

SELLING WITH A SONG:  
OCCUPATIONAL FOLK CRIES OF TEXAS

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under our  
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## PREFACE

This thesis is concerned with the problem of preserving the songs and cries of the peddlers, vendors, and other occupational hucksters who have been a colorful part of the culture of Texas. As such, they are an important phase of the state's folklore. These musical cries have been used by peddlers, who hawked their wares by foot or wagon, to lure customers to the products they had to sell. In recent years they have faded from the scene, largely because of new inventions, as well as federal, state, and municipal regulations, which have restricted their methods of earning a livelihood.

Because of the scarcity of published material on the subject, most of the information related to Texas peddlers has been derived from personal interviews with pioneers who recall their songs and cries, as well as with former peddlers or vendors still operating on a limited scale. To secure this material, the writer traveled two thousand miles over Texas to seek out in representative areas of the state those who would remember the days when the peddler was at the peak of his popularity---when people depended upon him to supply their needs and wants.

To show the value of such information as that contained in this thesis, the first chapter is devoted to a survey of the

manner in which writers, musicians, and artists have used peddlers and their cries to inject realistic color into their works. Those of all types and of all ages have been preserved in literature, music, and art ever since the Middle Ages of Chaucer, and perhaps long before. Shakespeare's Autolycus, Hogarth's Pieman, and Gershwin's strawberry and crab vendors are unforgettable characters.

The Yankee tin peddler was a familiar figure in early America, and the foot and wagon vendors moved westward across the nation as new frontiers were opened. But it was the later part of the nineteenth century before they invaded Texas in large numbers. It is the songs and cries of these hot tamale, watermelon, charcoal, fruit, and vegetable peddlers that are recaptured here, in order that they will not be lost to future generations.

The final chapter records the modern-day counterpart of the songs and cries of the street peddlers of yesteryear---the singing commercials of radio and television. Some folklore authorities believe that a few of these musical rhymes sung by the peddlers of the airwaves may someday become folk tunes, if they are sung often enough.

The writer wishes to express her sincere appreciation to Dr. Eleanor James for her helpful guidance in directing



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The almost one hundred persons throughout Texas who contributed information about this state's peddlers and their songs have been credited in footnotes throughout this manuscript. However, the writer would be ungrateful if she did not express her appreciation to them here.

Many others helped in the gathering of material by suggesting persons to be interviewed. These include J. Frank Dobie, famous Texas folklorist, author, and for many years editor of the Publications of the Texas Folk-Lore Society; Mody C. Boatright of the University of Texas and editor of the Publications of the Texas Folk-Lore Society; Morris Frank of the Houston Chronicle; Sigmund Byrd, author and Houston Press columnist; C. S. Boyles, Jr., of Sherman, writer and former newspaperman; Miss Lucille Holland and J. Q. Mahaffey of the Texarkana Gazette-News; Mrs. Percy Clark of Marshall; Mrs. T. Jay Foster of Pasadena; Mr. and Mrs. Mark Adams of Austin; Mr. and Mrs. Harry Quin of Temple; Mr. and Mrs. John D. Hart and Mrs. W. A. Foster of Lufkin; Mrs. G. Lee Reynolds, Sr., and Mrs. George Surkey of San Antonio; Anne Durrum Robinson and Marye Durrum Benjamin of Austin; and Mr. and Mrs. Robert James of Belton.

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The vagrant merchant under heavy load,  
Bent as he moves, and needing frequent rest;  
Yet do such travellers find their own delight;  
And their hard service, deemed debasing now  
Gained merited respect in simpler times;  
When squire, and priest, and they who round  
    them dwelt  
In rustic sequestration---all dependent  
Upon the PEDLAR'S toil---supplied their wants,  
Or pleased their fancies with the wares he brought.

---William Wordsworth.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER I

### LITERARY AND ARTISTIC RECORDS

From the time of Christ, and perhaps long before, peddlers have cried their wares in the streets and around market places of cities and towns throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> All nations have heard their songs, and all races have had their typical hawkers of goods symbolic of their ages and cultures. The peddler presents a colorful picture in any setting, and his song is a musical reminder of fading eras.

The folklore of an eon or a generation, of a country or a state, of a nationality or a race is incomplete without a record of the figure who was so much a part of the

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<sup>1</sup>"The Excursion," The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1905), pp. 419-20.

<sup>2</sup>Par Lagerkvist, Barabbas (New York: Random House, Inc., 1951), p. 53. "He steered clear of the temple square and the fashionable streets around it and kept to the alleyways of the lower city, where the craftsmen sat working in their shops and the hawkers cried their wares."



age in which he, in the manner of his time, supplied the wants and needs of the squires and housewives. He was, and still is in less industrialized nations and communities, that "vagrant merchant"<sup>1</sup> described by Wordsworth who toiled to please the fancies of his customers. He has been preserved for future generations in literature, music, and art. Poets have been inspired to versify about him, just as other writers have presented him as an important part of the background to depict certain ages in their works. Playwrights have used him to give a realistic setting for their dramas, and artists have painted him in their scenes, sometimes as the central figure.

The earliest literary record of the imaginative and musical vendors is found in the works of several English poets of the Middle Ages. The best known of these, Chaucer, was more interested in character types, and although he does not record any of their hawking songs, his friar and "doctor of phisik" are forerunners of the traveling salesmen of merchandise and the mountebanks who "went about the world selling health"<sup>2</sup> in later years. A professed disciple of Chaucer and one of the most influential poets of his time was John Lydgate, a monk of Bury St. Edmunds. A prolific writer in

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 419.

<sup>2</sup>Jean J. Jusserand, English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), p. 183.

his day, he recorded the songs of the London street peddlers in his "London Lackpenny,"<sup>1</sup> which humorously portrays the disadvantages of being in the metropolis with an empty purse.

A numerous race in the Middle Ages, not yet impeded by legal restrictions and modern inventions, peddlers are a people whose way to success is through "fair speech and enticing words."<sup>2</sup> They were needed in days before super-highways opened a speedy road to town markets and before printed advertisements and radio commercials lured customers to established stores and standard-brand products. In recent generations they have been and still are found in remote areas or in lands that are slow to give up tradition and custom. When people could not come to them, they were forced to move around to sell their wares.

In medieval England even the wandering friars became peddlers. As they went about preaching in the small villages, they gathered needles, thread, silks, knives, and other articles, which they later traded for food, shelter, and their other needs. This was recorded by John Wyclif in 1380 as he told how the friars plenished their wallets and then peddled their wares: "Thei becomen pedleris, berynge knyves, pursis, pynnys and girdlis and spices and sylk and precious pellure

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<sup>1</sup>"Street Cries," The Columbia Encyclopedia, 2d ed., 1904.

<sup>2</sup>Jusserand, English Wayfaring Life, p. 234.

and forrouris for wymmen."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Chaucer's wanton and merry friar, whose license to beg limited him to a certain district, always had a tippet full of knives and pins to give fair wives.<sup>2</sup>

Another poet of medieval England, William Langland, used the cry of a pie-man in his Piers the Plowman. After telling in verse of the various types of tradesmen, such as the bakers and butchers, the tailors and tanners, and the masons and miners, he quoted the cooks and their boys who cry, "Hot pies, hot!"<sup>3</sup> The English pie-man is popular with all children who are readers of Mother Goose, but Katherine Elwes Thomas sought to show how "Simple Simon" and other nursery rhymes and jingles connected with the name of Mother Goose are in reality "political diatribes, religious philippics and popular street songs, embodying comedies, tragedies, and love episodes of many great historical personages lavishly interspersed with dramatic abandon."<sup>4</sup> The pie-man of "Simple Simon," she said, was King James VI of Scotland, whose wares

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> Canterbury Tales, trans. J. U. Nicolson (Garden City, N. Y.: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1934), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard D. Grebanier et al., English Literature and Its Backgrounds (New York: The Dryden Press, 1949, I, p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> The Real Personages of Mother Goose (Boston: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co., 1930), p. 17.

were "glittering titles of nobility for which history records a marvelously quick and plentiful sale" to fill his depleted treasury.<sup>1</sup>

The "hot cross buns" sold in the streets by warbling vendors found its way into a nursery rhyme. According to Miss Thomas, this jingle is said to be "as ancient as the Romans. . . . the cradle of hot-cross bun-making is in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. There, the old Roman roads crossing the Ickneld and Armynges streets, was formerly an altar to Diana of the Crossways, whereon the Romans and early English offered their sacred cakes."<sup>2</sup> The actual cry heard in the streets of London in the nineteenth century was "Hot cross buns, one a penny buns, one a penny, two a penny, hot cross buns."<sup>3</sup>

The traveling chapman's pack was the itinerant shop of Chaucer's time, and on his back the peddler carried household wares which he distributed the same as the minstrel spread the literature of the day and the messenger brought news and pardons from Rome. The contents of a peddler's box at that time is shown in a series of illustrations in a fourteenth century manuscript, "where a pedlar is represented

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 199-200.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 328-29.

<sup>3</sup>J. Macray, "Street Melody" (music by Packard Hall), Notes and Queries, Third Series, VII (January-June, 1865), p. 24.

asleep at the foot of a tree, while monkeys . . . help themselves to the contents of his box."<sup>1</sup> In it they find vests, caps, gloves, musical instruments, cutlasses, pewter pots, and other articles.

If it were necessary to single out the best-known peddler in literature, perhaps it should be Shakespeare's Autolycus. The sharp-tongued rogue and wandering vendor of The Winter's Tale was not too scrupulous, but he sang a merry song to unload his pack:

Will you buy any tape,  
Or lace for your cape,  
My dainty duck, my dear-a?  
Any silk, any thread,  
Any toys for your head,  
Of the new'st and fin'st, fin'st wear-a?  
Come to the pedlar;  
Money's a meddler  
That doth utter all men's ware-a.<sup>2</sup>

And quite a salesman he was, for the influence he could wield with his song made the products he had to sell vanish almost as quickly as the rabbit beneath the magician's black cloth. The entranced servant tells his master, ". . . he sings several tunes faster than you'll tell money; he utters them as he had eaten ballads, and all men's ears grew to his tunes. . . . why, he sings 'em over, as they were gods

<sup>1</sup>Jusserand, English Wayfaring Life, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>IV, iii, The Works of William Shakespeare (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 1122.

or goddesses; you would think a smock were a she-angel, he  
so chants to the sleeve-hand, and the work about the square  
on't.<sup>1</sup> Autolycus enters, singing:

Lawn as white as driven snow;  
Cyprus black as e'er was crow;  
Gloves as sweet as camask roses;  
Masks for faces and for noses;  
Bugle-bracelet, necklace amber,  
Perfume for a lady's chamber;  
Golden quoifs and stomachers,  
For my lads to give their dears;  
Pins and poking-sticks of steel,  
What maids lack from head to heel;  
Come buy of me, come, come, buy, come buy;  
Buy, lads, or else your lasses cry:  
Come buy.<sup>2</sup>

In The Shepheard's Calender Edmund Spenser in 1579  
penned a sympathetic description of the peddler as he wrote  
of "May":

All as a poore pedler he did wend,  
Bearing a trusse of tryfles at hys backe.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps one of the best known of the London street  
cries was the "Cherry Ripe," which inspired several poets to  
record it in verse. Although Robert Herrick's poem of that  
title is the best known, at least one poet before him was re-  
minded of his lady-love by the musical chant of the vendors  
who sold the delicious red fruit. Writing of the garden of  
roses and white lilies in his fair one's face, Thomas Campion

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 1121.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 1127.

<sup>3</sup>"Pedlar," NED, VII, 610.

ends his 1617 verse with:

There cherries grow, which none may buy  
Till "Cherry Ripe" themselves do cry.<sup>1</sup>

But Herrick's poem, published first in 1648, became a popular song after it was set to music by Charles Edward Horn in 1824.<sup>2</sup> The following year Madame Vestris sang it at Vauxhall.<sup>3</sup> Herrick's well-known version, describing his Julia's smiling lips, starts:

Cherry-ripe, ripe, ripe, I cry.  
Full and fair ones; come and buy.<sup>4</sup>

The songs of the street vendors were part of the evidence of the "good times" in England in the early seventeenth century as the post-Elizabethan countrymen enjoyed the fruits of the Renaissance, according to Thomas Dekker's description of London at that time. In "Sloth" (ca. 1606), Dekker wrote, "In the centre of the town, the air of prosperity has increased; streets are filled with people and waggons, hawkers cry their wares, . . . ."<sup>5</sup> In his translation of Olearius' Voyaging Ambassador (1662), J. Davies wrote, "There was a passage . . . . from the Castle to the Church, along which

<sup>1</sup>"Cherry Ripe," Grebanier, op. cit., p. 334.

<sup>2</sup>James Watson, "Cherry-Ripe," Notes and Queries, Tenth Series, V (January-June, 1906), 254.

<sup>3</sup>"Cherry-Ripe," Notes and Queries, IV (July-December, 1905), 469.

<sup>4</sup>Herrick's Hesperides and Noble Numbers (London: George Routledge & Sons, Limited, 1928), T, 21.

<sup>5</sup>Jusserand, A Literary History of the English People (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1926), p. 292.

came first several peddling merchants, who sold wax candles."<sup>1</sup>

Some London cries were recorded in a small booklet, Pecuniae Obediunt Omnia: Money Masters All Things, published at York in 1696. Several were quoted in 1906 by Aleck Abrahams of London, who said he took them from the second edition of "that sacred little work." They included:

Turnips and Sandwich carrots, one man calls,  
Green Hastings in my cart, another bawls.

Buy earthen-ware, says one; others with Bags  
Cry up and down, Take money for old Rags.

Who buys my bak'd ox-cheek here in my pot,  
Plump, fresh, and fat, well stew'd, and piping hot.<sup>2</sup>

Another descriptive passage he quoted has a modern counterpart in mid-twentieth century China, where streets still are crowded with stands of food vendors and strolling peddlers who hawk their wares from baskets at each end of a bamboo pole, which they balance on their shoulders.<sup>3</sup> The English verse was:

Some carry painted Clothes on little Poles,  
By which it's known such men do catch moles;  
Others on clothes some painted Rats have made,  
Which notifies Rat-catching is their trade.

<sup>1</sup>"Peddling," NED, VII, 607.

<sup>2</sup>"London Cries," Notes and Queries, Tenth Series, VI (July-December, 1906), 434.

<sup>3</sup>Reported by A. L. Crouch, Fort Worth, who saw and heard the vendors while he was in China several years ago. To attract customers to their stands, the vendors would hit and scrape bamboo sticks together to make noise. Crouch said one peddler who sold rat poison "had dead rats hanging on his clothes to indicate the efficiency of his product."



The health hawkers, who peddled their questionable drugs by appealing vocally to the throngs who gathered around them in village streets, in market places, or at fairs, were among the earliest of the singing vendors. Even before Chaucer included his "doctour of phisik" among his Canterbury pilgrims, a French poet and author of many fabliaux and satires in the thirteenth century described a medicinal herbalist who lured customers with a vigorous spiel and a cheap price of a pence, so the poor as well as the rich could buy. Rutebeuf's herbalist pleaded that he was "not one of those poor preachers, nor one of those poor herbalists who stand in front of churches with their miserable ill-sown cloak, who carry boxes and sachets and spread out a carpet."<sup>1</sup> He explained that he had gone to different lands and countries "to kill wild beasts in order to extract good ointments from them, and give medicine to those who are ill in body."

The medicine men of Chaucer's day in England usually spread a carpet on the village green or in the market place to display their drugs before they broke into their chanting harangue. During the Renaissance the medical quacks continued to prosper. John Heywood's Potheary sold a syrapus de Byzans, which he described in such a way that whether the patient

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<sup>1</sup>Jusserand, A Literary History, p. 184.

lived or died, he was right:

These be the thynges that breke all stryfe,  
Betweene mannes syknes and his lyfe;  
From all payne these shall you delever  
And set you even at reste for ever.<sup>1</sup>

Another descendant of Rutebeuf's herbalist was Ben Jonson's mountebank of the seventeenth century, Volpone, who exclaimed from his scaffold on St. Mark's Square in Venice, "O, health, health! the blessing of the rich! the riches of the poor! who can buy thee at too dear a rate, since there is no enjoying this world without thee."<sup>2</sup> Although proclaiming his medicine worth a thousand crowns, he agreed to sacrifice it at eight and finally dropped his price to sixpence. In addition to his healing drugs, he sold a powder which he claimed a friend found in Troy that gave beauty to Venus and Helen. Shortly afterward an English traveler, Thomas Coryat, wrote of the amazing spiel of the Italian mountebanks in Venice who "sold cyles, soveraigne waters, amorous songs printed, apothecary drugs, and a common-weale of other trifles."<sup>3</sup>

Toward the end of the nineteenth century the drug vendors continued to ply their trade, despite legal restrictions which hampered their vocal operations. The place to

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>2</sup>The Fox, II, 1, The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson, ed. Ernest Rhys (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1920), p. 425.

<sup>3</sup>Jusserand, A Literary History, p. 192.

see them then was at the Goose Fair at Nottingham, where "one may still hear at the present day discourses not very different from those they spoke in the fourteenth century in England, France, or Italy; their profession is one that has changed less than any."<sup>1</sup> In his day Jusserand wrote that the peasants gathered before the vendors of cures for toothache and tonics for other troubles. "This vendor talks, gesticulates, gets excited, leans over with a grave tone and a deep voice."<sup>2</sup>

In 1712 John Arbuthnot in his John Bull, a series of pamphlets ridiculing the Whig war policy in England, mentioned the vendors who "go hawking and peddling about the streets, selling knives, scissors, and shoe-buckles."<sup>3</sup> His contemporary, John Gay, acknowledged the resounding cries on the cobble-stoned London streets as part of the bustle and color of his day. In his Trivia, describing London street life in the early dawn, he wrote:

Now industry awakes her busy sons,  
Full charged with news the breathless hawker runs;  
Shops open, coaches roll, carts shake the ground,  
And all the streets with passing cries resound.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>3</sup>"Peddle," NED, VII, 606.

<sup>4</sup>G. Baldwin Brown, William Hogarth in The Makers of British Art, James A. Manson (ed.) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 96.

He went even further to denote how the cries differed at various times of the year to such an extent that Rip Van Winkle could have awakened from his long sleep and determined the season by the sounds he heard. The songs of the peddler, the mountebank, and the hawkers at fairs and shows are described in ballad in The Beggar's Opera. In the stalls of the peddlers could be found "silken laces, pins and amber bracelets, knives, combs, scissors, thimbles," while the mountebank sold "his pills, his balsams and his ague-spells."<sup>1</sup> The fishmongers attracted the attention of F. Kirby as he wrote in his Suffolk Traveller (1764), "It is no unusual thing for Peddars to attend the Tides regularly, receive and pack up the Fish, on the common Key."<sup>2</sup>

From a literary standpoint the nineteenth century appears most replete in recognition of the wandering vendors who sold their wares with a song. Some writers were nostalgic, like Charles Lamb, who linked the London street singers with the beggar he described as "the only free man in the universe," and added, "I can no more spare them than I could the Cries of London. No corner of the street is complete without them."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. Garnett and Sir Edmund Gosse (eds.), An Illustrated History of English Literature (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1935), III, 216.

<sup>2</sup>"Pedder," NED, VII, 606.

<sup>3</sup>"A Complaint on the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis," The Essays of Elia (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1947), p. 136.

Another of his essays was written in "The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers,"<sup>1</sup> in which he applauds the pictorial satirist, William Hogarth, for having captured the sweep in one of his street scenes.

News hawkers, vegetable vendors, and the town watchman were used by William Thackeray to paint background scenes in his novel, The History of Henry Esmond, Esquire. He described the early morning in Kensington when the "street-criers were already out with their broadsides, shouting through the town the full, true and horrible account of the death of Lord Mohun and Duke Hamilton in a duel." Esmond also saw and heard "the market-carts rolling into London . . . the wandering merchants and hawkers filling the air with their cries." In another scene the watchman calling the hour "sang his cry of 'Past ten o'clock and a starlight night.'"2 In Sultan Stork, Thackeray wrote of "an old pedlar-woman, who was displaying her wares."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>Modern Library Edition (New York: Random House, n. d.), pp. 514, 515, 587. A century before, Robert Herrick had reproduced the town crier's call in his eight-line poem, "The Bellman (1)" (Robert P. Tristram Coffin and Alexander M. Witherspoon (eds.), Seventeenth Century Prose and Poetry (New York, 1929), p. 72). The poem ends with the couplet:  
 Past one o'clock and almost two,  
 My masters all, good day to you!

<sup>3</sup>"Pedlar," NED, VII, 610.

George Eliot's Bob Jakin, the jovial owner of the dog Mumps,<sup>1</sup> was a nineteenth century replica of Shakespeare's Autolycus. In Oliver Twist, one of the novels of Charles Dickens which hastened social reforms in England, the author described prison conditions partly by pointing to a peddler in a cell "who was going to the same prison for hawking tin saucepans without a license; thereby doing something for his living, in defiance of the Stamp-office."<sup>2</sup>

Christina Rossetti's goblins mimicked the songs of the fruit peddlers as they pleaded, "Come buy our orchard fruits,/ Come buy, come buy." They sang of their "grapes fresh from the vine," their apples, quinces, lemons and oranges, melons and raspberries, "plump unpecked cherries," peaches, apricots, and strawberries "all ripe together in summer weather."<sup>3</sup> The cry of a girl fishmonger in Dublin, as she wheeled her barrow through the narrow streets has been recorded by Margaret Bradford Boni. Her familiar song, from which an Irish folk song evolved, was "Cock-les and mus-sels; A-live, a-live oh!"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Mill on the Floss (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1948).

