

Cowboys liked to sing about their work (and the trouble they got into)! This audio clip, from the Library of Congress, provides an example.

It's called "Old Chisholm Trail," and it's performed by Frank Goodwyn.

Of course, at the time of Bass Reeves and the years when Texas Longhorns were actually moved over the Chisholm Trail, between Texas and the cow towns of Kansas, it wasn't possible to record their songs. But this, at least, gives us an example.

Goodwyn recorded this song in 1939. This image depicts how he appeared the following year.



The song, itself, actually dates back to the 1870s. It was one of the most-popular songs which cowboys sang during the heyday of the cattle drives between Texas and the cow towns of Kansas.

History tells us that the song itself is based on an English lyrical work which dates back as far as 1640. The words, of course, were modified to fit a cowboy's life.

Here's another interesting fact about singing on the cow trails, like the Chisholm. Cattle, moving slowly north in herds, seemed to like listening to music. Singing was one of the ways which cowboys used to keep the herds calm (and to avoid dangerous stampedes).

Edward C. Abbott—better known as “Teddy Blue Abbott”—was an Englishman who came to America, with his family, when he was a boy. He recalled how singing helped the cattle:

The singing was supposed to soothe the cattle and it did... The two men on guard would circle around with their horses on a walk, if it was a clear night and the cattle was bedded down and quiet, and one man would sing a verse of a song, and his partner on the other side of the herd would sing another verse; and you'd go through a whole song that way...

I had a crackerjack of a partner in '79 [that would be 1879]. I'd sing and he'd answer, and we'd keep it up like that for two hours. But he was killed by lightning.

Here are the words to one version of “The Old Chisholm Trail,” a song which members of the Western Writers of America chose as one of the top 100 Western songs of all time.

The Old Chisholm Trail

*Come along boys and listen to my tale,
I'll tell you of my troubles on the old Chisholm trail.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*Oh, a ten-dollar hoss and a forty-dollar saddle,
And I'm goin' to punchin' Texas cattle.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*I wake in the mornin' afore daylight,
And afore I sleep the moon shines bright.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*It's cloudy in the west, a-lookin' like rain,
And my durned old slicker's in the wagon again.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*No chaps, no slicker, and it's pourin' down rain,
And I swear, by gosh, I'll never night-herd again.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*Feet in the stirrups and seat in the saddle,
I hung and rattled with them long-horn cattle.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*The wind commenced to blow, and the rain began to fall,
Hit looked, by grab, like we was goin' to lose 'em all.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*I don't give a darn if they never do stop;
I'll ride as long as an eight-day clock.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*We rounded 'em up and put 'em on the cars,
And that was the last of the old Two Bars.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*Oh, it's bacon and beans most every day,
I'd as soon be a-eatin' prairie hay.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*I went to the boss to draw my roll,
He had it figgered out I was nine dollars in the hole.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*Goin' back to town to draw my money,
Goin' back home to see my honey.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

*With my knees in the saddle and my seat in the sky,
I'll quit punchin' cows in the sweet by and by.*

*Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea,
Come a ti yi yippee, come a ti yi yea.*

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Photo, of Goodwyn, by Ruby Terrill Lomax. Part of the Library's "Lomax Collection (LOT 7414)."

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Frank Goodwyn - Cowboy Singer

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