders Ballard, George Brown, and Phillips Barry, collectors, transcribers, and editors. *The New Green Mountain Songster: Traditional Folk Songs of Vermont*. New Haven: Yale University Press; London: H. Milford: Oxford University Press, 1939. text only

Larkin, Margaret, collector and editor. *Singing Cowboy: A Book of Western Songs*. Piano arrangements by Helen Black. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931.

Lomax, John A., collector. *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*. 1916. New edition with additions. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1922. Different tune.

Lomax, John A. and Alan Lomax, collectors and compilers. *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. New York, Macmillan, 1934.

Peters, Harry B., ed. *Folk Songs out of Wisconsin: An Illustrated Compendium of Words and Music*. Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977.

Sandburg, Carl. *American Songbag*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927. lyrics nearly the same, but tune is fairly different.

Tillett, Beverly, editor. *Jerry Silverman's Folk song Encyclopedia*. Vol. II. New York: Chappell Music Company, 1975.

K.G.