<sup>2</sup>Library of Classics (London and Glasgow: Collins Clear-Type Press, n. d.), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup>"Goblin Market," The Poetical Works of Christina Rossetti (London: MacMillan and Company, Limited, 1924), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Fireside Book of Folk Songs (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1947), p. 22.

Numerous are the indications that British writers of the nineteenth century neither overlooked nor were unimpressed by the role of the peddler in the life and customs of their day. The Scottish folklorist and historian, Sir Walter Scott, whose collection of old ballads led to his first major poem,<sup>1</sup> mentioned "the pedder-coffe who travels the land"<sup>2</sup> in one of his historical novels, The Monastery (1820). In his Vocabulary of East Anglia (1825), Forby wrote of the "pedder, one who carries wares in a ped, pitches it in open market, and sells from it."<sup>3</sup> Nancy Russell Mitford referred to Shakespeare's famous huckster as she described the "solid old-fashioned silken pincushions, such as Autolycus might have carried about amongst his pedlery-ware."<sup>4</sup> Anthony Trollope attempted to differentiate between trade and peddling in his Orley Farm (1862) by declaring, "I call it hawking and peddling, that going around the country with your goods on your back. It ain't trade."<sup>5</sup>

Salmon was peddled about the streets of Somers Town at "fip-pence" a pound in the early part of the nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup>The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805), Scott's Complete Works (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), Vol. 23, pp. 141-295.

<sup>2</sup>"Pedder-coffe," NED, VII, 606.

<sup>3</sup>"Pedder," ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"Pedlary," ibid., 610. This refers to Our Village, Series I (1863), p. 216.

<sup>5</sup>"Peddling," ibid., 607.

century, Edwin Roffe of that town recalled in 1864: "There was one little man in particular (always attired in Naples yellow-looking corduroy breeches) who seemed to devote himself with great constancy to the sale of that fish." The salmon man would lure customers with a musical cry he delivered in a clear tenor voice, "Delicate salmon, dainty fresh salmon!"<sup>1</sup> About the same time was heard:

Young lambs to sell, young lambs to sell.  
If I'd as much money as I could tell, <sup>2</sup>  
I never would cry Young lambs to sell.

One singer of this song was an old soldier with a wooden leg and an iron hook for his right hand who peddled in Northampton about 1825.<sup>3</sup>

Among the most familiar musical cries in London and other English towns were those of the "sweet lavender" vendors, still heard in the twentieth century. These flower peddlers usually were women and girls, who hawked the fragrant plant with melodious refrains. J. Holden McMichael described a tidy-looking middle-aged woman who sang as she walked down Hilbury Road, Tooting Common, "Who'll buy my sweet blooming lavender? There are sixteen (spikes or sprigs)

<sup>1</sup>"Salmon in the Thames," Notes and Queries, Third Series, VI (July-December, 1864), p. 274.

<sup>2</sup>Macray, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>William Liston, "Street Melody," ibid., p. 186.



a penny."<sup>1</sup> Another flower girl would sing this and add a rhyming appeal:

If you buy me once, you'll buy me twi-ice;  
'Twill make your clothes smell very ni-ice.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after the turn of the century in Russell Square, Bloomsbury, such cries as "Fine oysters," "Bottles," and "Any chickweed and groundsel for your singing-birds?" were still heard, according to McMichael.<sup>3</sup> He added, however, that the "old clo'" man "with bag over his shoulder, two or more hats on his head and a clock under his arm, seems to have disappeared, as have the sturdy-looking women vendors of stove ornaments who cried, "Any ornaments for your fire-stove?" Others still common at that time were the potted plant vendor's "All a-growing and a-blowing," the strawberry peddler's "Fine strawbs, forpse a barskit," "Milk-O!," "Fine o-ranges," and the raucous cry of the itinerant coal vendor. The familiar Sunday morning cry of "Lloy-oy-oy-d's Weekly Newspaper!" apparently had been suppressed by anti-noise agitation, while the muffin man still rang a bell but no longer called out his wares.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"London Street Cries," ibid., Tenth Series, VI, 335.

<sup>2</sup>H. P. L., "Sweet Lavender," ibid., p. 434. See also Macray, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>Op. cit., p. 335.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Still the peddler holds a certain fascination among those who wield the artistic pen and brush. In 1856 Frederick Law Olmsted mentioned in one of his accounts of his travels through the southern United States that "many negroes were in town, peddling eggs, nuts, brooms and fowls."<sup>1</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier spoke of peddling "from town to town" in his most famous poem, Snow-Bound, picturing his boyhood home in New England.<sup>2</sup> The cries of the sweet lavender ("Only a penny for a bunch of lavender"), mackerel ("Now then! Tuppence for a fresh-caught mackerel!"), and saucepan ("Walk up, walk up, sixpence for a saucepan!") vendors are recorded by A. A. Milne in one of his children's poems popularizing his young son as Christopher Robin.<sup>3</sup> In another Milne treats sympathetically the charcoal-burner.<sup>4</sup>

The first humorous character in American literature, created by Thomas Chandler Haliburton, was the Nova Scotia judge-author's peddling Clockmaker (1836), Sam Slick, "who travelled through New England and Canada selling clocks to people who didn't want them at a price far beyond their val-

<sup>1</sup>"Peddle," NED, VII, 606.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>"Market Square," When We Were Very Young (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1924), pp. 21-27.

<sup>4</sup>"The Charcoal-Burner," Now We Are Six (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1927), pp. 30-32.

ue."<sup>1</sup> In his novel of the American Revolution, James Fenimore Cooper cast his Spy, Harvey Birch, in the role of a peddler, while an early American poet, Joseph H. Nichols, presented a "pleasant picture of the Yankee peddler."<sup>2</sup> Carrigan, by Robert W. Chambers, centered around the activities of a peddler,<sup>3</sup> and a Jewish notion hawker was the hero of a German novel by Otto Ruffins, published in Cincinnati in 1877, called The Peddler.<sup>4</sup>

Describing the peddlers at William College commencement in 1838, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote in his American Notes: "The most characteristic part of the scene was where the peddlers, ginger-bread, etc., were collected. There was a peddler there from New York State who sold his wares by auction, and I could have stood and listened to him all day."<sup>5</sup>

Even though the occupation of peddling was recognized in the United States at that time as the first step toward business or financial success, frequently the early peddlers, usually young and adventurous, were sharply criticized

<sup>1</sup> Richardson Wright, Hawkers and Walkers in Early America (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1927), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-29.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

as mercenary and not too honest. Timothy Dwight, president of Yale, in his Travels in New England and New York in 1823, observed that "many of these young men employed in this business part at an early period with both modesty and principle."<sup>1</sup> One foreign visitor, Thomas Hamilton, after a trip to the infant nation in 1833, wrote in his Men and Manners in America that "The whole race of Yankee peddlers in particular are proverbial for dishonesty."<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the man who accommodated others while he earned his living in this manner continued to thrive and expand as the nation grew. A familiar figure in the United States whose cry was not silenced until after the first quarter of this century was the ragpicker remembered by most children of the early 1900's. W. H. Davies recorded his song and method of bartering in his poem which took its title from the rag man's cry:

This morning, as I wandered forth,  
I heard a man cry, "Rags and Bones!"  
And little children in the streets  
Went home for bottles, bones and rags  
To barter for his toys and sweets.<sup>3</sup>

The plump rose-cheeked elf named Santa reminded Clement C. Moore of a pack-peddler, as shown in his now famous

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>"Rags and Bones," Chief Modern Poets of England and America, ed. G. D. Sanders and J. H. Nelson (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1933), p. 143.

poem that children still read at Christmas time. Dashed off by the professor of Greek and Oriental literature on a December night in 1822 after he conceived the idea while driving home in a sleigh, the jingling verses have become more and more popular through the years. In his description of St. Nick, Moore wrote:

A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,  
And he looked like a pedlar just opening his pack.<sup>1</sup>

In music and drama there are many notable examples of the use of the musical cries of vendors, principally in street scenes. Ralph Vaughn Williams, considered the outstanding English composer of his time, chose the London cry of "Who'll buy my sweet lavender?" as a theme for his London Symphony (1914).<sup>2</sup> Parisian street cries were used effectively by Gustave Charpentier in his opera of bourgeois life in the French capital, Louise, first performed at the Opera Comique in 1900.<sup>3</sup> In America, George Gershwin introduced the cries of a strawberry vendor, a honey peddler, and a crab man into his opera about Negro life in the South, Porgy and Bess.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"A Visit from St. Nicholas," LIFE, Vol. 31, No. 24 (Dec. 10, 1951), pp. 96-100.

<sup>2</sup>"Street Cries," The Columbia Encyclopedia, 1904.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Many popular songs have been inspired by the street vendors and their songs. One of 1799 vintage, sung by young and old alike in Boston, was "Come Buy My Woodenware."<sup>1</sup> A young quadroon girl named Clio, who sold her hot corn on the streets of New York in a slow chanting voice, caught the fancy of Stephen C. Foster, but the composer who recorded much melodious folklore of America was unable to transform her cry into a song. "There's a wild, wooing tone in her voice," he said, "that I cannot reach." And he never wrote her song.<sup>2</sup> In more recent times we have had such popular tunes as "Yes, We Have No Bananas," "Peanut Vendor," and "I Scream, You Scream, We All Scream for Ice Cream," all believed to have been inspired by the songs and cries of street vendors.

More and more use is being made of this phase of folklore, as the picturesque cries have rapidly faded in most industrialized nations. Few of the cries survive in the bustling cities; those that still are heard in the United States exist chiefly in coastal and southern border areas, among Negroes in the Deep South and Mexicans along the Rio Grande. They include the songs of the fish vendors, the flower sellers, and the hot tamale man.

Only a few years ago Laurraine Goreau, haunted by the melodious cries of the Louisiana shrimp vendors, set down the

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<sup>1</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

words and music for a song, arranged by Sigmund Spaeth. The cry that gave him his inspiration was "Swi-imp boy-y-y-y! Swi-imp boy-y-y-y! Heah yo' swimp boy. Fresh swimp! Mississippi River swimp! Tasty muddy water swimp!" In notes by the composer which appear on the sheet music, he said, "Back in the days of plenty, back in the prewar days when you hustled to sell your wares, in New Orleans, in Baton Rouge, in other points of Louisiana, a dusky figure might pass down your sidewalk in the early morning light, a tin bucket of shrimp in each hand, a glass pint jar resting on top of one .....and the fresh stillness would be rent with calls of "Swi-imp boy-y-y-y" that brought ebony maids of energetic housewives eagerly to the door." He was intrigued by the "sheer natural beauty of the call," Goreau wrote, and while they were still ringing in his ears, he wrote his "musical narrative of the shrimp boy's sale."<sup>1</sup>

While Goreau captured the song of the Louisiana boy vendor of shrimps in recent times, William Hogarth, the British artist of the eighteenth century made famous by his "miniature conversation pieces," preserved London's "Shrimp Girl" of his day.<sup>2</sup> The itinerant vendors of food and other commodities were well-known figures at that time, and Hogarth used

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<sup>1</sup> "Shrimp Boy" (New York: Ricordi & Co., 1948).

<sup>2</sup> "William Hogarth," DNB, IX, 990.

them effectively in his street scenes. The red cheeks of the shrimp girl matched the color of the marine delicacies she carried in the basket balanced on her head. The painter-engraver was recognized in his day for his unusual type of artistry. Dr. Samuel Johnson said in a quatrain epitaph that Hogarth "saw the manners in the face," while Horace Walpole called him "a writer of comedy with a pencil."<sup>1</sup> Lamb, his most sympathetic critic, said, "Other prints we look at, his prints we read."<sup>2</sup>

Another of Hogarth's notable characterizations among the peddling class of his day is his Pieman in "The March to Finchley." An enlarged reproduction of the periwigged pie-man, with cloth-covered flatboard of pastries balanced on his head, is used as the frontispiece in a collection of the artist's works.<sup>3</sup> Grinning at the pieman in this scene is a dirty little chimney-sweeper, while a milk-girl with her bucket stands nearby. A youthful guardsman is preoccupied with two ladies selling ballads and rival newspapers, one The Jacobite Journal.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 986, 989.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 989.

<sup>3</sup>The Complete Works of William Hogarth (London and New York: The London Printing and Publishing Company, n. d.).

<sup>4</sup>Brown, op. cit., p. 164.



Considered one of Hogarth's best crowds is the variety of people in his "Idle 'Prentice Executed at Tyburn." Perhaps the best of several vendors in it is "an itinerant seller of gingerbread . . . . (who was) well known in places of public resort."<sup>1</sup> Among such typical London workmen as a butcher, vintner, blacksmith, and tailor in his "Beer Street" are two women fishmongers with their flat baskets of fish, balanced on the head of one and lying on the ground beside the other where she sits.<sup>2</sup> In his "Gin Lane" crowd is "an itinerant ballad-seller who also retailed gin."<sup>3</sup> The comic spirit is evident in "The Enraged Musician," in which is found "every conceivable variety of disagreement and discordant sound---the razor grinder, turning his wheel; . . . the shrill milk-woman; . . . the fish-women; the chimney-sweepers at the top of a chimney."<sup>4</sup> The milkmaid with her big bucket balanced on her head is one of the most conspicuous figures. Another vendor with a basket on his shoulder rings a large dinner bell. The orange girls are reproduced by Hogarth in "The Laughing Audience," one reaching up from the pit to offer a patron in a box the fruit

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>4</sup>William Hazlitt, Lectures on the English Comic Writers (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), p. 187.

from her bucket-shaped basket, while he flirts with the other.<sup>1</sup>

Modern cartoonists also have used the street vendors as characters in their appeals for laughs or smiles. One which appeared in America of the late 1920's shows a street vendor as the central figure of a four-panel strip. In the first panel he is crying, "Hot chestnuts!" A passerby tosses a magazine to the sidewalk at the feet of the nut salesman in the second panel, while in the third the vendor is shown reading Advertising and Selling. The last panel shows the more enlightened salesman crying, "Very hot chestnuts!"<sup>2</sup>

The theater, the movies, and the radio frequently use street cries of peddlers and vendors to provide settings and sounds for their productions. Among the modern playwrights who have recognized the color available in the songs of the vendors are England's Christopher Fry and America's Tennessee Williams. In his cast of The Lady's Not for Burning, Fry includes a drunken "rag-and-bone merchant" named Skipps.<sup>3</sup> Williams, on the other hand, limits his use to the cry of a lemonade vendor chorused by one of his characters. In the last scene of the play *Amanda*, the mother who clings frantically

<sup>1</sup>Brown, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>2</sup>The New Yorker 25th Anniversary Album, 1925-1950 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), pages not numbered.

<sup>3</sup>(New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1950), III, 90.

to the past in her world of illusion just as she clings to her two children, asks Jim, the gentleman caller, if he knows the song about lemonade. Then she sings the song which once was a familiar tune caroled by sellers of that refreshing summer drink in the South:

Lemonade, lemonade,  
Made in the shade and stirred with a space,  
Good enough for any old mail!<sup>1</sup>

London street songs of the milk and bread peddlers were used in a movie, "The Great Mr. Handel."<sup>2</sup> In a New Orleans street scene in "Toast of New Orleans" (1950),<sup>3</sup> a Negro woman, wearing white apron and cap, strolled along peddling her wares with a song, "Raz-berries, get your sweet raz-berries." Following her was a Negro man in a straw hat carrying a basket and moving along as slowly as he rolled out his vocal appeal, "Rab-bits (rarebits), get your fresh sweet rab-bits." On the street were watermelon wagons, while flower stands lined the sidewalks. During Mardi Gras in New Orleans, the street vendors still are a colorful part of the carnival celebration. Among the twentieth century street hawkers in London, especially on election nights, are the

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<sup>1</sup>The Glass Menagerie, vii, Treasury of the Theatre, ed. John Gassner (2d ed.; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), p. 1058.

<sup>2</sup>As recalled by Mrs. Harrell Lee of Austin.

<sup>3</sup>As recorded by me while attending the movie.

balloon peddlers. While thousands thronged Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus on a cold November night in 1951, "the balloon hawkers did a brisk business in party symbols" as they cried, "Red, a tanner, blue, a tanner."<sup>1</sup>

In recent years efforts have been increased to record and preserve the colorful street cries of the peddler, in music as well as in literature, but interest in this phase of folklore is newer than some other types, such as tales and ballads. Much has been written about the cowboy and such fabulous quasi-historical characters as Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill, but little is recorded about the foot-weary occupational soldiers who attracted customers with their songs and cries.

At the University of Texas Radio House in Austin may be found the manuscript of a radio program, "South of the Rio Grande," which includes several songs and cries of vendors heard on the streets of Santiago, Chile.<sup>2</sup> One is the gay song of the tortillera, "Buy my tortillas," while the carbonero (coalman) cried, "Carbon, Senor!" The grease man offered his lard for sale with the musical chant, "Mantequilla! Mantequilla!" The people of Santiago heard the

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<sup>1</sup>Anonymous, "This Last Prize," TIME, Vol. LVIII, No. 19 (Nov. 5, 1951), p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Broadcast Nov. 19, 1943, by the Texas School of the Air as one of a series entitled "Music Is Yours." Production by Elithe Hamilton Beal; script by the Durrum twins (Anne Durrum Robinson and Marye Durrum Benjamin); music by Homer Ulrich.

melancholy note of "Hay cebo-o-o-o-o!" from the lips and lungs of the woman who bought kitchen stuff, while the butcher had a hoarse call of "Cecina Buena! Cecina Buena!" (Salt Beef! Salt Beef!). Cambista, an Indian woman who sought to exchange the fruit she carried for hot peppers, sang, "Tecojotes por venas de chile?"

Some of the more familiar Louisiana musical versions have been recorded in song by Adelaide Van Wey.<sup>1</sup> Included is the melodious song of the orange girl, "Sweet oranges. Sweeter than the honey in the comb. Sweet oranges."<sup>2</sup> The blueberry vendor caroled her fresh and juicy products at three baskets for a dime,<sup>3</sup> while the watermelons were "fresh from de vine."<sup>4</sup> Ending his song with a yodeled "Char-coo-ool! Char-coo-ool!," this huckster was willing to sell his coals by the bushel, peck, frying pan, or "any way you lek."<sup>5</sup> All of the songs were plaintive appeals that pierced the ears of prospective customers from the distance as the vendors approached or traveled on down the street, and their echoes

<sup>1</sup> Creole Songs, record by Disc, 5047.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Rosamond Johnson (ed. and arr.), Rolling Along in Song (New York: The Viking Press, 1937), p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wright, op. cit., p. 235.

sifted through the air after they disappeared from sight. Typical of the Gulf Coast area, where the shrimp fleet's sailing and return are ceremonies familiar to the inhabitants but witnessed with awe by tourists, are the songs of the shrimp sellers. Miss Van Wey sings this one, her voice rising high on the last y of the "Shrimpy-y!":

Oh, Shrimpy, row, row, row, row  
 Up to your do', do', do', do'.  
 Bet you'll want mo', mo', mo', mo'  
 Of shrimpy, row, row, row, row.  
 Shrimpy-y! Shrimpy-y! Shrimpy-y!

The crab vendor's song attracted many customers in the evening when he wandered by with his hot deviled crabs and sang:

Mah crabs are nice and brown;  
 Ah sell 'em all around.  
 When you are hongry and blue-ue,  
 Wait for the crab man to pass through-ough.  
 Cra-hab-by! Devil cra-hab-by!  
 Cra-hab-by! Devil cra-hab-by!

Through the years the peddling class has been part of the frontier life in America, venturing into new horizons to supply the needs of the pioneers. First in New England, they moved South and West as new territories were inhabited by the early settlers. They were, in fact, traveling stores, and they thrived before new inventions, health and sanitation laws, anti-noise ordinances, superhighways, and supermarkets eliminated the need for the wandering merchants and drove them off the streets. Since Texas was in its infancy with

few cities before 1900---San Antonio, the largest, was the only one with a population over 50,000<sup>1</sup>---, peddlers operated freely in this state well into the twentieth century. Although a few still survive, their songs have rapidly vanished in the last two decades. Soon the cries they shouted and the songs they sang to sell their wares will be forgotten, and the people who recall them now will be gone.

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph W. Steen, Twentieth Century Texas (Austin: The Steck Company, 1942), pp. 15-16.

## CHAPTER II

### PEDDLERS EAST OF TEXAS

Years before any American set foot in Texas, when the state was a vast uncivilized territory occupied by Indians and buffalo and explored by daring adventurers in small bands, the peddler was a familiar figure along the eastern seaboard of the newly occupied land. The wandering vendors date back to the early days in America, decades before the Revolution, when they traveled on foot or horseback with packs on their backs. Later they ventured farther inland in horse-drawn wagons. Their wares were largely home-grown or hand-made, but sometimes they sold imported materials and articles brought by ship from England.

The original Yankee huckster was a tin peddler, who supplied the early settlers with cooking utensils. William and Edgar Pattison, Irish brothers who were tinsmiths by trade, settled in Berlin, Connecticut, in 1738.<sup>1</sup> But it was two years before they could begin to manufacture their product in their adopted homeland, for it was that long before they could secure the sheet tin from England that they needed to start their practice. They were so successful in this nation's first industrial venture that other Berliners took

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<sup>1</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 71.



up the manufacture of tin products, and the town became the center of the tin industry, retaining the leadership until 1850.

By 1823 the tin peddler's stock was composed not only of tinware, but of "pins, needles, scissors, combs, buttons, children's books, and cotton stuffs."<sup>1</sup> He had started out with a sack or basket on his back, but now he traveled in large wagons, also loaded with drygoods, hats, and shoes.

After the Revolutionary War the peddler would set out in late summer or fall on his winter expedition with his wares loaded into a horse-drawn cart or wagon furnished by the tin manufacturer. Heading to the southern states, he would peddle his products in settlements all along the way, returning to New York and Connecticut at the beginning of summer, after selling his vehicle and horses.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes he ventured as far as Detroit, Kentucky, Canada, and St. Louis.

Taking the news from the seaboard to the isolated farms and small settlements, the peddler also "carried last year's fashions, public opinion of a decade gone by, and the prejudices that never die out, together with assorted heart-

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> B. A. Botkin, A Treasury of New England Folklore (New York: Crown Publishers, 1947), p. 25.

break for many an uplandish maiden."<sup>1</sup> His visit was eagerly awaited by the farm families, especially the wives and children, as he brought them articles and household goods they could not otherwise get.

Phineas T. Barnum, telling about life in his hometown of Bethel, Connecticut, in 1820, when he was but ten years old, wrote that children in families of ordinary circumstances ate their meals on wooden plates called trenchers. "As I grew older our family and others discarded the trenchers and rose to the dignity of pewter plates and leaden spoons," he wrote in later years. "Tin peddlers who traveled through the country with their wagons supplied these and other luxuries."<sup>2</sup>

Many of the chapmen, as they were often called in New England, carried their goods in small, oblong tin trunks, which were slung on their backs from leather straps. For this reason these Colonial dealers were called "trunk-peddlers."<sup>3</sup> As they traveled from house to house and town to town, or stopped on the village green, they would open their trunks or packs to display their wares. Their stock consisted of combs, jewelry, pins and needles, shoelaces and buckles,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 672.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

knives and woodenware, home-knitted socks and mittens, calico and other piece goods, as well as Bibles and other books. They first followed Indian trails on foot or horseback, but as their loads increased and new roads were opened, they began to use wagons and were able to extend their territories. The first of these vehicles were small carts with boxed bodies, but as the size of the wagons increased, so did the amount and variety of merchandise the peddlers carried. They added larger objects, such as clocks and dishes, blankets and brooms, brass kettles and lamps, hats and shoes, and other clothing.

Frequently the country people who were their customers had no money; therefore, the peddlers were forced to accept farm produce or the handiwork of the housewives as pay for the goods they had to sell. The articles they collected in this manner were loaded into their wagons and taken back to the towns to sell, usually at a large profit. The Fuller Brush men, who still operate by ringing doorbells in cities across the nation, were accepting farm produce in exchange for their wares as late as twenty-five years ago.<sup>1</sup>

No racial line was drawn among the itinerant merchants. There were peddlers of all nationalities and races. Before broom corn planting was started systematically about

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

1798, the first brooms in America were made and sold by the Indians. They used birch or ash for the handles and strips of birch for the brush. These aborigines also peddled "baking trays, wooden dishes, ladles, spoons, shovels, embroidered birch-bark baskets, and fancy figures of coloured porcupine quills."<sup>1</sup> Before and during the Revolution Philadelphia had its gingerbread man, a German immigrant who became baker-general to the Continental Army, as well as other Dutch vendors of tinware, herbs, and knick-knacks.<sup>2</sup>

The French were predominant in the Mississippi Valley and New Orleans, bartering their "coarse cloths, beads, vermilion, kettles, knives, guns, powder, and illicit liquor with the Indians in return for horses, mules, furs and the like."<sup>3</sup> Louisiana also had its Creoles, as well as Negroes after the Civil War who peddled to earn their living in their new-found freedom. Although the Italians, as well as Greeks and Armenians, were chiefly peddlers of fruits and flowers, in the early days some in New York and Philadelphia hawked "plaster casts of famous masterpieces and statuettes."<sup>4</sup> Baskets, fancy laces and embroidery, and tinware were sold by vagrant Gypsies, who also were organ-grinders and fortune-

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 238, 242.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

tellers.<sup>1</sup>

In Palmyra, Illinois, about the turn of the century children thrilled to the unmatched drama of watching the Armenian peddlers open their packs on the front steps of their homes. They were not allowed to enter many homes, for housewives mistrusted them, but they were permitted to display their wares on the porches or steps. And as the youngsters of the family gathered around to peer with awe, mother occasionally would buy several yards of the peddler's heavy, coarse ecru linen lace, or perhaps even a jeweled comb or a string of beads. On the endless leaves of the folding telescope valises would be displayed cards of buttons, combs set with imitation gems, amber and tortoise shell hair pins, and strings of colored glass bead necklaces which little girls might hold and admire.<sup>2</sup>

By 1836 the Jews had invaded the ranks of the Yankee peddler, first with packs on their backs, but they were thrifty and soon started establishing department stores in all parts of the country.<sup>3</sup> The Spanish and Mexicans were found mostly west of Louisiana, and even in recent years have comprised a large part of the peddler faction in Texas.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 211-13.

<sup>2</sup>Reported by Dr. Eleanor James of Denton as told to her by her mother, Mrs. Robert James of Belton.

<sup>3</sup>Wright, op. cit., pp. 47, 92.

Even though most of the roving vendors were nameless, or at least known only by such appellations as "Johnny Cup o'Tea"<sup>1</sup> or "Dutch Molly,"<sup>2</sup> many men who later gained success in business or other careers got their start in life following the peddler's route. Bronson Alcott hawked tinware and almanacs from door to door.<sup>3</sup> Benedict Arnold traveled into Canada selling stockings, caps, mittens, and other woolen goods,<sup>4</sup> while the soap manufacturer, B. T. Babbitt, started out as a razor strop and notions peddler.<sup>5</sup> Enoch Noyes, who with his descendants was in the horn comb business for 162 years, began making and peddling his combs at West Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1759.<sup>6</sup> The author who fashioned the tale of George Washington and the cherry tree was one of the best known book peddlers of his time, Mason Locke (Parson) Weems.<sup>7</sup> The great showman Barnum used his salesmanship as a peddler of "molasses, candy, gingerbread and cherry rum."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-43.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

The gingerbread-man in Barnum's time<sup>1</sup> was a familiar figure in New England, and long before in the Colonial states during the Revolution. One early nineteenth century pastry seller in Wilmington, Delaware, carried a cakeboard on his head piled high with hot gingerbread.<sup>2</sup> The muffin man, who carried a basket and announced his late afternoon approach with a tinkling bell, followed the pastry boys with their rolls, muffins, and other sweets in trays balanced on their heads.<sup>3</sup> A century later another form of pastry was peddled by vendors on the Lower East Side of New York, who cried out their chalah (breadtwist) in a cheerful voice:

Hello, everybody! Chalah!  
Hello, chalah! Chalah, everybody!  
Hello, everybody!<sup>4</sup>

While few, if any, of the early pack-peddlers, who trudged the country trails and rough roads, advertised their wares with vocal pleas, the street vendors, flourishing as cities began to grow and houses nestled closer together, exercised lusty voices early in the 1800's. Their songs and cries became familiar chords in the symphonies of metropolitan noises, and they resounded vigorously as the peddlers moved westward across the nation, keeping pace with the pio-

<sup>1</sup>Supra, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>Wright, op. cit., pp. 237-38.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ethan Seymour, "Voice of the City: Street Cries of New York," New York Times Magazine, March 3, 1946, p. 29.

neers who sought new homes in unpopulated regions. Many of the musical cries heard in eastern cities and in such picturesque harbors as Charleston and New Orleans have been recorded. They were those sung mostly by vendors of fruits, vegetables, fish, and fuel. But other household equipment reached customers attracted to their doors by the cries of the singing salesmen.

One of these was the broom man. At one time the tin peddler added brooms to his stock and stacked them in bundles on the back of his wagon.<sup>1</sup> But later one who specialized in this product was heard singing this refrain:

Here goes the broom man, passin' by,  
Why not buy a broom today?  
Sweep 'em clean, sweep 'em clean.<sup>2</sup>

The broom man apparently inspired a folk ballad recorded by Ira W. Ford, in which the plea, "Buy a broom, buy a broom," is followed by the final lines of succeeding verses with "Oh, buy of the wandering Bavarian a broom" and "Bless the time that in England I cried, buy a broom."<sup>3</sup>

Not only were the brooms used to sweep out the dirt that normally accumulated on the floors of houses, but in pre-Revolutionary days sand was spread on the floors of

<sup>1</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 191.

<sup>3</sup>Traditional Music of America (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1940), p. 391. Also see music, p. 144.



houses that lacked carpets and was "drawn into fanciful figures with the sweep of the broom." The sand men of that era would cry, "Sand your kitchens! Sand your floors!" or "Want any sand? Want Sandy?"<sup>1</sup> Much later, in New York, this cry rang through the streets before it was silenced by the city's anti-noise ordinance:

Here's your white sand, choice sand,  
Here's your lily-white sand---<sup>2</sup>  
Here's your Rockaway Beach Sand.

The soft soap man in Philadelphia had his song that was "Sam! Sam! The soap fat man!"<sup>3</sup> In New Orleans the clothes-pole man carried his bundle of long white ash poles on his shoulder as he strolled through the streets seeking buyers in the days when the weekly wash was a Monday custom in everyone's backyard. His loud, husky cry was a drawling "Clo's---poles. Long, straight clo's poles---."<sup>4</sup> Special brands of locks and keys usually were sold by peddlers representing manufacturing firms, while some of the toilers sold only their services. Starting with "Any Locks to repair? Or Keys to be fitted?," one would add this verse:

<sup>1</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 235.

<sup>2</sup>Seymour, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 235.

<sup>4</sup>B. A. Botkin, A Treasury of Southern Folklore (New York: Crown Publishers, 1949), p. 672.

Do you want any Locks  
 Put in goodly repair  
 Or any Keys fitted,  
 To turn true as a hair?<sup>1</sup>

But the most plaintive and musical of them all were the songs sung by the men who peddled charcoal in their push-carts or horse-drawn wagons. About 1850, when the fuel used at that time to light fires sold in Philadelphia at thirty-five cents a barrel, a coal vendor waved a handbell and sang a refrain that showed he aimed to please:

Charcoal by the bushel,  
 Charcoal by the peck,  
 Charcoal by the frying pan  
 Or any way you lek!<sup>2</sup>

Another in Springfield, Missouri, proclaimed himself to the residents of that town with his early morning cry:

O-o-o-oh, lil' man,  
 Go get yo' pan;  
 Tell-a yo' mam.  
 Chah-coal!<sup>3</sup>

In New Orleans the charcoal peddler was in great demand among the Negro washwomen, who used the coals to heat their old-fashioned flatirons before the days of electric appliances. One of his songs was:

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<sup>1</sup>Wright, op. cit., with illustration between pp. 232-33.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>3</sup>Carl Sandburg, The American Songbag (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927), p. 459.

Mah mule is white,  
 Mah chah-coal is black,  
 I sells mah chah-coal  
 Two bits a sack.  
 Chah-coal! Chah-coal!<sup>1</sup>

A Negro vendor in the bayou city appealed to all classes, both financial and racial, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As his wagon rolled along slowly, he would advertise his willingness to sell to any and all with this musical verse:

Ah sells to the rich  
 And ah sells to the po'<sup>r</sup>  
 And ah sells to the yellow gal  
 Sittin' in the do'.  
 Chaw-coal!<sup>2</sup>

Also in New Orleans about the same time were tinware peddlers and menders. A Negro peddler sang hymns to attract attention, while an Italian tinker, who carried a charcoal brazier with his mending rod and soldering stick, would cry, "Teen-a-fix! Teen-a-fix!"<sup>3</sup>

In the autumn in Philadelphia the woodman would appear on the streets, crying his staccato appeal, "Wud! Wud! Wud! Wud!"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Botkin, Southern Folklore, p. 674.

<sup>2</sup>Recorded by Mrs. Isabel Caylat Thayer of Houston, in her collection of New Orleans street songs she heard in her native city during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 235.

Before the Greeks, Armenians, and Italians seized control of the fruit and vegetable traffic in the East, these foods were peddled mostly by women. A robust woman vendor might be seen trudging along the streets with a tray of the juicy red fruit on her head and calling, "Cherries!" Or, in late summer, one could expect to hear such an optimistic cry as "Peaches, here dey go!"<sup>1</sup> When the men took over, they usually stood at the rear of their canvas-covered wagons loaded with the fruit they were urging on anyone who might pass by and hear their musical chants.

The peddling of apples farther west and into the southern reaches of the nation might not have been possible had it not been for a strange character named Jonathan Chapman, now better known as a folklore figure by the name of "Johnny Appleseed." For Chapman, as the story goes, scattered apple seeds in frontier settlements from Ohio on down the Ohio River so that the pioneering settlers would have a more nutritious diet, not just meat and fish. His orchards flourished after he traveled west on his mission from his native Massachusetts in the early part of the last century.<sup>2</sup>

In New Orleans about 1935 a fruit that is common in the tropical regions of the Americas, and which today is

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 236. Also see illustration opposite p. 232.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 214-15.

popularly used in salads, was peddled under the name it was given because of its tough skin and shape. One avocado vendor there would cry, "Alligator pears! Two for a nickel!"<sup>1</sup>

Berry and watermelon peddlers were poetic as well as musical. In the South the blackberry woman brought her basket of berries to town, carried on her head and protected from the sun's rays by a covering of elder and sycamore leaves. Her poetic and melancholy chant was familiar:

Black-ber-ries,---fresh an' fine,  
I got black-ber-ries, lady,  
Fresh from de vine,  
I got black-ber-ries, lady,  
Three glass fo' a dime,  
I got black-ber-ries,  
I got black-ber-ries, black-ber-ries.<sup>2</sup>

A little pickaninny in New Orleans, trailing after her Negro mammy who called out as she walked along with a basket balanced on her head, "Heah's yo' fresh green cawn (corn), okry, and tomatoes!," would cry in a high soprano, "Blackberries, fresh and fine, just off de vine."<sup>3</sup>

While most of the watermelon peddlers varied their vocal inflections with emphasis on different syllables, usually the name of the product was drawled into a song all by itself. Some might add appropriate remarks about the ripeness

<sup>1</sup>Reported by Elmo Hegman of Austin as he heard it.

<sup>2</sup>Botkin, Southern Folklore, p. 673. Cf. Johnson, op. cit., p. 190, blueberry song. Also see Botkin's recorded rendition of a strawberry cry, p. 670.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Isabel Caylat Thayer of Houston.

or temperature of their melons; others at times would continue their chants with "fresh from de vine,"<sup>1</sup> similar to the cries of the berry vendors. On the East Coast the pronunciation of the product gave a peddler's cry a dialectal flavor, "Watermelyuns."<sup>2</sup> One street crier in Charleston advertised his load of melons in the vernacular of a plantation slave:

Load my Gun  
Wid Sweet Sugar Plum  
An Shoot dem nung gal  
One by one  
Barder lingo,  
Water-millon<sup>3</sup>

Before the rural people knew the true value of the farm produce and other products they grew and made, they used these home-grown goods as a means of exchange with peddlers for other articles they needed. Thus, the peddlers of tinware, apparel, and household objects had a double-barreled method of making money, as they bartered at an advantage with the farm families; then sold the corn, wheat, chickens, and other farm produce they received at much higher prices in nearby towns. This was the principal reason for the establishment of the public market, where farmers could bring

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<sup>1</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>2</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>3</sup>Botkin, Southern Folklore, p. 670. The author explains that "nung gal" is the plantation darcy's lingo for "young girl."

their produce and sell it themselves. At these markets could be found, in 1700 as well as today in many towns and cities, garden fruits and vegetables, meats, fish, groceries, and other articles of clothing and household goods.<sup>1</sup> But in small communities where there were no markets, or even in cities where there were, the food products were peddled through the streets.

In Charleston one of the women vendors, who carried fifty-pound baskets of vegetables on their heads, cried out her "Red Rose To-may-toes. Green Peas! Sugar Peas!"<sup>2</sup> One of the opposite sex called "Little John" would wend his way through the streets, singing: "Here's your 'Little John' Mam. I got Hoppen John Peas Mam! I got cabbage---I got yaller turnips Mam, Oh yes Mam. I got sweet petater---I got beets; I got spinach."<sup>3</sup>

Hominy hucksters were found on the streets of New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore thirty years before the Civil War. At first a Negro delight, hominy was accepted by white people after 1828, and the vendors who sold it had such musical cries as "Hominy! Beautiful hominy!" and

Hominy man is on his way,  
To sell his good hominy.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wright, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>2</sup> Botkin, Southern Folklore, p. 669.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 670.

<sup>4</sup> Wright, op. cit., p. 236.

Early in the nineteenth century a sweet potato bard in Philadelphia had his special verse he sang:

My hoss is blind and he's got no tail,  
When he's put in prison I'll go his bail.  
Yed-dy go, sweet potatoes, oh!  
Fif-en-ny bit a half peck!<sup>1</sup>

Women who cried their wares in the "gombo" French spoken by Creole Negroes could be heard in the French Quarter of New Orleans at twilight hawking their hot potato-cakes, made of either sweet or Irish potatoes. The jargon they sang sounded something like this:

Bel pam pa-tat, Bel pam pa-tat,  
Ma-dam, ou-lay-ou le bel pam pa-tat,  
pam pa-tat.<sup>2</sup>

Negro women in Philadelphia peddled pepper pot, a dish relished by the residents of that city. Carrying with them bowls and spoons to serve their customers, they pushed small carts on which were placed the round kettles of pepper pot kept warm over charcoal burners. As they ambled along, they would chant:

All hot! All hot!  
Makee back strong!  
Makee live long!  
Come buy my pepper pot!<sup>3</sup>

Other hot foods were served by the street vendors, and among the most familiar characters were those who hawked

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>2</sup>Botkin, Southern Folklore, p. 672.

<sup>3</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 237.



sweet corn on the sidewalks and thoroughfares of Manhattan until their occupation was halted by a city health ordinance. One poetic hot corn huckster, similar to the Clio who inspired Stephen Foster,<sup>1</sup> sang this inducement:

Here's smoking Hot Corn,  
With salt that is nigh,  
Only two pence an ear,---  
O pass me not by!<sup>2</sup>

Another of their familiar songs was:

Here's your nice Hot Corn!  
Smoking hot! Piping hot!  
O what beauties I have got!<sup>3</sup>

What made some Charleston street cries of the Negro peddlers of chickens and poultry products intriguing was the jargon they used in their chants. Speaking Gullah,<sup>4</sup> typical of the sea island area between Charleston and Savannah, they were understood only by those who had learned to interpret their language or were accustomed to what the vendors were trying to sell. One woolly-headed old Negro who had fresh yard eggs to sell would vocalize: "Emy Yad aigs terday my Miss."<sup>5</sup> Another with chickens cried, "Here one, here murrer, here two pun tapa 'turrer, here tree wid e two leg tie to

<sup>1</sup>Supra, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Wright, op. cit., with illustration between pp. 232-33.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. Cf. Seymour, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>5</sup>Botkin, Southern Folklore, p. 671.

garra." To most strangers this would have no meaning, just as the tobacco auctioneer's jet-propelled sales talk is merely a tangled slur of sounds to those unfamiliar with his high-powered gibberish, but to those who heard it day after day, it meant, "Here is one, here is another, here are two on top of each other, here are three with their two legs tied together."<sup>1</sup>

In seacoast towns, along the Atlantic or on the Gulf of Mexico, fish of many kinds gave peddlers another opportunity to versify or compose musical descriptions of the wares they had to sell. In New England some carried their seafood products in panniers on horseback; others used push-carts; and later most of them adopted two-wheeled canvas-covered carts. They sold cod, oysters, mackerel, shad, porgies, and flounder. Sometimes they would make their approach known by blowing tin horns, which came to be known as "fish-horns."<sup>2</sup> New England fish dinner still are famous, and in past years the main dish originated with a purchase from a fish vendor. The Connecticut River shad season was officially open when New Englanders heard the cry, "Shad! Buy any Shad!" Or it might be a simple "Fresh fish fit for the pan!"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 239.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Oysters were not on New England menus until after 1800, when they were first planted in Connecticut waters, but after that they were peddled into the interior of the state, as well as in seacoast villages. Packed in kegs and carried on horseback, later in spring wagons, they soon were being taken to northern New York and as far as Canada. When customers did not have cash to buy the fish, the peddlers would accept butter, cheese, pork, or brooms in exchange for the oysters.<sup>1</sup>

Porgies and crabs aroused the musical imagination of vendors in Philadelphia and Charleston, as well as in New England. One appealed to housewives with his cry:

Here comes the fishman!  
Bring out your dishpan  
Porgies at five cents a pound.<sup>2</sup>

A vendor in Charleston with a sense of humor would proclaim the "human qualities" of his fish:

Porgy walk and porgy talk  
And porgy eat with knife and fork,  
Get yer nice por-gy!<sup>3</sup>

The crab man was part of the regular street scene all along the Atlantic Coast. Usually the peddler was a Negro pushing a cart or wheelbarrow of live crabs. In Charleston one advertised with a nasal cry the female of the species,

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

since it was considered more desirable and brought more money than the male crab. His monotonous cry was "She craib! She craib! She craib!"<sup>1</sup> Also in the South, as well as in Philadelphia, one would hear "Crabs! Crabs! Alive!"<sup>2</sup> or a more descriptive song:

Fresh, fresh crabs,  
Fresh Baltimore crabs;  
Put them in the pot  
With the lid on top;  
Fresh Baltimore crabs!<sup>3</sup>

A porgy vendor in Charleston, who had the appearance of an Indian chief, did a thriving business under his quaint sign of "Joe Cole and Wife," as he sang his wares, a favorite among the colored people of the South. His yell, which included his specialties of all seasons, whiting and shad as well as porgy, could be heard for blocks:

Old Joe Cole---Good Old Soul  
Porgy in the Summer-time  
An e Whiting in the Spring  
8 upon a string.  
Don't be late, I'm waitin' at de gate  
Don't be mad---Here's your shad  
Old Joe Cole---Good Old Soul.<sup>4</sup>

Another Charleston fish huckster had his individual shout to entice customers:

<sup>1</sup>Botkin, Southern Folklore, p. 669.

<sup>2</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 235.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Botkin, Southern Folklore, p. 669.

Mullet! Mullet! Mullet!  
 Flounder and Black Fish!  
 Shark steaks for dem what likes 'em;  
 Sword Fish for dem what fights 'em;  
 Fish-ee! Fish-ee!<sup>1</sup>

"Mosquito fleet" fishermen, most of them with strong lungs, hawked their whiting when they returned to port, crying only the name of their "catch."<sup>2</sup> But it was the strange, melodious, hard-to-imitate song of the Negro shrimp vendor that was hard to forget. In the early morning one boy's faint, clear soprano could be heard as he identified himself in the song that followed his "Raw! Raw! Raw swimp!" cry:

An a Daw-try Daw! an a swim-py raw!  
 an a Daw-try, Daw-try, Daw-try Raw swimp.<sup>3</sup>

Although they were peddlers of services rather than of merchandise or other wares, no mention of street cries would be complete without recalling the town crier, the scissors grinder, the bootblack, and the chimney-sweeper. As late as twenty-five years ago one or two New England towns still had preserved as a picturesque figure their town criers. In the early days it was the duty of this bell ringer to "read proclamations to the populace, announce runaway servants and apprentices, and sometimes (serve as) night watchman."<sup>4</sup> Later he would patrol the streets from dark to dawn

<sup>1</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 240.

<sup>2</sup>Botkin, Southern Folklore, p. 668.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 239.

merely to call out the hours and announce the weather outlook.

The scissors grinder, as well as the organ grinder with his monkey, also still was a familiar figure in the 1920's. He would alternate at ringing his bell and singing his poetic appeal, which guaranteed to please his employers:

Any Razors or Scissors,  
Or Penknives to grind?  
I'll engage that my work  
Shall be done to your mind.<sup>1</sup>

While Italian children supplanted the Negro boot-blacks on the streets of New York, the Negroes monopolized this business in New Orleans and other parts of the South. Usually they would cry out a simple "Shine, Mister?" But some had a poetic approach to passersby:

Shine 'em up! Shine 'em down!  
Shine 'em black or shine 'em brown!  
Shine 'em up all over town!  
Shine, mister?<sup>2</sup>

The chimney-sweep was a legal necessity in the days before gas and electric stoves replaced the wood-burning fireplaces and iron wood stoves that required an outlet for smoke and soot. In Philadelphia, where there was a fine of forty shillings "if your chimney took fire in consequence of neglect," small Negro boys would yodel as they emerged from chimneys, "Sweep-ho! Sweep-ho! Sweep-ho!"<sup>3</sup> Still familiar,

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<sup>1</sup>

Ibid., with illustration between pp. 232-33.

<sup>2</sup>Seymour, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 237.

as well as necessary, in some countries, the sweep wearing the traditional black-silk hat and close-fitting black shirt and trousers brings luck to the house whose chimney he sweeps, according to German folklore.<sup>1</sup> In New Orleans the sweep would come around in the autumn to warn people that their chimneys should be swept before winter. There he wore a top-hat, a long linen duster, and carried a bundle of sacks, ropes, and long palmetto leaf brushes over his shoulder. In his song he called himself "Rom-a-nay," which was "gombo" French for ramoneur (chimney-sweeper).

Rom-a-nay, Rom-a-nay, Rom-a-nay, lady,  
 I know why yo' chim-ly won' draw.  
 Stove won' bake an' yuh can' make no cake  
 An' I know why yo' chim-ly won' draw.<sup>2</sup>

Almost as soon as the railroads began to operate in the United States, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the train hawkers came into being. Peddlers of newspapers, books, apples, and other kinds of foods saw an opportunity to gain customers among the train passengers. For a long time they would merely board the trains when they stopped and jump off just before the whistle blew and the porter yelled, "All a-board!" Later they traveled aboard the trains, peddling their wares up and down the aisles, and today we still find them, usually a dining car waiter selling

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<sup>1</sup>"Chimney-Sweep's Life Not So Bad," The Denton Record-Chronicle (Texas), April 24, 1952.

<sup>2</sup>Botkin, Southern Folklore, p. 673. Cf. Johnson, op. cit., p. 189.

between-meal snacks, even though most trains now have snack bars. Sir Charles Lyell told of one he encountered, on a visit to America in 1849, who called out: "A novel by Paul de Kock, the Bulwer of France, for twenty-five cents! All the Go! More popular than the Wandering Jew."<sup>1</sup>

The newsboy who hawked papers on the city streets did not become common until after 1833.<sup>2</sup> At first he merely called out the name of his paper and, perhaps, the most startling headline. P. T. Barnum recalled in his later years the scarcity of newspapers in his hometown of Bethel, Connecticut, when he was a boy in 1820. The town received newspapers only once a week from Norwalk, and the man who brought them would also have pins, needles, and other notions. Barnum remembered the queer cry of the apparently religious news vendor called Uncle Silliman, who would shout, "News! News! The Lord reigns!" One time, as he passed the schoolhouse in Bethel while snow was falling, Uncle Silliman added a bit of spot news to his usual cry, "and snows a little."<sup>3</sup>

As their numbers grew and competition became more serious, the newsboys tended more and more to exaggerate and emphasize the sensational news of the day. At times they would invent facetious cries. Not many years ago, Malcolm

<sup>1</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>3</sup>Botkin, New England Folklore, p. 672.



McLean of Austin reported, he heard an example of this type of shout, when a newsboy in Miami Beach, Florida, yelled, "Extra! Extra! Seven Shot in a Crap Game! Read all about it!" Before he realized what the simulated headline meant, McLean said, "he had my nickel and I couldn't do anything about it."

Early in this century some New York clothes merchants in certain sections of the city would cry out their goods, before their voices were stilled by anti-noise ordinances. One of these probably was advertising what he hoped passersby would take as a bargain, but it also could have indicated the quality of his merchandise. At any rate, he cried:

Cheap! Cheap!  
Shoes cheap! Suits cheap!  
Dry goods here, cheap!  
Cheap!<sup>1</sup>

While this merchant vocally advertised his apparel for sale, it is the old clothes man who bought ready-to-be-discarded clothing that still survives in some large cities. The most familiar cry of the ragpicker, the name by which he has been best known, is "I cash clo'."<sup>2</sup> In the 1940's a be-whiskered old fellow, whose clothes were always patched and whose shoes never seemed to fit, would walk along the narrow

<sup>1</sup>Seymour, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Columbia Encyclopedia, 1904. This cry was used as a musical refrain sung by an old clothes man in a street scene of the musical play based on Betty Smith's novel, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn. The play of the same name is by Betty Smith and George Abbott; music by Arthur Schwartz; lyrics by Dorothy Fields.

Greenwich Village streets in New York, loaded with old clothes. As he dragged laboriously along under his load, he would cry, "I cash! I cash!," which meant that he wanted to buy old clothes and that he would pay cash for them.<sup>1</sup>

Among the more recent street cries still heard on Times Square in recent years are those of the barkers who peddle sightseeing tours to Manhattan visitors. In a loud and clear voice, one would shout:

Chinatown! Trips around New York!  
 Chinatown! Bus leavin' in a few minutes!  
 Chinatown! See New York!<sup>2</sup>

The evolution of the peddler in America, from the first hawkers of tinware to the sightseeing tour barkers, follows a trail that did not open in Texas until almost the middle of the last century. He followed the pioneers as they moved westward, leaving behind their homes and the conveniences they had in those days. In the hundred years since, as the settlers established new homes and founded new towns, the peddler flourished as his colorful cries formed an integral part of everyday living and helped to mold the state's character; then diminished toward a gradual fadeout as he found he was no longer needed.

Texas vendors, however, have added some new songs to the nation's choral lore, for the state was a vast expanse

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<sup>1</sup>Reported by Mrs. Harrell Lee of Austin, who lived in New York at the time.

<sup>2</sup>Seymour, op. cit., p. 29.

of mixed cultures and races. And Texas offered the peddlers products of a new flavor, especially those derived from the land across the Rio Grande, of which it was once a part.

### CHAPTER III

#### BETWEEN THE RED AND THE RIO GRANDE

When the tin peddler started operating in New England, and as he graduated from travel by foot and horseback to wagons and carts, doubled and tripled the stock he carried, and ventured many miles into new territories to supply isolated customers with notions and household wares, Texas was still a comparatively wild country. Not until Stephen F. Austin, fulfilling his father's dream, led a small party into the land of the mesquite and the mustang in the summer of 1821 was the first American colony established in the land then owned by Mexico. During the next fifteen years the early settlers were preoccupied building new homes, planting crops to provide their food, fighting Indians, and winning their battle for independence.

It is doubtful that any peddlers were among these hardy pioneers, for they would have had a hard and profitless time seeking out buyers in the sprawling but sparsely settled expanse of raw land. Even after Texas became an independent nation, settlements were small and scattered, and Indian scalping raids persisted. Therefore, it is unlikely that many peddlers crossed the frontier lines until peaceful living was somewhat assured by the annexation of the republic to the United States in 1845.

We do know, however, that there were some peddlers in the settlements near the Louisiana border and along the Gulf Coast, where ships landed in the Galveston area in the early nineteenth century. Mrs. W. L. Love of Galveston has several letters written in 1839 by her great-grandmother, Lucy Parker Weston Shaw, to her parents in Maine, during the year after she arrived in Galveston as a bride in December, 1838. This was just a year after the city was founded. Her husband, Joshua Clark Shaw, later a member of the city's first board of aldermen, had come to Galveston the year before to explore the new territory before returning to bring his bride. In her first letter home Lucy Shaw described the scarcity of food and the poor living accommodations---water obtained by excavating holes in nearby sand hills was brought to the house in buckets carried on carts. A few months later she wrote of the high prices of food, mentioning specifically that peddlers sold watermelons at \$1.00 each, figs at \$1.75 a dozen, and eggs at \$1.50 a dozen. Driftwood from the beach, used as fuel, sold at \$45.00 a cord.

But only after Texas became the twenty-eighth of the United States, and military posts were established to protect the citizens from the Indians, did the wandering merchants begin to invade the new territory. These peddlers followed the cycle they had already traveled in the eastern states, traveling on horseback, in wagons, or carrying their packs on their

backs. At first they came with tinware, needles, pins, combs, and other small notions. Since money was scarce among the farm families, the peddlers traded their wares for farm produce, poultry products, and home-made articles of clothing, quilts, and bedspreads. Their arrival was always a big event, especially for the children, since visitors in those days were few and far between. The peddlers fed and bedded their horses, as well as themselves, wherever they happened to be at meal-time or at nightfall.

Peace was brief this time, too, and the rumblings of secession rolled through the South in the mid-nineteenth century. Texans were divided on the issues involved, and, although a majority of them opposed abolition and voted to withdraw from the union, the hero of San Jacinto lost the governor's chair, because he refused to pledge his allegiance to the Confederacy. Sam Houston died in his beloved Huntsville two years later. Even though Texas was on the fringe of this war, many of her sons were on the battlefields.

Not until after the Civil War, then, did the state begin the steady growth that lured peddlers in large numbers to its blossoming cities, but especially to the rural areas, where farm families were more dependent upon the traveling vendors to supply them with articles the land would not produce.

Today's old-timers, children and grandchildren of the early pioneers, still remember the pack peddlers who hawked

their wares by foot or wagon in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. And hardly a city or town does not have a store that was started by one of these traveling salesmen who got their start peddling from farm to farm or door to door with packs on their backs.

One of these was M. L. Westheimer, who was a miller in Germany before coming to America. Arriving in Texas in 1852, he settled first in Galveston, but soon moved to a farm which today is the site of the Lamar school in Houston. After peddling dry goods and notions from a pack on his back, he opened a general merchandise store in Houston with his cousin, Adolph Cramer. Later he sold his interest and started a livery stable, from which he operated omnibuses, the horse-drawn coaches which preceded streetcars. For his mule cars, he built the first rails in Houston, wood tracks with a third track in the middle for the mules to walk on so they would not be slowed down by the mud. Westheimer's daughter, Mrs. Hettie Westheimer Ray,<sup>1</sup> recalled that her father, because he had once experienced the trials of a peddler, told her mother never to turn from their door anyone who had something to sell. "Because of this, mother had needles of all sizes and sewing tape of all kinds, as that was something she could afford to buy," Mrs. Ray said.

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<sup>1</sup>Born on the farm in Houston February 23, 1869.

The largest department store in Lufkin was founded by Simon Abram, whose family had come from Poland. He traveled over the surrounding country with a pack on his back and later in a one-horse buggy, selling laces, brown and white domestic, calico, needles, thread, pins, and "nun's veiling" (cream-colored or white for brides, pink or blue for bridesmaids, black for widows and burials).<sup>1</sup>

In Austin, Theodore Lowe started as a pack peddler of fine laces and other imported goods about 1875. Later he acquired a horse and wagon, before opening his dry goods store at the corner of Sixth and Congress Avenue, still called Theodore Lowe Corner by old-timers, even though the store no longer exists.<sup>2</sup> There were many others, such as the Zeve brothers, Joe and Aaron, of Nacogdoches; the Newman brothers, Max and Ben, of Belton; and the Sangers of Dallas.

Although the housewives eagerly awaited the visits of the peddlers for the household equipment and clothing materials they would bring, the children were even more excited, for they knew that mother would buy something for them---calico for a new dress, shiny new shoes, or a ribbon bonnet. Also, it usually meant they would have an overnight guest, and the popularity of the peddlers was challenged only by that of the

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<sup>1</sup>Reported by Mrs. Ora McMullen, Mrs. Lillie Stegall, Mrs. W. J. Townsend, Sr., and Mrs. W. C. Binion, Sr., of Lufkin.

<sup>2</sup>Reported by J. Dave Dillingham of Austin, born in Williamson County August 15, 1866.



circuit-riding preachers in this respect. Frequently the children would sit on the gateposts in front of their homes to await the general stores on wheels. It was a thrill for them to stand by and watch the peddler open his pack or valise to display his laces and embroidery, silks and calicos, and dress patterns, as well as buttons, combs, and other small notions.

In Nacogdoches the peddlers were part of the picturesque scene in the 1870's, when the Old Stone Fort still stood in the center of the village and the loud yells of the stagecoach drivers could be heard in the distance as they neared the town, cracking their whips to let the residents know they were coming with the mail.<sup>1</sup>

When she was a girl in Old Boston, Bowie county, in the early 1880's, Mrs. Ada C. Read Penn<sup>2</sup> of Austin recalled, most families relied largely on the peddlers, who would cry "Hello!" as they approached to attract the attention of the housewives. Among the wares they carried for little girls were straw hats which sold for fifty cents. Most of the "store shopping" was done in nearby Texarkana or the shipping center of Jefferson, where steamboats brought goods that went from there by stagecoach to the interior of the state. When the cotton crop was harvested, her father would load up sixty

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<sup>1</sup>Reported by Mrs. Ida Hillenkamp, born in Nacogdoches February 14, 1860.

<sup>2</sup>Born in DeKalb, Bowie County, August 10, 1867.

bales to take to town, where he would buy food and clothing in large quantities to last the remainder of the year. On his return he would have large kits of mackerel, sides of dried codfish to be soaked and cooked at home, crates of oysters, barrels of flour and sugar, and bolts of gingham and calico.

All kinds of kitchen utensils and other tinware products were peddled through the eastern part of Texas. Mrs. Margaret Moore of Temple remembered an uncle who had a tin shop in Greenville, where she lived as a child. After making a sufficient quantity of tinware, he would load his buckets, pans, tubs, and wash basins on a wagon and travel through the country selling his products. The tin peddlers, with other notions in their stock, operated in Salado in the days when college students there paid only ten or twelve dollars for "room, washing and lodging," according to Mrs. Robert L. Henry of Belton. About the same time, she recalled, "everyone would run to the post office to get the mail, when they heard the bugle blasts of the approaching stagecoaches."

Among the colorful peddlers in Galveston during the 1880's were some Chinese who carried bushel baskets of tea, coffee, vegetables, or fruits suspended from each end of a bamboo pole balanced across their shoulders. They walked from house to house, and "children were always glad to see

them come, as the peddlers gave them crystalized fruit or nuts."<sup>1</sup> Other peddlers carried collar buttons, pins, needles, and other notions on trays hung from straps around their shoulders.

The peddlers who traded their wares for whatever the farm families had to sell were called "chicken peddlers," because they bought chickens, as well as eggs and other farm produce, so that their customers would have money to buy their wares. These salesmen usually carried their goods in "telescopes," valises that were so called because they unfolded like the magnifying instrument of that name. When opened, the valises revealed numerous trays of articles that were hard to resist. On the back of their horse-drawn wagons were wire coops in which the peddlers could keep the chickens until they reached a town to sell them.

The wagons upon which the peddlers traveled, although all were horse-drawn, never were exactly alike; each had an individual touch of its owner. S. W. Adams of Austin, who lived on a farm in Houston county when he was a child, remembered one which had a bed "latticed up with wood," before wire netting was available for coops. "When mother found something she wanted to buy, we kids would chase down some chickens or gather some eggs." Chickens then sold at ten to

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<sup>1</sup>Reported by Mrs. W. L. Love of Galveston, born May 30, 1874, in the old Capitol Hotel owned by her father, which had been the second capitol of Texas. The Rice Hotel now stands on the site.

twenty cents each, while calico or gingham could be bought for ten to fifteen cents a yard.

One wagon vendor who came to Salado once a week would take orders and on his next trip bring whatever his regular customers needed. His wagon had a canvas top and was built up on the sides, with shelves on the inside to display his wares. A door opened on one side for the customers to enter and select what they wanted to buy. The chicken coop was on the rear end.<sup>1</sup> Later in Salado, about 1910, peddlers traveled in four-wheel horse-drawn hacks, covered on top and sides with heavy canvas to protect their wares from the sun and rain. The drivers would roll up the canvas to display their goods.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporaries of the pack and wagon peddlers in East Texas, still remembered by the old-timers who were school children at the time, were the organ grinders with their monkeys to collect small coins in tin cups and the "old Russian" with his trained bears. Mrs. S. W. Adams of Austin remembered the performing bears---a grizzly, a black bear, and a cinnamon bear---that would come with their owner to the school grounds at Huntsville at lunchtime. Children would save scraps from their lunches to feed the animals, so they could see them dance.

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. W. S. Rose of Salado, who has lived there since 1886, when she went there to teach "painting and elocution."

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Pearl Goodnight of Salado, who believes she is a distant relative of the famed cattle driver, Charley Goodnight.

"We'd hardly eat any of our lunches, so we would be sure to have some food for the bears," Mrs. Adams said.

Reminiscing at an Old Trail Drivers of Texas reunion at San Antonio in 1931, Bob Lauterdale recalled the early-day clock peddlers: "I can remember when cattle were so cheap that a peddler came through the country trading off eight-day clocks for cows and calves. One settler took his clock home and, after winding it, set it on the mantle. After supper the family gathered around to watch the clock and hear it tick. Directly the thing struck eight o'clock. The sound scared the family so bad they just stampeded."<sup>1</sup>

In the early days before merchants started handling china and pottery table ware, a broken dish was a minor disaster in any household. The early settlers guarded their dishes with special caution. Afton Wym tells of the pioneer living in Parker county, when peddlers came from Fort Worth "with tinware, knives, and two-tined forks."

"They also brought shining tin pails, dishpans, washpans, sifters, and candlesticks. Each household had its covered dutch oven for all baking purposes, but in Parker County this was called the skillet and lid. In each well-ordered home were to be found heavy pieces of ironware, washpots, and lidless skillets for frying. Pothooks for the boiling pots were built firmly into the chimneys. Some homes even had

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<sup>1</sup>J. Frank Dobie, The Flavor of Texas (Dallas: Dealey Lowe, 1936), p. 270.

wrought iron andirons, but rocks were often used to support the burning logs in the fireplace." At first candles were used for light, as well as grease lamps, "made by placing a wick or a wadded rag in a utensil filled with tallow or lard." This type of lamp, however, smoked up the house badly, and particular housewives avoided using them. Soon peddlers brought small brass lamps, which held "as little as a half-pint of kerosene (coal oil) and were burned without a chimney," but many people thought them too dangerous to use.<sup>1</sup>

Among the familiar peddlers in the early years of this century were the Assyrian "lace ladies" and the gypsies, who sold all kinds of fancy laces, embroidery, linens, and trinkets. Most of them carried old-fashioned "telescope" valises, which opened upward to reveal trays of handmade merchandise not found in the local stores at that time. Their stock usually included bedspreads, tablecloths, pillow slips, quilts, and scarfs or "fascinators" (silky wool or crocheted scarfs worn on the head and tied under the chin). Mrs. F. D. Biddle of Texarkana remembered one who also peddled vanilla flavoring and a face powder called "prepared chalk." This chalk was crushed into powder before using and came in only one shade, white; there were no such special blends to suit different types of skin, like the rachel, peach, blonde, and brunette of today.

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<sup>1</sup>"Pioneer Folk Ways," Straight Texas, Publication of the Texas Folk-Lore Society, XIII (1937), 211.

In Marshall two Assyrian sisters, one named Annie, wore long black dresses decorated with spangles, black beads, numerous bracelets, dangling earrings, and colorful head scarfs.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Alice Powers of Salado, who had a hand-woven quilt she bought many years ago from an Assyrian peddler, remembered these vendors as well as she did the cattle herds that used to pass her house when she was a girl. The cattle drivers, taking their herds to northern markets over the old Chisholm Trail, would camp regularly near her home. Her two younger brothers soon learned it was profitable to go watch the herds and be on hand when the drive resumed in the early morning, for the drivers usually would have to leave some new-born calves behind.

A group of gypsies who camped in tents on a hill at the edge of Marshall when she was a girl are vivid pictures in the memory of Mrs. Maude Sedberry. She would slip away from home to play and sing with the carefree wanderers and watch them dance to the music of their tambourines. In nearly every Texas town of any size the gypsies tempted women with their elegant wares. While these gypsies never stopped roving, many of the Assyrians settled and opened stores of their own.

The Fuller Brush Man has been the most widely known brand-name peddler in Texas, as well as throughout the nation, because of his persistent and persuasive salesmanship, his

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<sup>1</sup>

Recalled by Mrs. Ruth Beehn of Marshall.

knack for getting his foot inside the door and his brush products into the house to demonstrate to reluctant housewives. Because he had become such a symbol of this phase of American life, he was made the subject of a movie by that title only a few years ago. But another type of door-to-door vendor familiar in recent years was a woman, who carried a small grip, or suitcase, filled with cooking extracts, toilet goods, and cosmetics. Like the brush salesman, these women peddlers usually were known by the name of the products they had to sell. Housewives called them the "Raleigh woman" or the "Watkins woman." People in Belton remember one refined little old lady who, less than twenty years ago, pushed a baby buggy on the sidewalks from house to house, stopping at each one to rap on the door in hope of finding a customer for her toilet goods and food flavorings. She wore a black taffeta petticoat that rustled as she walked; this was the only noise that signaled her approach.<sup>1</sup>

Although these peddlers who trudged silently over dusty roads or muddy lanes, or jogged along in their wagons over rough unpaved trails, carved a niche in the state's social history, it is the huckster who hawked his goods with a sing-song appeal that most clearly reflects the life, occupations, and products typical of a specific area. This musical lore has been part of the natural setting of Texas, just as it has been in New Orleans, Charleston, and New England.

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<sup>1</sup>Reported by Miss Lena Armstrong, librarian at the public library in Belton.



CHAPTER IV  
VOCAL VENDORS OF TEXAS

In his introduction to a collection of frontier songs and ballads, J. Frank Dobie recalled a remark made by an old Scotch woman to Sir Walter Scott as the famous nineteenth century folklorist was taking some ballads from her. "They were made for singing and no for reading," she contended.<sup>1</sup> Just as Dobie says his border ballads also are "made for singing and no for reading," so are the songs and cries of the street peddlers and vendors. They recall a way of life that has gradually vanished with the arrival of modern inventions and the adoption of legal restrictions that silenced their songs and licensed their means of livelihood.

The ambitious salesmen who traveled by foot, by horse, or by wagon, hauling their products to the doorsteps of their customers, attracted attention---and buyers---by crying out their wares. The more poetic vendors chanted in rhyme, often more amusing than poetic. Others with a musical bent put their verses to refreshing and seductive melodies, singing out their tunes as their horse-drawn wagons rumbled along the streets, or as they hawked their goods by foot. But they all had one thing in common---strong vocal chords.

<sup>1</sup>"Ballads and Songs of the Frontier Folk," Texas and Southwestern Lore, Publication of the Texas Folk-Lore Society, VI (1927), 121.

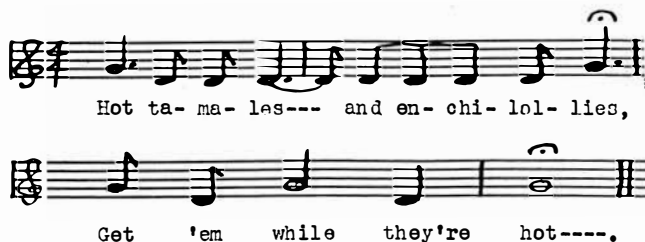
Perhaps the most familiar chants and songs heard in Texas, with the greatest number of variations, were those sung by the watermelon, hot tamale, fruit, vegetable, and charcoal peddlers. Those that had food to sell were the most numerous, and many of these were farmers or gardeners who raised their own crops and then peddled them through the streets in residential neighborhoods. Some had regular customers who depended upon their weekly or daily visits to stock their cupboards and pantries.

Certain foods that required preparation, such as hot tamales, breads and other bakery products, lye hominy, ice cream, and cold drinks, were first hawked by the men or women who made them. Later peddlers cried out the wares or products made by others who had advanced from street salesmen to owners of their own shops.

Just as varied as the state's climate, landscape, and wildlife, Texas hucksters were part and parcel of the mixture of races and nationalities that invaded the territory ruled under six flags. Although the Anglo-Saxons could be found selling almost anything that would bring them money, members of other races became identified chiefly with certain products. The singing fruit salesman usually was an Italian or a Mexican; the hot tamale man was most often a Mexican; and the hominy vendor almost always was a Negro.

Each part of the state had its predominant racial huckster. In East Texas, more closely allied with the Deep South of the plantation slavery era, there was a preponderance of Negroes. From San Antonio and Austin south to the Rio Grande, the Mexicans led the parade of peddlers. Because of the large numbers of Spanish-speaking citizens in Texas who are reluctant to give up their romantic language, the state's occupational songs and cries include many in the Mexican tongue. Especially is this true of the songs used to sell foods that made their way north across the border, until today chili con carne, tamales, tortillas, and enchiladas are epicurean delights in cafes and roadside stands throughout Texas.

In San Antonio shortly after the turn of the century a Mexican vendor sold tamales and enchiladas through the streets with a sing-song appeal. He carried them in buckets, one in each hand. His tamales, which he sold at ten cents a dozen, "were so moist they would melt in your mouth and so hot they would burn your fingernails," Mrs. George Surkey recalled. She also remembered the song he sang:



Tom Harris, a full-blooded Indian (his father was an Apache and his mother a Cherokee) who was reared by Mexicans, still peddles his hot tamales in Temple, where he started out about 1900 with a large can strapped to his back. At that time, he recalled, he sold seven tamales---a baker's half dozen---for a nickel. Fifty years later he was getting fifty cents a dozen; meat and meal price hikes forced him up on his charges. From the pack on his back he graduated to a small wooden pushcart with three wooden wheels, which he still rolls through the streets two or three times a week. In his cart is a round five-gallon tin yeast can, wrapped with tow-sack to hold the heat, and he opens the can only when he stops to make a sale. Like most other tamale peddlers of recent years, he keeps a stack of newspapers on his cart to wrap the tamales for his customers. He rang a bell to announce his approach until he was forced to stop by a city ordinance. Now he just walks along silently, pushing his little cart. He says, philosophically, "Everyone knows who I am."

On a crisp fall or cold winter day, few could resist the hot tamale man, usually a Mexican who pushed his little cart of cornshuck-enveloped treats along the streets. The name of the product itself was the heart of most of the cries heard in all towns of any size in Texas, and more often than not this was preceded by an adjective describing the tempera-

ture of the tantalizing treat. Each tamale man had his own individual way of singing or crying his wares, and no two sounded exactly alike. Some emphasized the hot; others placed their vocal stress on the various syllables of the product itself.



#### PLATE II

In East Texas, where the state's Negro population is largely concentrated, there were about as many ebony-skinned tamale vendors as there were Mexican. Two of the tamale men remembered by the long-time residents of Lufkin were a Mexican everyone called "Hombre" and a Negro known only as Frank. "Hombre," who pushed his small cart through the streets in the earlier part of the century, lived in an old slave quarter log cabin, where he made his tamales. He would plod

slowly through the streets, calling out his "Hot ta-ma-les!" or in his native tongue, "Ta-ma-le cal-i-en-te!"



### PLATE III

As late as the 1940's Frank had a regular daily route he walked through the town, with his lard tin of tamales hanging from a strap around his shoulders. People frequently would go to hunt him, as they knew where he would be at certain hours.<sup>1</sup> Other towns had their favorite tamale men. In Nacogdoches it was a Mexican called "Old John," while in Texarkana tamales were peddled by a tall Negro known as Mike.<sup>2</sup>

In Galveston many years ago an old tamale man rode through the streets in his horse-drawn wagon and blew a horn which attracted attention and customers with its peculiar fog-horn sound. He had no cry. "His horn was his signal and everyone knew it," W. A. Nicholson recalled. Even today Galveston still has a Mexican who has become somewhat of a landmark in the shadows of the Texas Revolution monument on palm-lined Broadway. There he can be found every day from late afternoon on into the night as long as his tamales hold out.

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<sup>1</sup> Recalled by Mrs. W. J. Townsend, Sr., Mrs. W. C. Binion, Sr., and Mrs. Ora McMullen of Lufkin.

<sup>2</sup> Recalled by Miss Vergie Sanders of Nacogdoches and Mrs. Joe Bowers of Texarkana.

He keeps them steaming hot in a large tin airtight container on a small fringe-topped pushcart, with a lamp-shaped light hanging from the top.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the vendors in Houston had their own peculiar pronunciations for this staple of the Mexican diet inherited from the Aztecs.<sup>2</sup> One Mexican driving a two-wheeled horse-drawn cart would cry, "Hot tamalip!"<sup>3</sup> Another's chant was "Ta-mal! Ta-mal!"<sup>4</sup> Others would set up tables in the old city market, where the bus station is now located, and keep their chili and tamales hot on charcoal burners. They served these dishes, with hot peppers and chopped onions, on tables covered with red-checked cloths.

For years an old Mexican stood on the same corner near a laundry in Fort Worth, throwing kisses and calling out his "Hot ta-ma-les, tortillas, enchiladas, chili con carne! Anybody want some?"<sup>5</sup> J. C. Roberts of Fort Worth, who was born in the small town of Sanger and who spent his boyhood in that Denton county community, remembered "a fellow who met the trains at the depot in Denton." He was a familiar

<sup>1</sup>Described by Mrs. Peter Lalsz and Mildred M. Oser of Galveston.

<sup>2</sup>John G. Bourke, "The Miracle Play of the Rio Grande," Journal of American Folk-Lore, VI (1893), 91.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Mrs. I. Lee Campbell of Houston.

<sup>4</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Mody C. Boatright of Austin.

<sup>5</sup>Recalled by Mrs. John Winter of Fort Worth.

character to everyone in Denton in those days, shortly after the turn of the century, and was well known to the train passengers who passed through the town regularly. At a breathless pace, apparently afraid the train would pull out before he could dispose of his food, he would shout, "Hot tamales, chicken and ham sandwiches, nice fresh pies, boiled eggs."

When she was a child in Waxahachie, Dr. Harlan Miller of Denton recalled, she sat on the gatepost waiting for the hot tamale man to reach her neighborhood. One vendor carried his tamales in a large lard tin, braced on his back by a strap slung over his shoulder. The pecan pralines he sold as an additional treat sounded more like "corn candy" the way he pronounced it in his cry, "Hot tamales, 'cawn candy!"

Some of the tamale men advertised their products in verse. One poetic Mexican in Dallas impressed her so much with his musical rhyme that she wrote a short story about him when she was in high school, Mrs. Wayne Taylor of Denton said. As he walked along shoving his cart, he rang a bell that blended with his tune, which could be heard a block away:

Hot tamales, floatin' in gravy;  
Suit ya taste and don't mean maybe.

Another in Dallas had two verses to the song he sang. His favorite was:



The world goes around  
 And the rain comes down,  
 And I got the best  
 Hot tamales in town.

But for the sake of variety, he sometimes used this version:

The sun rises in the east  
 And sets in the west,  
 And here's the place<sup>1</sup>  
 You can get the best.

A vendor who indicated he had a bargain, apparently when competition grew stiff, was heard in Denton, soliciting customers with his cry of "Hot tamales, two in a shuck."<sup>2</sup> Another in Lufkin was a little more honest. Although he claimed in his cry that his tamales had "three in a shuck," he would add facetiously, "Two of 'em slipped and one of 'em stuck."<sup>3</sup> Mody Boatright of Austin believes this cry of the hot tamale peddler was being mimicked by boys playing marbles when he was young. As he recalled it, their pleading call for luck when they made a shot was:

Hot tamales, two in a shuck,  
 One fell out, the other stuck.

Although many complained of the unsanitary aspects of the street-peddled tamales, most people were willing to risk any health hazards to taste the corn-husked treat. George Sessions Perry, who prefers hog's head tamales to those made

<sup>1</sup>Recalled by J. Robert Hill of Dallas.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Edwards of Denton.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Mrs. M. L. Holland of Texarkana.

of beef or chicken, wrote, "I never saw a tamale peddler in my life who manifested the slightest interest in sanitation, but I also don't remember ever buying any of their wares that weren't, for all their skimping on the meat content, tasty and good."<sup>1</sup>

Once a colorful feature of the San Antonio street scene were the chili stands and the now almost legendary "chili queens," whose voices embellished the atmosphere with their ringing entreaties to prospective customers. Operating first in open-air stands on Alamo Plaza, where they cooked their chili con carne, tamales, frijoles, tortillas, and many other kinds of pucheros and ollas (a kind of Spanish gumbo or stew) on charcoal burners, the chili queens moved to other plazas before they were driven indoors by health and sanitation laws. They flourished most freely in the late nineteenth century before they began to fade in the 1890's.<sup>2</sup> However, some were still in business through the first quarter of this century.

About 1910 there were still chili stands in front of the Alamo, Maury Maverick wrote in his autobiography, but he discredited what he called "the popular idea of the 'Chili Queen.'" According to this belief, he said, "she was supposed to be a very beautiful young Senorita, somewhere between six-

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<sup>1</sup> Texas: A World in Itself (New York: Whittlesey House, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942), p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> Bourke, "Folk-Foods of the Rio Grande Valley and of Northern Mexico," op. cit., VIII (1895), 60.

teen and twenty-one, a charming girl, who had a voice like a nightingale and dressed in fine Spanish costumes. . . . The truth of the matter is that the chili stands were insanitary places and were ordinarily run by poor old women, who had little charcoal stoves in back of their stands." Reminiscing of his boyhood days, Maverick said that on Saturday nights "Papa would give us what he called 'tamale money'---a big nickel each, and with this hickel we would go to the tamale stands where we would all get six tamales and chili-con-carne. And the time came when our father doubled our tamale money and gave us ten cents each, and so with the dime we could get what we had been getting before, and also a great big cup of chocolate, or some pecan candy. With the chocolate was served some 'pan dulce'---that is to say, sweet bread or Mexican cake."<sup>1</sup>

Spreading from the Alamo Plaza, the chili stands were afterwards found on Haymarket Plaza, so called because, when it was first established, it was used principally for the sale of hay for horses before wagons and buggies were replaced by horseless carriages. V. T. Garcia, who started as a fruit and vegetable peddler and later established a wholesale produce business, said market stalls thirty-five years ago rented at ten cents a day to farmers who brought hay and produce to town to sell.

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<sup>1</sup> A Maverick American (New York: Covici-Friede Publishers, 1937), pp. 50-51.

Haymarket Plaza by day, the public square would become "Chili Queen Plaza" by night. A vivid and fragrant description of the chili stands is given by Brownie McNeil as he recalls a visit to the plaza with a Mexican neighbor boy, despite "the warning of my mother concerning the complete disregard of accepted sanitary practices among the fraternity of the tamale and the frijol." The hot greasy odor of the Mexican foods, heated by mesquite coals in an open brazier, cast off an enticing aroma for some distance, and smoke curled into the air when the lard cans were opened to serve a customer.

"Several pots and five-gallon lard cans were arranged around each brazier on racks, near enough to the coals to keep their contents warm," McNeil wrote. "The brazier was in the center of a crude U-shaped table made of wide boards laid across a carpenter's sawhorses and covered with oil-cloth. Oil lanterns hung from poles at each of the two corners of the U." On the table in front of each folding chair was a knife, fork, spoon, glass, and plate. Placed upside down, the plate was turned up by the customer to indicate he was ready to be served. "As we approached the plaza, we heard the shrill, nasal female voices singing the wares each had to offer: "Menu-u-u-u-do-o-o, enchila-a-a-a-das, ta-a-a-a-a-cos, chi-i-i-i-i-le!" About midnight the stands were

cleared away to make way for the vegetable produce to be unloaded from waiting wagons, and "by four o'clock in the morning the plaza would be a howling, chattering mass of peddlers and buyers who would argue and bargain over piles of fruits and vegetables."<sup>1</sup>

In Laredo, as in the land south of the border, Mexicans would come around in the early morning about sunup selling barbecue, according to Ed Idar of Austin. Many people would buy the roasted meat for breakfast. One vendor, driving a horse-drawn wagon, would call out his barbacoa as he rode along, but all was practically a whisper except the "co-a," which resounded in the air in a plaintive melody as his voice rose to a high note on the a:



#### PLATE IV

To make their barbecue, Idar said, the Latin-Americans would dig a large pit in the ground and build hot coals in the hole, using the leaves of the tropical maguey, which contain much water, to line the pit. The meat would be placed in the pit and covered with leaves. After more coals and loose dirt were added, the meat would be left to roast for four or five

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<sup>1</sup>"Haymarket Plaza," The Sky Is My Tipi, Publication of the Texas Folk-Lore Society, XXII (1949), 168-78.

hours before being removed from the earthen stove. This method also is used on many ranches in Southwest Texas.<sup>1</sup>

Tortillas, carried in baskets, were sold by women and are still peddled in this manner in Nuevo Laredo, just across the border, and farther south in Mexico. Now in Laredo, however, tortillas are handled by certain families or in neighborhood stores. The drawling "co-a!" is still heard in Mexican sections of San Antonio, where vendedors sing their barbacoa for sale through the streets.<sup>2</sup>

The Arabian fashion of selling bread from trays carried through the streets of Jerusalem,<sup>3</sup> which found its way to Europe and then to the New World, apparently was introduced to Texas by the Mexicans. Many of the prégons who specialized in hot and sweet breads were familiar on the streets of San Antonio and smaller towns south to the Rio Grande. In the Alamo city the Mexicans carried large baskets of pan dulce (sweet bread) or cakes. Some used a ring-shaped attachment fastened to their heads, on which they balanced their large baskets, as they strolled through the streets singing, "Pan dulce!"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See article by J. Frank Dobie, "Backyard Pits Are Popular: Good Barbecue Requires Good Meat, An Even Fire and Plenty of Time," Fort Worth Star-Telegram, February 10, 1952.

<sup>2</sup>Reported by Marion Tarin, butcher in the City Market, San Antonio.

<sup>3</sup>Bourke, "Notes on the Language and Folk-Usage of the Rio Grande Valley," op. cit., IX (1896), 97.

<sup>4</sup>Recalled by William L. Scott, assistant custodian of San Jose Mission, San Antonio.

The musical cry of a bakeryman in Alice, where he lived with his grandmother while attending school in the early part of this century, is recalled by J. Frank Dobie:

Alice had two or three panaderias (bakeries). Along in the afternoon after the baking was finished, a Mexican would fill a great basket, which he carried on his head, with hot lightbread and pan dulce (sweetened bread, something like coffee cake) and start out through the streets. One could hear him two or three blocks away crying in a kind of song, "Pan caliente, pan dulce" (hot bread, sweet bread). Whoever bought a loaf of lightbread at five cents would receive as a pilon (something extra)<sup>1</sup> one of the delicious little round cakes, both as light as milk foam. As the bakeryman took the basket from his head and uncovered the clean, white cloth wrapping, the warm, fresh smell of the bread made a kind of song also, matching his cry. His smile was another song as he took the nickel and delivered the pilon.<sup>2</sup>

His voice rising on the last note of each type of pan he had to offer, the vendor's song sounded like this:



PLATE V

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<sup>1</sup> A custom by which buyers received a small gratuity or gift after a purchase. As explained by John G. Bourke, well-known folklorist, "This custom must be one of great authority; the word pilon means a stone, or other crude weight, with which in Spain it was in ancient days customary to balance the scales used in the markets. Under the name of l'agnappe, the very same thing exists among the Creole French in Louisiana. Perhaps the Romans had in their bonus a custom of similar import." (Southwestern Lore, Publication of the Texas Folk-Lore Society, IX (1931), 114.

<sup>2</sup> "Pan Caliente, Pan Dulce": Street Vendors' Cries of Other Days Added Picturesque Touch to Living," Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 13, 1951.

In the small town of San Diego in South Texas, José Martínez baked the hot and sweet breads, which were peddled in the streets there by vendors who called out in the same musical chant.<sup>1</sup>

While these Mexican vendors hawked their wares by foot, some of the bread salesmen in other parts of the state sold their bakery products by horse-drawn wagons. In the piney woods section of East Texas, W. A. Colmorgan opened the first bakery in Lufkin about 1895 and peddled fresh bread baked daily by his wife. Driving his one-horse hack, he would make his rounds of the town every afternoon to sell his hot breads, doughnuts, and coffee cake. He rang a bell and sometimes would call out, "Hot bread!" Later, when his business was established, his deliverymen took over the selling end of his deal.<sup>2</sup> In Jefferson a Negro known only as Amos to his regular customers delivered fresh bread every afternoon in a horse-drawn hack. He worked for the local bakery and rang a bell to summon housewives to his wagon.<sup>3</sup>

When Mrs. Jessie Heirs Grymes was a young teen-age girl in Houston, she witnessed an eighteen-inch snowstorm that imprinted in her memory a bread vendor who sold his

<sup>1</sup>Reported by his daughter, Ebelia Martínez.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by W. M. Glenn and Mrs. R. T. Cannon of Lufkin.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Lillie McDonald of Jefferson.

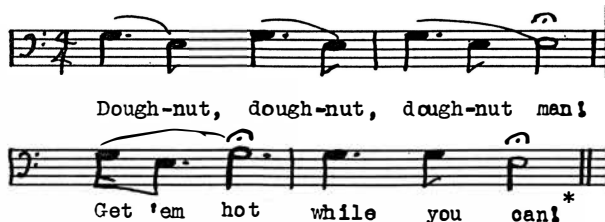


long and round loaves, cakes, and pies from a horse-drawn wagon. During this storm of 1889, she recalled, "Old Man Young had to take the wheels off his wagon and put on sleds to deliver his bread." As he rode along in the days when horses and oxen were watered at the courthouse fountain, he would cry out, "Bread! Bread!"

In the early part of this century, when Galveston still had mule cars as the only means of public transportation, a young Jewish immigrant from Poland arrived and started out in business on a literal shoestring. At the age of thirteen Felix Fox was peddling shoestrings and went to the wharf one day in search of customers. He was greeted by workers who wanted food, not shoestrings; so he went to a local baker to stock his basket with pies, cakes, and doughnuts, according to Mrs. Peter Lelsz, whose father was the baker. As she was a young girl at the time, she remembered the young immigrant's rise to success and fortune. His first day's venture to the docks with food was met with such a hearty response that the next day he filled two baskets. Soon he made himself a pushcart at a blacksmith shop, and in three months he had outgrown this. But it took him almost a year of saving from his profits before he was able to buy a horse and buckboard to increase his supply. Then he added a keg of ice water to his wagon, and later lemonade, which he sold in large mugs for a nickel. As he started out

selling his pies, he would cry, "Get your fresh hot pies!" Because of his sales instinct, however, when his business grew and he made friends with the workers at the wharf, he changed his cry to "Get Felix's fresh hot pies!" Some years later when he left Galveston, Mrs. Lelsz said, he was wealthy.

Galveston's doughnut men were familiar figures. Some traveled on foot; others in wagons. One had a rhythmic chant he used to sell his hot little cakes with the hole in the middle:



#### PLATE VI

Wearing white cotton trousers with a loose white coat, and carrying his doughnuts in a basket strapped over his back, another would walk along the Galveston streets, calling out:

Call for coffee! Coffee doughnuts!  
Doughnut man! Doughnut man!<sup>1</sup>

Another would sing a song with a plaintive blues melody to sell his product, emphasizing the fact that they were

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\*Recalled by Mrs. Peter Lelsz of Galveston.

<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Miss Margaret Reading of Austin.

home-made, but slurring the last word so that it sounded more like "home-mud."



Home-mud dough-nuts! Home-mud dough-nuts!



Can't you hear that dough-ough-nut man?



Ma - a - a - ma! Ma - a - a - ma!



Won't you buy my home-mud dough - nuts?\*

#### PLATE VII

From the early days watermelons have been one of the principal products peddled by street vendors in Texas. Today highway stands and summer gardens, where people can sit at tables and enjoy the ice-cold juicy, pulpy red meat of the sliced melons, have driven most of the wagon peddlers from the streets, but an occasional wagon still is seen parked and displaying signs to advertise the huge green-skinned fruit. A few may call out their drawling "Wa-a-ter-mel-ons!," but

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\*Recalled by Mildred M. Oser and W. A. Nicholson of Galveston.

most of the vendors just sit in silence and wait for customers in passing automobiles to stop and pick out melons to take home. For a long time the vendors would plug their melons to assure their buyers that they were ripe.

Among the many Texas brags are its Parker county melons, which first won national notice about 1900, when G. A. Holland and Luther Lytle took twelve Triumph melons to the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1904 and returned home with the gold medal. Ranging from ninety-six to a hundred pounds each, they weighed a total of 1,185 pounds. "The sightseers at the fair were amazed at the size of the melons, and public outings had to be staged to assure them that the exhibit was not a fake," wrote Afton Wynn.

Long before this time Bill Sullivan of the Erwin community had made a local name for himself as a melon grower, and people in the Poolville section who had had less luck with their melons would wait anxiously until Sullivan came along the road with a wagonful of the green motley beauties which he sold for a dime or fifteen cents each.<sup>1</sup>

Most familiar throughout Texas were the melodious cries that enticed customers with only the name of the product, crooned "so prolongedly that you could imagine a long street paved with a single sliced watermelon."<sup>2</sup> Peddlers

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 228.

<sup>2</sup>Dobie, "'Pan Caliente, Pan Dulce,'" op. cit.

differed in their vocal inflections, placing emphasis on different syllables of the word as their voices rose or dropped. Some of them sounded like this:



Wa--- ter - mel - ons!



Wa - ter - mel - ons----!



Wa--- ter - mel - ons----!

#### PLATE VIII

Many of the wagon peddlers rang large dinner bells as they rode along in their wagons, piled high with the large, heavy melons that were as much a part of a Texas summer as a Fourth of July picnic. Most of them emphasized in their songs and cries the color of the pulpy edible fruit, while some who managed to keep them cold enticed customers by using the adjective that spelled refreshment on days when they were baking under a blistering sun.



Wa--- ter-mel-ons! Ice cold wa-ter-mel-ons----!

#### PLATE IX

In some towns today one still sees an occasional watermelon wagon parked under the shade of a tree. Only a year ago in Fort Worth one such salesman, persistently clinging to the past, parked his wagon at a busy intersection at the edge of Trinity Park and attempted to compete vocally with the honking horns and screeching brakes of heavy automobile traffic. But it was twenty or more years ago that their songs had the greatest appeal and revealed the most imagination. One of the comparatively simple songs heard in Dallas was:



Red, ripe! Red, ripe! Wa--- ter-mel-ons!\*

PLATE X

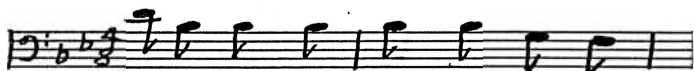
In Denton and Emis, and perhaps in other Texas towns, certain poetic peddlers had a verse that stressed the freshness of their product and the cost, which, compared to the prices charged today, sounds like the advertisements of an end-of-the-season clearance sale:

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\* Recalled by Miss Ione Kimball of Belton.

Watermelons, watermelons,  
 Fresh off the vine,  
 Get your watermelons,  
 A nickel or a dime.<sup>1</sup>

A watermelon vendor who plied his trade on the wagon route in Denton about twenty-five years ago would ride through the streets, soliciting buyers with this song:



Wa - ter - mel - ons, come and see - ee,



Ev-ery-one sold on a guar - an - tee - ee!<sup>\*</sup>

#### PLATE XI

Apparently part of a verse heard often in several other Texas towns, the first two lines of the musical cry were:

Watermelons, nice and sweet;  
 Everyone must be good to eat.<sup>2</sup>

At the Farmer's Market in Houston today are several peddlers who now sell their watermelons, fruits, and vegetables from parked trucks. But they remember the songs they used to sing as they sold their produce from horse-drawn wagons that rolled through the streets. One of these vendors, called "Chicken Red" Beatty because he once peddled

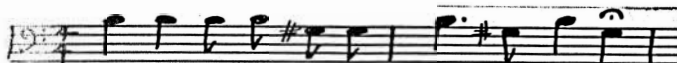
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<sup>\*</sup> Recalled by Mrs. R. H. Hopkins of Denton.

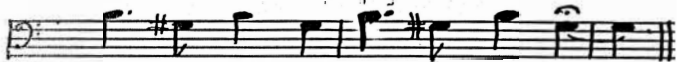
<sup>1</sup> Beatrice Witte, "Peddlers in Texas," The Daedalian Quarterly, Vol. XXVIII, No. 3 (1942), p. 20.-

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

chickens and his hair is a sandy color, sang this song to dispose of his melons:



Red ripe wa-ter-mel-ons! Sweet and jui-cy,



Fit for you and fit for Lu - cy!\*

#### PLATE XII

A one-armed vendor, W. D. Holt, who started peddling when he lost an arm at the age of thirteen, remembered a particular spiel he cried during the thirty-seven years he worked on the streets of Dallas. It was not a song, but more of a drawling chant mixed with a bit of original verse:

Oh, good old red ripe watermelons!  
 Oh, they're red ripe and sweet as honey.  
 You can save money!  
 You can cut 'em and plug 'em;  
 They are red ripe!  
 Oh, lady, lady, you can eat the meat  
 And pickle the rind  
 And save the seed 'til plantin' time.

Hank Williams, who went to Houston from his native Navarro county in the middle 1930's and still peddles seasonal fruits and vegetables he gets from the Farmer's Market, had a loud voice and a long song he used to sell his watermelons. He appealed to the sparse pocketbooks of his depression customers with his persuasive palaver that announced

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\* Recorded as sung by Beatty.



his product, "Watermelons! Here comes Honest John, the poor man's friend. Let everybody eat 'em!" Then he cajoled them into buying melons with his musical cry:

Big like a bar - rel and red ripe! We  
 plug 'em and we out 'em, and they've  
 got to be good. And I know you'd buy one  
 if you could. They are home-grown. They are the  
 Hemp-stead mel-on and red to the rind, and you'll  
 nev - er eat a good one 'til you've  
 had one of mine. They are red ripe!\*

The musical score consists of seven staves of music in 2/4 time, written in treble clef. The melody is simple and catchy, with lyrics written below the notes. The final staff ends with a double bar line.

PLATE XIII

\* Recorded as sung by Williams.

In San Antonio many of the watermelon vendors were Mexicans, who peddled their wares in two languages, depending upon the neighborhood in which they were selling. In the Mexican sections of the city they sang in their native tongue. One recalled by Tom Melchor, chief clerk at the City Market, was "Sandias colorados sabrosas" (Watermelons red and tasteful). Another vendor selling "sweet canteloupes" would sing, "Melones dulces." Many also would add a phrase that carried an appeal to bargain-minded prospects: "Aqui esta el que de barato" (Here is a man who sells cheap).



PLATE XIV

V. T. Garcia, one of the oldest produce men still operating there, started out as a peddler in Austin and continued when he moved to San Antonio in 1914. He first peddled apples and bananas from a horse-drawn wagon, and sold hay to the government for Army horses and to livery stables on Haymarket Plaza. In recalling his early days, Garcia said he would make the market with his hay and produce between

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Recorded as sung by Melchor.

three and nine in the morning, peddle his fresh fruits and melons by wagon through the streets until three in the afternoon, and then return to the market to finish out the day. His one-horse wagon had a step on the back, where customers could climb up to pick out what they wanted. When his two sons, Anthony, now market master at the City Market, and Eugene, were old enough to help, Garcia bought two other wagons and loaded each with seventy-five to a hundred pounds of whatever products were in season. Sometimes he would call out as he drove along, "Aqui esta el hombre dulce su sandias (or melones) dulce. Benga y agarra!" (Here is the sweet man with your sweet watermelons (or canteloupes). Come and get it!). Or, "Aqui esta el ranhero; barato, bueno y bonito" (Here is the country man; cheap, good and pretty). Although all of his cries had music, one he always used and especially remembered was "Salio colorado y dulce!" (Cut ripe and red and sweet).

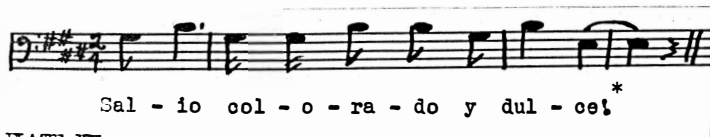


PLATE XV

At the time when his smaller melons sold at a nickel apiece or six for a quarter, and the larger ones at ten cents each or three for a quarter, Garcia would sing to his English-

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\* Recorded as sung by V. T. Garcia.

speaking customers:



Wa--- ter-mel-ons! A dim-ey, a dim-ey,



And three for a quar - ter.\*

# PLATE XVI

Later, after Garcia had changed from horse-and-wagon to motorized trucks, his sons took over the peddling while their father managed his wholesale produce business. Tony recalled when, at the age of fourteen, he sold apples, bananas, and other fruits from a Model-T truck in the depression thirties. Prices of those days make today's housewives sigh as they shop for food at modern supermarkets. Apples sold at ten cents a dozen, three dozen for a quarter, or a bushel basket for six bits. Grapes brought five cents a pound or a quarter for six pounds; bananas, ten cents a dozen or a quarter for three dozen. Tony's truck bed was built up with shelves from the rear to the top where it joined the cab. Products were placed in boxes or baskets on the shelves, and a step at the rear of the truck enabled the customers to climb up for a more convenient view as they selected the foods they wanted to buy. One of the chants he cried as he drove

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Recorded as sung by V. T. Garcia.

along was:

Bananas, peaches, and apples!  
 Oh, lady; oh, lady!  
 They're nice and danoy.  
 Oh, lady, we got 'em here,  
 Sweet as candy.  
 Come and get 'em!  
 We're selling 'em cheap today!

But when his truck was loaded only with bananas, he had a shorter musical verse:

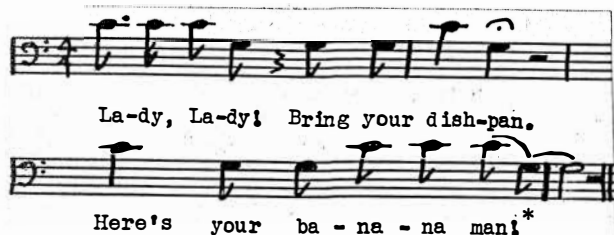


PLATE XVII

In waterfront towns along the Gulf Coast the banana boats were always colorful and provided an exciting pleasure for children who went to the docks to see them come in. Mrs. I. Lee Campbell of Houston, whose father's wholesale grocery and cotton business was located close to the docks, remembered the small boats with their vivid striped awnings that came up the bayou to unload their cargo. Peddlers, as well as produce men, would meet the boats to load their wagons or pushcarts with bananas, which they sold in residential neighborhoods. Many families bought whole stems of the fruit, which they kept

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\*  
 Recorded as sung by Anthony Garcia.

hanging on their back porches. A stem of bananas could be bought for twenty-five cents, while the peddlers sold them at five to ten cents a dozen.

Nearly everywhere the peddler of this fruit was known as "the banana man," sometimes with his name tacked in front. In Houston about thirty years ago one of the familiar peddlers was Sam, the banana man. He was a robust blond German with a magnificent baritone voice, who sang excerpts from operas, and he could be heard blocks away as he rode along in his horse-drawn wagon.<sup>1</sup> The "banana man" in Lufkin first peddled in a wagon, later in a truck, and could be expected on a certain day of the week. He got his bananas in carload lots off trains that brought them inland from the ports where the boats docked. The banana stem decorated the back porches of most homes, as they were hung by ropes to let the fruit ripen, according to Mrs. R. T. Cannon.

In El Paso and other border towns, the Mexican banana peddlers cried only the name of their product unless they could compose an original song. Among Mexicans it is unethical to copy the song of another peddler, says Mody C. Boatright of Austin, an authority on Texas folklore. But their individual tunes and pronunciations made each distinctive. One he recalled would sing, "Bee-nan-oes!"

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Isabel Caylat Thayer of Houston.

Like other peddlers who have been inhibited by anti-noise and health laws, the voice of the banana peddler has been silenced, even though he may be seen in some towns still pushing his little cart. The effect of legal restrictions on the peddlers was exhibited forcefully only a year ago, when the face of an old Italian, pushing his small two-wheeled cart of bananas near the Farmer's Market in Houston, sickened with fear as he was approached by an interested inquirer into the way he made his living. Frightened at the thought of arrest, he cringed and pleaded, "I do nothing."

For several years in the 1920's a banana peddler in Temple would park his wagon beside a railroad grade crossing near a cemetery, especially on Saturdays, and sit silent as he waited for customers. To advertise his fruit he would hang stems of bananas on one end of his wagon gate and from poles attached to his wagon wheels.<sup>1</sup>

In Jefferson, which had been the thriving commercial gateway to Texas in the Civil War days, is a former fruit peddler whose father had worked with a construction gang that helped build the railroad between Longview and Carthage in the 1880's, when he was a small boy. After his father's death in 1899, Charley Chamberlain and his mother traveled by ox-wagon from Collin county to Jefferson. The trip through the

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Jake Bollinger of Temple.

wild prairie and woodlands took eleven days. As he was born a paralytic and could hold only such jobs as nightwatchman, his mother worked at housekeeping, washing, and ironing, earning five to six dollars a month, and also peddled laces, tablecloths, and Irish linens made by Catholic nuns in Cincinnati. In 1910, however, Charley got a horse and wagon and started peddling bananas and other fruits, sometimes traveling as far as Idabel, Oklahoma, and Cameron, Arkansas. He would get bed and board at farm houses where he happened to be at meal time or at night. Later he had a tiny store in Jefferson, where he had a banana stalk and sold bread, cakes, and tobacco. But while he was peddling his fruits, he had a sing-song appeal he would cry out as his wagon rumbled through the streets:



Ap-ples, orang-es, and nice ripe ba-na-nas!\*

PLATE XVIII

Miss Emma Normand of Huntsville remembered a Negro fruit peddler in Trinity, where she first taught, who sold pears grown in the orchard of a local lawyer. Driving a horse-drawn spring-wagon, he would sing out in a voice that sounded like the bleat of a sheep---soft, high-pitched, and plaintive. His voice would rise on the first cry and drop

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\* Recorded as sung by Chamberlain.



on the second, omitting his r's, as he sang:



#### PLATE XIX

In the days when apples were scarce in Texas, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the arrival of apple wagons from Arkansas was a big event. In The Alamo City, Pearson Newcomb describes the welcome they received in San Antonio:

The day before Christmas 1850 was made memorable by the arrival of three wagons loaded with apples. The apple merchants had driven all the way from Arkansas to reach San Antonio, the best market in Texas. Their covered wagons, bearing a precious cargo, more fragrant than spices of the Orient to the inhabitants of San Antonio, had no need to advertise; the air became perfumed along the streets traversed and young and old followed the carriers until they halted to peddle their cargo at ten cents an apple. But what apples they were! The sight of them carried many an old Yank back to the stony hillsides of New England.<sup>1</sup>

In Parker county, teachers in the log schools would buy apples from the Arkansas peddlers to give to their pupils. Each wagon had a fruit-laden limb sticking up to advertise what they had to sell. "Apples were such a rarity and were held in such wholesome esteem by the pioneers that they often

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\* Recorded as sung by Miss Normand.

<sup>1</sup>(San Antonio: Standard Printing Company Press, 1926),  
p. 60.

had their tintype pictures struck while holding an apple fondly in the hand."<sup>1</sup>

The apple wagons from the north, with pole on the front decorated with an apple on top, stopped in Belton to sell the fruit on their way south, according to Mrs. Robert L. Henry of that town. The peddler of the "apples from Arkansas" would sing as he rode through the streets in the early part of this century: "Apples, apples, fresh apples!"

An old apple peddler in Lufkin recalled by Mrs. Lillie Stegall wore an old felt hat and drawled through his mouth, always crammed with tobacco:



Ap-puls! Ap-puls!\*

PLATE XX

Peaches were among the first cultured fruits to be introduced in northern Texas, according to Afton Wynn: "The

The crop was first saved by drying, but along in the eighties the housewives began to learn to can their peaches in glass jars---an innovation which met the disapproval of many who could not believe the fruit would be fit to eat. Bunch raisins, which the people called "reesons," and dried apples could be purchased at the stores around Christmas time, but all tropical fruits were oddities for years.<sup>2</sup>

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Recorded as sung by Mrs. Stegall.

<sup>1</sup>Wynn, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Just as travelers still find apple and maple syrup stands dotting the highways of Ohio and apple cider stands along the roadways of Arkansas, they still can see such stands in front of farms in Texas, where watermelons and fruits of various kinds are sold in season, especially during the summertime. Along the Rio Grande children wearing big-brimmed straw hats may be seen at roadside stands with baskets of apples, peaches, and apricots picked from orchards for sale to travelers.<sup>1</sup> In some towns along the Mexican border may be seen peddlers carrying oranges in baskets on their heads and singing out their product in English, or the same "Naranjos" heard in Mexican towns and villages.<sup>2</sup> Laredo and other Rio Grande towns which have large Mexican populations have heard the ringing cries of "Algo de fruta! Algo de dulce!" (Some fruit! Something sweet!).<sup>3</sup>

The flower markets of Mexican towns extended to Texas cities, especially in that part of the state where Mexicans once had settlements, and fragrant bouquets still may be bought for a song south of the border. At one time such markets could be found in San Antonio, Houston, Victoria, San

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Gilpin, The Rio Grande, River of Destiny (New York: Duell, Sloan Pearce, 1949), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Recalled by George Lee Reynolds of San Antonio.

<sup>3</sup> John G. Bourke, president of the American Folk-Lore Society until his death in 1896, wrote that this New World cry has "more than accidental resemblance" to the street cries of the Moslems, such as "In the name of the Prophet! Figs!" (Journal of American Folk-Lore, IX (1896), 97).

Diego, Laredo, and Corpus Christi.<sup>1</sup> And perhaps some of the vendors sang such refrains as one heard in Monterrey several years ago from the lips of a flower merchant who walked along with a basket of fragrant blossoms on his head:

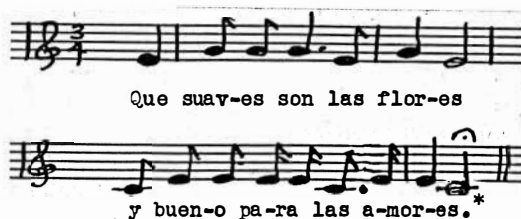


PLATE XXI

Even today on All Saints' Day, in the colorful Juarez market across the river from El Paso, Texans and other visitors will find young Mexican boys with their arms loaded with flowers of all colors and perfume scents, as well as small carts filled with chrysanthemums and other blossoming plants.<sup>2</sup>

Berry vendors were seen frequently on the streets of Houston and Galveston. In the early 1900's, D. A. Finch of San Antonio recalled, one peddler in Galveston called out his appeal in such a slurring chant that it sounded as though he

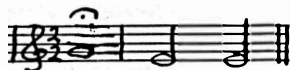
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\* Recorded as reported by Norman (Brownie) McNeil of San Antonio. This means "How sweet are the flowers, and good for love."

<sup>1</sup>Bourke, op. cit., VIII (1895), pp. 69-70.

<sup>2</sup>Gilpin, op. cit., pp. 161, 166.

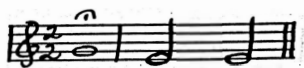
had his word turned backwards. Instead of strawberries, it sounded more like "berry-STRAW-berry-STRAW-berry-STRAW." In Houston one Italian vendor had trouble with his English as he sang, "Strawbelly! Strawbelly!"<sup>1</sup> Negro peddlers in Houston, who carried their berries in pint or gallon cans, or in baskets, would peddle dewberries, blackberries, and strawberries in season, usually by wagon. Strawberry wagons were most numerous, as the berries came from nearby Pasadena, once just a big strawberry patch but today a thriving young industrial city. The cries of the peddlers had the same tune, regardless of which type of berry they were selling:



STRAW - ber - ries!



DEW - ber - ries!



BLACK - ber - ries!\*

PLATE XXII

Nearly every woman born before 1915, or who was a housewife in the early part of this century, remembers the

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\* Recorded as recalled by Mrs. I. Lee Campbell of Houston.

<sup>1</sup> Recalled by Mrs. Mody C. Boatright of Austin.

vegetable vendor who supplied her with most of the food that went on her dinner table. When she heard his cry of "FRESH vegetables!", she would wipe the dishwater or brush the flour from her hands with her apron, and go out to the wagon to handpick her vegetables. After his initial loud cry to attract customers---and many also announced their approach with large dinner bells---the vegetable man usually would call off in a lower monotone a list of his products---corn, string beans, cabbage, peas, okra, tomatoes, etc.

Many of the men who peddled vegetables in Texas were farmers who were selling products they raised on their own land, and for this reason the early ordinances restricting the activity of peddlers exempt home-grown foods. In most towns markets were established, where the farmers could take their garden produce to sell to folks in the city. W. A. McCartney, Sr., of Texarkana, who has lived there since he was four years old and the town was only a few months old, remembered the wagon vendors who came to town from the country with their produce and gathered at the hotel located on the first lot sold after the city was settled in 1873, "when the railroad came through."<sup>1</sup> Later the city established a market square, where farmers could bring their produce to sell.

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<sup>1</sup> McCartney now lives in the third hotel built on the site, in 1930. His father had built the first frame hotel, the Cosmopolitan, which was torn down and replaced with a three-story brick building in 1887.

In the days before the telephone, the vegetable wagon was the place where women neighbors gathered to exchange the day's gossip. And many of the farmer-peddlers were favorites of the children, because they could hop rides with them on their wagons, just as children of later years jumped on the back-end of ice and milk wagons to nibble chips of ice as the wagons rumbled to their next stops. One of these favorites in Texarkana was Mr. McCormack, whose son now owns a furniture store there. He had regular customers who responded to the bell he rang as he called, "Fresh vegetables, butter, and milk."<sup>1</sup> Another was Mr. Torry, who drove a covered wagon with slat sides and shelves inside to hold large boxes of okra, cabbage, beans, and other vegetables. One woman vegetable peddler was a town character everyone remembers, not only because of her cry, but because of the way she dressed. Mrs. O'Mike was her name, and she wore men's trousers. "In those days she was the only woman in the world---in our world at least---who wore trousers," said Mrs. F. D. Biddle. As she rode along in her horse-drawn wagon she would cry out, "Come on, ladies! Here's your fine collards, sister to cabbage!"

Jefferson also had its woman "vegetable man," who rang a bell to lure housewives to her canvas-covered wagon.

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. S. A. Collom, who was born twenty years after her father, Dr. R. W. Read, founded Old Boston in Bowie county in 1854.

Besides all kinds of vegetables in season, she sold butter, eggs, and buttermilk.<sup>1</sup> From behind his clerk's desk at the old Excelsior Hotel, where Jay Gould wrote below his flowing signature in the register in 1882, "The End of Jefferson,"<sup>2</sup> L. P. Neilon recalled a farmer named Lee Grubbs, who peddled farm produce, fresh meat, poultry products, fruits, and melons from a buckboard wagon. He stirred busy housewives from their homes by ringing a large dinner bell.

In the early 1900's a small Negro woman whose customers fondly called her "Aunt Mary" would ride through Marshall on her high-seated buggy and ring a bell as she peddled her vegetables and field corn hominy. But she did not wait for housewives to come to her. She would park her buggy and walk up to the porch, where she would rap with a stick or tin can and call out, "Housekeeper! Housekeeper!" The housewives knew when they heard the dingling of her bell in the distance that Aunt Mary was in the neighborhood, and they would listen for her knock that always followed.<sup>3</sup> Even today Negro peddlers sometimes walk from door to door and knock, but few still cry out their wares. One August morning

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Martin Ragley of Jefferson.

<sup>2</sup>Gould was angered because Jefferson officials refused to grant right-of-way for his railroad. He also is reported to have said that he would live to see the day when grass would grow in the streets of the town.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Maude Sedberry and Mrs. E. P. Womack of Marshall.



in 1951, however, a short, fat dark-skinned woman, wearing a printed cotton dress and a black straw hat, was seen walking along the sidewalk carrying a large brown paper shopping bag. She stopped in front of each house and called, "Any butterbeans or peas today?"

Fifty years ago, before fresh vegetables and fruits were stocked in grocery stores, people either had to raise their own or depend on peddlers to supply them. In those days only such staples as sugar, flour, and cornmeal could be bought in stores. Mrs. Hettie Westheimer Ray of Houston remembered one peddler who would come to her father's farm to buy sweet potatoes, turnips, greens, and cabbage to peddle in town. Sweet potatoes, which then sold at fifty cents a bushel, now cost about twenty-two cents for three or four yams. When A&P, the first big grocery chain, came to Houston, their products consisted chiefly of coffee, tea, spices, and boxed cookies, according to Mrs. I. Lee Campbell, who recalled the big vans through which customers could walk to pick from the shelves what they wanted to buy.

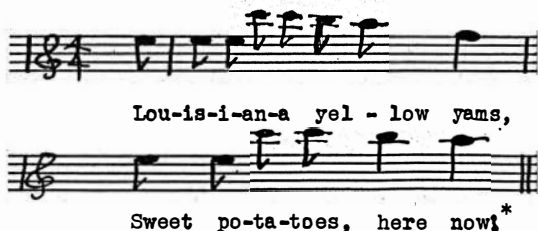
One peddler in Houston, who progressed from foot to horse-and-wagon to truck, had two methods of selling. Sometimes he sang from his wagon; sometimes he rang doorbells of houses along his route. One of his rhyming cries was:

Okra, cucumbers, squash, and sweet potatoes,<sup>1</sup>  
And look at these good old red ripe tomatoes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Reported by W. D. Holt of Houston as one of the cries he used while peddling vegetables.

Another, Hank Williams, had a special song he sang to sell his sweet potatoes:



# PLATE XXIII

An Italian peddler who operated in Houston about 1908 apparently had trouble with the language of his adopted land, but he solved his problem with a neat trick. He would follow an English-speaking vegetable vendor, who cried out his beans, potatoes, corn, etc., and call simply, "Same-a-ting-a! Same-a-ting-a!"<sup>1</sup>

A farmer who peddled his vegetables and fruits by wagon in Austin was a familiar figure to many housewives in the early part of this century. Mr. Crockett, who later made money in real estate, usually had a child riding beside him on his wagon, and he always gave his young companion an apple.<sup>2</sup>

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\* Recorded as sung by Williams.

<sup>1</sup> Reported by Mrs. Arthur Joy of Galveston as told to her by her husband.

<sup>2</sup> Recalled by Mrs. Ada C. Read Penn and Mrs. Jane Y. McCallum of Austin.

While the large dinner bell was the most popular device used by vegetable vendors to lure customers to their wagons, one in San Antonio had his own unique noise-maker after the advent of the automobile. He would pound on a Model-T brake-drum to announce his approach.<sup>1</sup> Tom Melchor has a picture of another vendor, Roberta Garza, who rode through the streets on a three-wheeled bicycle-cart vehicle. In the side-cart were boxes and bushel baskets of whatever produce he had to sell. A Negro named Louie blew a bugle to attract attention in the early 1900's; then called the long string of produce on his wagon. The gray-haired, peg-legged darky's bugle blasts were a familiar noise on the streets of San Antonio as late as 1915.<sup>2</sup>

William Archibald Willingham, Bell county native whose grandparents were among the first settlers in Salado in 1850, when buffalo herds still ran wild and Comanche warriors fought back at the white intruders who ventured into the untamed land, peddled tomatoes and cabbage as a boy over an eight-mile area around Salado. He carried two and a half gallons of tomatoes in each of two cedar water buckets, one hanging on each side of his horse, and a townsack of cabbage heads in front of him on his saddle. To cross a swinging foot bridge over Salado Creek to reach customers on the other side, he had to crawl

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by George Lee Reynolds of San Antonio.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Miss Frances Donecker of San Antonio.

on his knees and push his buckets in front of him to keep from losing his balance. There were lots of onion peddlers around Salado at the turn of the century, Willingham recalled. The yellow, red, and white onions were raised on the creeks west of the town and were carried loose on wagon beds or in towsacks by peddlers who would cry, "Onions for sale!"

Among the familiar vegetable vendors in nearby Belton were a German woman named Minna Kolls and a farmer named Hart, who rang a bell and shouted from his wagon loaded with sweet potatoes, "Hart's yellow yams!"<sup>1</sup> Minna, who lived in the German settlement west of the present Mary Hardin-Baylor College, knitted as she rode along in her wagon and sold the vegetables she had raised herself. Her cry was something like this: "Fresh vegetables! Carrots, potatoes, and snaps!" Although the vegetables she had for sale varied, she always ended her cry with "Snaps!" (meaning snap or green beans).<sup>2</sup> Another vegetable man had his own peculiar vocal advertisement as he peddled his black-eyed peas and pumpkins in the fall: "Hoop holes and punkins!"<sup>3</sup> Belton still has its Trade Square, where farmers can bring their products for sale without fear of penalty---all vegetables in season, as well as

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Fred Guffy and Mrs. C. B. Wade of Belton.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mrs. W. T. Harris of Belton.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Robert James of Belton.

peaches and plums in the spring, watermelons and canteloupes in the summer, and pears and apples in the fall. There also the country people gather on "First Monday" trade days if they have anything to sell or trade. "About all they bring nowadays, though, are shotguns, pigs and hogs, and hound dogs," said W. M. Ferrell, city secretary.

A few years ago the march of progress shoved Temple's farmer's market from the public square in the center of town to a lot near the railroad tracks and cotton gin. The square, west of the municipal building, was converted into a modern concrete municipal parking lot with ten rows of parking meters to accommodate 278 cars at a time. The only one of its kind in Texas, it was planned to alleviate the town's parking problem.

An amusing, though contradictory, cry of a young Czech peddler in West, small Czech community near Waco, was heard there around the turn of the century. Perhaps the chamber of commerce influence of the sunny western state had reached his ears, but, at any rate, the youthful peddler would sell his father's farm product by calling out, "California home-grown greens!"<sup>1</sup>

The mere mention of fresh lye hominy makes the mouths of most old-timers water. Nearly everyone in the early part

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<sup>1</sup>Reported by Margaret Angeline Aderhold of Denton as told to her by her mother.

of this century, and before, made hominy in washpots in the backyards, and those who remember its taste say that the canned hominy found on grocery store shelves today cannot compare with the ash-flavored hominy of the past. In the words of William S. Rose of Salado, "It's the ash flavor that makes the difference." He still makes his own lye hominy three times a year---one batch in the fall, another in the winter, and again during the spring. To make it he ties live oak ashes in a thin white cloth sack, which is placed in the pot of water with the corn, already shelled. During two hours of boiling, the lye from the ashes seeps through the sack to give the hominy its ash flavor. The husks fall off the corn kernels and the eyes slip out. After this first cooking, the corn is washed thoroughly and put back into the pot in clean water to be boiled five more hours. The hominy then is put up in glass jars to be used whenever desired for a meal.

Mrs. Lillie McDonald of Jefferson said many people in that area of East Texas made their own hominy, and this is the way they did it: The corn was shelled by rubbing the ears over an old wood stove rack; then it was put into a washpot or hopper of clear water with post oak ashes and cooked until the eyes and skins of the corn peeled off. After a good washing, the corn was placed back into the pot, which had been

cleaned and filled with clear, fresh water, and cooked for hours until it was soft and tender. To keep it from getting too dry or burning, someone had to stir it frequently. When done, it was put in big crock jars. "It took all day to cook a big pot of hominy, and the best was right out of the bottom of the pot," Mrs. McDonald said. "The whitest ears of corn were taken to the mill to be ground into meal, and it made the best corn meal, much better than any we can buy now."

Just as it was the Mexicans who reigned over the tamale trade, it was the Negroes, including many ex-slaves, who led in the peddling of "Fresh lye hominy!" One in Marshall traveled on foot and carried his hominy in a tin bucket, covered with a white cloth to keep it clean. As he made a sale he would dip out the hominy with a tin cup and sell it by the pint. He had a poetic song he sang as he made his regular rounds:



Hom-in-y man, hom-in-y man, Com-in' a-round on time.



Hom-in-y man, hom-in-y man, Com-in' down the line.



Two quarts for fif-teen cents, one quart for a dime.\*

Most people who have lived in San Antonio any length of time have either seen or heard of Sister Crockett, daughter of Negro slaves, an ordained minister in her own right, and a legend in the city where she peddled lye hominy from her old fringe-topped surrey for many years. Wearing a long black robe dress that touched the ground and a starched white bonnet, she carried her hominy in a five-gallon lard can and delivered it twice a week to her regular customers.<sup>1</sup> Sister Crockett was born in Columbus the year after the Civil War ended, and besides her peddling and preaching, she composed many hymns, two of which were taken to the Library of Congress by the late John A. Lomax.<sup>2</sup>

The hominy peddlers, some men and some women, apparently were familiar figures in most Texas towns. One in Houston called out "Hominy man! Hominy man! Hominy man!" and had a rhyme that followed, according to Mrs. I. Lee Campbell, but she could not recall the verse. In Belton a Negro woman carried her bucket of lye hominy from house to house and knocked on the back door of each one. She called out, "Want any hominy today!", prefacing her question with the name of the housewife.<sup>3</sup> Mrs. W. J. Townsend, Sr., of Lufkin

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<sup>1</sup> Recalled by Mrs. George Surkey and Mrs. Ethel Wilson Harris of San Antonio and Mrs. Curtis Meeks of Fort Worth.

<sup>2</sup> Howard Hunt, "Lively Sister Jennie Crockett Makes Hominy, Preaches at 83," San Antonio Evening News, January 2, 1950.

<sup>3</sup> Recalled by Mrs. W. T. Harris of Belton.



remembered a white woman who sold hominy there from a large tub, ringing a bell as she walked along singing religious songs. Another had a small dog tied to her one-horse buggy, and he ran along behind as the buggy bumped over the dirt streets every Saturday morning. She also rang a bell.<sup>1</sup>

While visiting in Dallas as late as 1930, Mrs. Alice Powers of Salado heard a Negro woman with a pushcart and ten-gallon lard can of lye hominy, crying at frequent intervals, "Fresh lye hominy!"

With the decline of the smokehouses and home-cured meats after the Civil War, many people who lived in cities and towns depended upon their country neighbors to supply them with their fresh meat, before butcher shops were opened and meat counters became a part of every grocery store. Most of the time the farmer who brought fresh meat to town also had butter, eggs, and poultry. Many rang a bell to summon housewives to their wagons, but a few called out "Fresh meat!" or whatever special kind they might have. Nearly every town had a favorite meat man that older residents remember by name.

In Marshall it was a Mr. Buchanan, who came twice a week from the nearby community of Hallsville in the days when many families had steak for breakfast. When a housewife bought a pan of meat to last several days, he would give her liver free.<sup>2</sup> The dietary importance of liver had not yet been

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. W. C. Binion, Sr., of Lufkin.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Maude Sedberry of Marshall.

widely publicized. Live turkeys also were sold by farmer-peddlers, who carried their birds in wagon beds built into large coops. Women could pick out a large turkey for only \$1.25. Recalling a farmer-butcher from whom she bought in Jefferson in the early part of this century, Mrs. Martin Ragley said, "If a housewife took a large roast, he would throw in the liver, brains, and a large tongue. Now we pay ninety cents for a medium-sized tongue and seventy-five to ninety cents a pound for calf liver."

Farmer Brownie, who specialized in pork sausage, was a familiar meat vendor in Texarkana. His mark of distinction was his habit of always asking for "funny papers" to take home to his children.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes peddlers would come from Indian territory with bear meat, and those who were courageous enough to taste it found it as good as beef.<sup>2</sup> One of Houston's best-known meat men was a Mr. Ferguson, who slaughtered his own hogs and cattle in pens on the bayou. As he approached the homes of his regular customers, he would call, "Meat! Fresh meat!"<sup>3</sup> Goat meat, which vied with beef in the barbecue pits on Southwest Texas ranches, was peddled in that section of the state, as well as in the hill country west of

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. F. D. Biddle of Texarkana.

<sup>2</sup>Reported by Mrs. Lois Griffen of Texarkana as told to her by her mother, Mrs. J. Q. Mahaffey, Sr.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Jessie Heirs Grymes of Houston.

Belton. Anyone who bought a quantity of mutton, beef, or pork would receive free the heart, brains, liver, and "lights" (lungs).<sup>1</sup> When W. A. Willingham peddled goat meat and beef by wagon to his regular customers at Salado, he would stop at each house and cry, "Goat meat for sale!"

About 1910 in Texarkana farmers would come to town with big water buckets of eggs they sold at fifteen cents a dozen, fryers at twenty-five cents apiece, hens at fifty cents each, country butter at twenty-five cents a pound, freshly-churned buttermilk at ten cents a gallon or five cents a half-gallon.<sup>2</sup> Usually milk and buttermilk were sold from ten-gallon cans, and the housewife would have a pitcher or pail into which would be poured the amount she wanted. Since most women made their own buttermilk biscuits, as well as most of their bread, the cry of "But-ter-milk!" brought housewives to their doors with pitchers. Marshall's butter-and-milk man of some fifty years ago was a Mr. Bentley, who called his customers by name as he walked toward their doors. When he came to her mother's house when she was a girl, Mrs. Robert L. Heard recalled, he would announce himself with the cry, "Once mo' time, Mrs. Adams, once mo' time."

In Galveston, when she was a child in the early part of this century, Borden deliverymen would come by her house

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. C. B. Wade of Belton.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mrs. F. D. Biddle of Texarkana.

with milk in large buckets and dippers to transfer it to the pails of customers, Miss Margaret Reading of Austin recalled. This city was laid out by Gail Borden, surveyor, after he joined the Austin colony in Texas, and after serving as its collector of customs and establishing the colonial Telegraph and Texas Register at San Felipe in 1835, he left to gain wealth and fame with his invention of a process for condensing milk, which he patented in 1856.<sup>1</sup>

Since Galveston was the principal port and largest city on the Texas coast, that is the place from which the state must glean most of its lore on the picturesque fishmongers and their wailful cries. Although their small carts sometimes included oysters, redfish, trout, catfish, and flounder, the most familiar songs were those caroled by the shrimp and crab vendors. The less imaginative fishermen, with strings of their day's catch flung over their shoulders, would cry a simple "Fish man!" or "Fresh fish!" An Italian woman peddled her fish, which she kept in a small tank of water, from a wagon drawn by an old bony horse. As the wagon rumbled along the streets at a snail's pace, she would repeat over and over, "Feesh! ah, la, la, la!"<sup>2</sup>

But the prolonged "S-h-r-i-m-p!" cry and the refrain of the peddlers who sold stuffed or deviled crabs are the ones

<sup>1</sup>The Columbia Encyclopedia, 228.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Robin Miller of Midland.

that left the deepest impression on the people who heard them. Usually the crab men would come around just after sundown, with baskets on their arms, selling their seafood treats at a nickel or a dime apiece, three large ones for a quarter. One would announce his approach with "Crabs! Red hot crabs! Get 'em while they're hot!"<sup>1</sup> Others with different kinds of fish would ring a bell as they pushed their small carts through the streets.<sup>2</sup>

Although he still operates in some places, the ice man has, on a large scale, been replaced by the electric refrigerator. But before the days of universal electricity and electric gadgets of all kinds, people in towns had ice boxes for their food, and the ice man paid a daily visit. Card-board cards, printed with numbers to designate the amount of ice wanted, were posted in front windows each morning to inform the ice man how much to deliver each day. Usually he wore a uniform and carried big tongs to haul the 25, 50, or 100-pound blocks of ice from his horse-drawn wagon into the kitchen or back porch. He would announce himself to occupants of the house with a loud shout, "Ice man!"

Anyone will admit that suggestion breeds desire, es-

<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. W. L. Love and Mrs. Peter Lelsz of Galveston.

<sup>2</sup>Perhaps there were some Mexicans in South Texas border towns who sang the same song heard by Norman (Brownie) McNeill of San Antonio in Monterrey a few years ago: "Pescado! Pescado! Pescadito!" (Fish! Fish! Little fish!).

pecially when the stomach is empty and the suggestion involves food. That is why one colorful but illiterate street peddler in Fort Worth "sold more hamburgers than anyone I ever saw," according to J. C. Roberts of that city. This salesman, known fondly as Hamburger Bill, would tease his prospective customers with a reminder that it was time to eat, assisted by the enticing aroma of his product. Then he would shout out the name of the tasty sandwich meal he had to offer: "Are you hungry? Are you hungry? Are you hungry? Hamburgers!" A similar appeal, with a bit of psychology injected, was used by another vendor in San Angelo, who would cry as people passed his small stand, "Are you hungry? Don't you ever get hungry? You look hungry! Hamburgers!"<sup>1</sup>

Those who have tasted both know that a Texas hamburger is as different from one sold in the eastern states as a boarding-house table is from a depression bread line. With "everything on it," one can expect not only the meat and bun, but lettuce, tomatoes, pickles, onions, mustard, and perhaps chili sauce and no telling what else. As George Sessions Perry described it, "a short-order tantrum, and the sky's the limit," while in the East it is merely a thin "pat of grilled meat in a naked bun."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mody C. Boatright of Austin.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., p. 125.

This was the kind of mammoth 'burger sold by a vendor at an Old Settlers picnic in Sherman about 1920. As she recalled hearing his poetic cry, when she was a child there, Mrs. Riley Cross of Denton said it was irresistible as well as descriptive:

Hamburger lunches and they're all red hot,  
An onion in the middle and a pickle on top.

Although not as streamlined as those pushed through the streets by the Good Humor Man and local independent vendors of today, the first ice cream vehicles used by peddlers in Texas were pushcarts, as well as horse-drawn wagons. Before the days of cones, which were first introduced at the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904, ice cream was sold in oblong-shaped blocks wrapped in a sort of oil paper. Toward the end of the nineteenth century a vendor in Galveston pushed his small cart through the streets and called out, "Ice cream biscuits;"<sup>1</sup> The first ice cream cones were called "saysos."<sup>2</sup>

But it was the "hokey-pokey" man whose ice cream was popular throughout Texas from the 1890's into the early part of this century. In Belton at a Confederate Reunion in the old Confederate Park, one vendor cried, "Hokey-pokey ice cream, five cents a stick." The confection was frozen in a small round tin container. When a customer came along, a slice was cut and a small wood stick placed in it so that it could be

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. I. Lee Campbell of Houston.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

eaten like a popsickle.<sup>1</sup> The hokey-pokey ice cream in San Antonio was more like sweetened frozen milk than the ice cream we know today, and it melted very quickly, according to Mrs. Elizabeth O. Graham, curator at the Spanish Governor's Palace. She recalled one vendor who would chide children with the question, "What do you do when your mama hits you on the back with a brush?" Then he would answer his own question, "Ice Cream!"

In Lufkin W. A. Colmorgan, who sold ice cream as well as bread made by his wife, introduced the oblong-shaped hokey-pokey bricks there. They were wrapped in oil paper. Another vendor would add to his "Hokey-pokey!" cry, "Ice cream for the ladies and candy for the babies."<sup>2</sup> Some years later Tony Wilson, driving a one-horse hack and ringing a bell, sold "snowballs," which were made of crushed ice with cherry or strawberry flavoring poured over it, similar to today's snow cones sold at carnivals and county fairs. Children would run from their houses when they heard the bell and Tony's voice calling, "Snowman! Snowman!"<sup>3</sup>

Pushing his small cart and ringing a bell, a vendor in Texarkana would pleadingly tempt children, and send them

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<sup>1</sup>Reported by Miss Lena Armstrong of Belton as told to her by her father.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by W. M. Glenn, Mrs. Ora McMullen, Mrs. W. J. Townsend, Sr., and Mrs. Lillie Stegall.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Miss Rebecca Townsend of Lufkin.



scurrying into their houses to get nickels, with his shout, "Hokey-pokey ice cream! Cry for it, little girl, cry for it!"<sup>1</sup> Joe Connella recalled an Italian ice cream peddler there who would instruct children in a similar manner:

Go hom-a, baby, cry.  
Cry, baby, cry.  
Tell-a mama to give you nickel  
For ice-a cream-a.

In the 1920's "Greenie" was a favorite of Fort Worth youngsters in the summertime, and each afternoon they would gather around his horse-drawn wagon, clasping their nickels in their hands as they responded to the jingling bells on the bridle of his horse.

Nieve (ice cream) and helados (popsickles, eskimo pies, or, literally, frozen sweets) were peddled in Mexican sections of San Antonio and in towns along the Rio Grande, just as they were in Mexico. In a musical chant, they would sing:



He- la- dos!\*

PLATE XXV

Today's ice cream vendors push their slick white steel carts through the streets in the summer months, their voices

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\* Recalled by George Lee Reynolds of San Antonio.

<sup>1</sup> Recalled by Mrs. Lois Griffen of Texarkana.

silent but with tinkling bells, chimes, or, as in San Antonio, playing such music box tunes as "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" or "Down by the Old Mill Stream."<sup>1</sup> Some even have motor wagons.

In the early part of this century in Alice, when the town had no water service, many citizens were supplied with water by Mexicans who hauled it in barrels attached to small two-wheeled carts drawn by small burros. J. Frank Dobie, who lived there as a child, described the water boy's drawling monotone cry of "A-g-u-a" as it lingered in his ears:

As the water hauler went up and down the streets at a snail's pace he called out with a slowness that matched his motion, "A-g-u-a." The housewife who needed water had plenty of time to intercept him. He drove his burro as near as he could get to the upright barrel beside the house and by means of a hose emptied his cart-barrel into it.<sup>2</sup>

When the summer sun in Texas sends the mercury soaring like a gas-filled toy balloon that has slipped from the grasp of a child, nothing is more refreshing than an ice cold drink. Many hawkers have profited by the heat as they quenched the thirst of patrons with lemonade, soda pop, or other chilled liquids. County and state fairs still retain some of the color of the occupational hucksters of former years, but one chant that probably has faded out of existence, replaced by bottled drink cries, is that of the lemonade vendor. Mrs. R. H. Hop-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>"Pan Caliente, Pan Dulce," op. cit.

kins of Denton recalled one she heard at a Fourth of July picnic there a number of years ago:

Ice cold lemonade!  
Made in the shade,  
Stirred with a silver spade.

There were many variations throughout Texas. Some added to the cry of the beverage they had to sell, "All you can drink for a nickel." Others who colored the drink to make it more enticing would call, "Pink lemonade," with rhymes of their own invention. One of the variations was heard during the twenties at a Fourth of July celebration in Belton. Much earlier it was served in tin cups, but at this time the vendor who poured his tasty potion into tall glasses for his customers cried:

Ice cold lemonade!  
Made in the shade,  
Stirred with a spade,  
Sweetened with the fingers  
Of a pretty little maid.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1920's lemonade vendors, who were mimicked by young boys selling soda pop (fruit flavored drink sold in bottles) from hastily erected stands along curbs in front of their homes, had a chant that was familiar in many towns all over the state. As heard in Huntsville, Belton, Fort Worth, and other communities, the cry was tempting enough to make anyone want to part with a nickel, especially if his throat was dry:

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<sup>1</sup>Reported by Miss Lena Armstrong of Belton as told to her by Mrs. Walter Tulloch of Belton. Cf. Williams, The Glass Menagerie, p. 27, supra.

Ice cold lemonade!  
 Freeze your teeth, curl your hair,  
 Make you feel like a millionaire.<sup>1</sup>

At barbecues and county fairs in West Texas about 1910, one vendor combined two of the frequently heard cries into a poetic plea he shouted with unrestrained vigor:

Ice cold lemonade!  
 Made in the shade,  
 Stirred with a spade.  
 It cleans your teeth  
 And curls your hair  
 And makes you feel good everywhere.<sup>2</sup>

An orange juice drink sold at public gatherings in West Texas about the same time was peddled by one vendor at Maryneal, south of Sweetwater in Nolan county, who had a romantic sense of humor:

Orange cider,  
 Kiss-me juice,  
 Hug me tight  
 And don't turn me loose.<sup>3</sup>

Confederate reunions and county fairs in Belton about fifty years ago had vendors who sold an orange drink they called "moxie-mead." Some say it was flavored water, others that it was merely sweetened water with a little coloring. There were several versions of the cries they used to attract customers to their stands. As Robert James recalled, the hawker of the drink "made mostly of water, sugar, and soap

<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Miss Emma Normand of Huntsville and Miss Lena Armstrong of Belton. Also heard by the writer in Fort Worth.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mody C. Boatright of Austin.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

weed to make it foam" would bellow:

Moxie-mead, the honey wine,  
The California health drink.  
All you can drink for a nickel.

Another version was: "Moxie-mead, the honey comb, the honey wine, the ladies' favorite (with emphasis on the long i in the last word).<sup>1</sup>

Aside from the fairs and other public gatherings, most of the singing and shouting hucksters today are found at football and baseball games and other sports events. They carry bottles of soda water (or soda pop) in water buckets or larger enclosed metal containers filled with ice, and their usual cry is "Ice cold sody-water" or a monotone "Cold drinks anybody, soda water anybody," without the expected question-mark inflection at the end. But one brand drink whose wide advertising has made it a leader in its line was used in a cry heard a few years ago at a football game in Fort Worth:

Have a drink, have a soda,  
Have a drink of ice cold Coca Cola.<sup>2</sup>

Most sports fans today would find a football stadium or a baseball park incomplete without the incessant cries of the peanut and popcorn vendors. And the wares they sell seem to bolster the cheering section. But they are by no means new figures in the peddling trade. One in Huntsville in the

<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Fred Guffy of Belton.

<sup>2</sup>Reported by J. W. Nichols of Denton.

early part of this century, who carried his peanuts in a wooden box hung from a leather strap over his shoulder, catered to college students. In his Italian accent, he would sell his parched peanuts with the cry, "Peanutsy! Peanut-sy!" Mrs. S. W. Adams of Austin said girls on the campus at the time called him "Old Peanutsy." Almost half a century later, at a baseball game in Temple, an adolescent peddler went through the stands crying his slurring sing-song spiel that required close attention to decipher:



Get your pea-nuts right here ten cents any-bo-dy.\*

PLATE XXVI

In San Antonio about 1916 a peanut vendor drove a small low four-wheeled wagon drawn by a large heavy-footed white horse, with paraphernalia on the wagon for popping corn and roasting peanuts. On the wagon was a shrill steam whistle that announced his approach until it was muffled by a city anti-noise ordinance.<sup>1</sup> Another vendor took his regular place daily at a stand in front of the post office. He was a Greek known to his regular customers as Mr. Honest, and he had a steam whistle connected to his small kerosene burner on which

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\* Recorded as heard by the writer.

<sup>1</sup> Recalled by Miss Frances Donecker of San Antonio.

he roasted his peanuts.<sup>1</sup>

Today in Laredo, and even more commonly across the border in Nuevo Laredo, Mexican men and women cry out their wares as they have for many years from sidewalk stands or strolling through the streets. Catering especially to tourists, some carry their fruits and candies on trays hanging from straps around their necks, some use baskets, while still others have glass-topped pushcarts. In addition to the "Algo de fruta" and "Algo de dulce!" cries, which have lingered from the past, many now still call out their creamy-milk candy rolls, "Charamusca!" and "Carmencillo de leche!" Another familiar cry of the past also still heard at towns along the Rio Grande is "Torreon de almendra!" (big almonds).<sup>2</sup> Sometimes these cries are heard on the streets of San Diego, especially in August during the cotton festival, or La Feria (the fair), when throngs gather on la plaza. The buhoneros or vendedores cry out whatever foods, sweets, rings and necklaces, huaraches, or other things they have to sell. A favorite is a crystalized watermelon rind candy, calabasa, according to Ebelia Martinez, whose father is a candy-maker as well as owner of a food store. She said calabasa vies in popularity among the Mexicans with nopalitos, a dish made from cactus. After the thorns are removed, the plant is cut into

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by George Lee Reynolds of San Antonio.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Bourke, "Folk-Foods of the Rio Grande Valley," op. cit., 61.

strips and boiled; then transferred to a skillet of shortening, to which eggs and paprika or chili powder are added. The ingredients are fried and served hot.

As soon as trains began to operate through Texas, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, news butches began to hawk fruits, candy, chewing gum, and booklets, as well as newspapers and penny novels. Later they added sandwiches to the trays they had slung from a strap around their necks. At first they would merely board a train when it stopped to discharge or take on passengers, walk up and down the aisles crying out what they had to sell, and jump off just before the train pulled out of the station. But when trains began to move faster and passengers were sufficient to warrant a good business for the peddler, some of the butches rode the trains between certain towns, selling their wares as the train rolled along the rails.

On the Fort Worth and Denver between Amarillo and Fort Worth, during the decade between 1910 and 1920, one railroad vendor amused travelers with the bit of exaggeration he injected into the cry he used to sell pork sandwiches: "Whole hog in a biscuit, one dime, ten cents."<sup>1</sup> Another who operated on a Texas and Pacific route through West Texas puzzled customers with his somewhat contradictory sales talk: "Apples,

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mody C. Boatright of Austin.



oranges, two for a nickel apiece."<sup>1</sup>

Many of the news butches wore stiff-billed caps similar to those worn by conductors and were considered regular members of the train crews. One of these working on a train between Sweetwater and Fort Worth about thirty years ago called out the contents of his basket as he strolled through the cars: "Apples, oranges, bananas, chewing gum, Peter's chocolates." His basket also contained a delicacy, grapes in paper cone-shaped containers, which was a rare treat to inhabitants of the prairie lands in those days.<sup>2</sup>

Children who rode the trains at that time were fascinated by such toys in the butcher's basket as climbing monkeys and candy in glass containers shaped like lanterns and pistols. These child tempters, as well as painted scenic sofa pillow covers, were among the wares sold by O. O. Porterfield of Texarkana, when he peddled fruits, peanuts, and soda pop on the T&P from Texarkana west. One of the cries he remembered, because of its rib-tickling appeal, was "Boneless bananas!"

Although the majority of the singing peddlers in Texas were those who sold food, others who supplied household necessities were almost as important. The most colorful were those who provided the charcoal used for heating, cooking,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by C. S. Boyles, Jr., of Sherman.

and ironing before the days of gas and electricity. The principal colony of charcoal burners was in the hill country north of San Antonio and west of Austin, commonly called the cedarbrakes. Most of the charcoal was from mountain cedar, considered the best wood for the purpose since it made charcoal that caused no smoke and left no ashes. It also burned with an even heat. However, the slower-burning live oak and post oak charcoal was preferred by such businesses as tailor shops.

The first settlers in the community that became known as Charcoal City, on the banks of the Guadalupe River, were German immigrants who started arriving as early as 1850. They cut the cedar to clear the ground for planting their crops, but soon learned of the demand for charcoal and began to burn it between planting and harvesting seasons. They were followed by Anglo-Saxons from other parts of the United States, Negroes liberated after the Civil War, and later Mexicans. Besides its uses in the home, charcoal was in demand by blacksmiths for tempering steel, by tinmiths for heating their soldering irons, and to purify drinking water when most of it was caught in rain barrels standing under the eaves of houses.

San Antonio was the principal market of the charcoal vendors when the demand was greatest, from 1880 to 1920, and the trip took them two to six days, depending upon the weather.

One version of how the charcoal was made is given by Fritz and Emilie Toepperwein of Boerne, as described by one of the burners:

First you go out and cut the wood. Then you haul it up, and throw it around the coal bed. Then you peel the bark off the wood. After you are through with that, you start setting the wood up end-ways. In the middle of the pile you leave a hole. You also leave little holes at the bottom. Then you pile the bark over the whole thing. Make the dirt about four inches thick. Then take a stick with a cloth, or paper at the end of it, and poke it to the center, and light the fire. The heat will soon start charring the wood. You don't have a fire in there, that is, lessen you get a hole in the kiln somewhere, and if that happens, you got to shovel it shut in a hurry. If it gets air to it, it will burn. The slower it chars, the better and harder the charcoal will be.

Then you get yourself a hook-rake, with a long handle, and start pulling at the kiln, and let the dirt fall through and put out the fire. Let it stand overnight like that. The next morning, you rake it all out into a big ring. If there are any live coals left, douse them out with a little water.<sup>1</sup>

Although they usually depended on regular customers or dealers to buy their coal, the charcoal burners would turn salesmen and peddle it through the streets if they had an oversupply. In a slow, drawling voice that could be heard blocks away as they approached and disappeared, the peddlers would cry:

Charcoal, charcoal for sale.  
Charcoal, charcoal for sale.  
Charcoal, charcoal for sale.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charcoal and Charcoal Burners (Boerne: The Highland Press, 1950), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Charcoal peddlers who sang "Charcoal" through the San Antonio streets in the early part of this century were recalled by Kimbrough Burt and Miss Frances Donecker of that city.

A Mexican vendor in San Antonio, Frank Salas, used to peddle charcoal in the Mexican sections of the city on Saturday mornings. His prolonged musical appeal could be heard before his wagon rolled into sight:



El car - bon-n-n-n.\*

PLATE XXVII

And as he drove away after making a sale, he would sing a sharp, staccato farewell which meant, "The charcoal man, he goes!"



El car-bon-er-o! Se va! \*\*

PLATE XXVIII

In sections of the city inhabited by English-speaking customers, Salas would change his song to one that ended with a trailing diminuendo on the last note:



Chah-coal-l-l-l.\*\*\*

PLATE XXIX

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\* Recorded as sung by V. T. Garcia of San Antonio.

\*\* Ibid.

\*\*\* Ibid.

Steve Heffington, tax assessor-collector for Travis county, became well-acquainted with the people who burned charcoal for a living when he started out as a field deputy in the tax office in 1905. The charcoal burners lived in tents or cedar shacks along Bull Creek and Cold Water Creek, which flowed out of the Colorado River west of Austin. From them he learned their method of burning mountain cedar into charcoal:

"They cut it into sticks about three or four feet wide and six feet long. After building a crow's nest of the bark and cedar so it would burn easily, they stacked the cedar sticks up over it like a tepee. The wood had been stripped clean of all bark, which then was placed on the outside of the sticks. Dirt was piled six inches thick on the outside, leaving openings at the top and bottom to let air get in. Then a torch was stuck through the holes to ignite the crow's nest. When blue smoke started coming out, you knew the fire was burning. Air holes then would be filled up and the fire smothered from blue to red smoke; then you knew the coals were smoldering. Sometimes it took three or four days to burn a big kiln. When it burned down, you had a pile of charcoal. Dirt was used to smother the fire out."

The coals were gathered into sacks, if available; if not, they were hauled loose on the wagon beds to sell in town at twenty-five cents a sack. One charcoal peddler, Heffington

recalled, could be heard as he drove his wagon down the alleys singing:

My hands is black,  
My face is black,  
And I sell my coal  
Two bits a sack.  
Chah-coal!

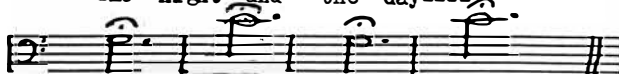
Some of the people in Austin called the charcoal burners who inhabited the hills around Austin "hillbillies," according to Mrs. Roy Bedichek. She recalled one peddler who wore galluses and a shirt that was always unbuttoned, and drove a wagon drawn by two horses, one black and one gray. His song was a plaintive melody with a drawling rhythm, and he could be heard far in the distance as his wagon moved slowly through the streets:



The black and the gray---



The night and the day---



Chah--- coal---. Chah--- coal---.\*

#### PLATE XXX

Charcoal peddlers were familiar in other parts of the state, too. In Emis, Negroes riding alone on horse-drawn two-

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\* Recorded as recalled by Mrs. Bedichek.

wheeled carts would drone: "Chaw---coal---, chaw---coal fo' sale! Fotch out yer pail!"<sup>1</sup> The cry of "Chah-coal!" was heard on the streets of Salado, Temple, and Belton, where some people called the old-fashioned flatirons used for pressing clothes "sad-irons."<sup>2</sup> In Belton about 1900 one vendor had a rhyme he chanted to peddle his coals:

Nice charcoal, shiny and black,  
Twenty-five cents for a big pack.<sup>3</sup>

A Negro in Marshall who rode in a small dilapidated wagon drawn by two scrawny mules peddled his charcoal with the drawling cry of the product. His face looked like "cooked leather," according to Mrs. Ruth Beehn, who has an old charcoal burner and a sack of charcoal among her collection of antique china, furniture, and other household furnishings. The portable stove, which was a common sight in most homes in the early part of this century, was built of clay bound in neavy tin, with a metal handle and round holes in the bottom to let the air enter. Many Negro washwomen in East Texas still cling to the old flatirons, once heated on charcoal furnaces, in preference to the more modern electrical appliances.

<sup>1</sup>Witte, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Pearl Goodnight and W. A. Willingham of Salado; Mrs. Margaret Moore of Temple; W. M. Ferrell, Miss Ione Kimball, Mrs. C. B. Wade, and Mrs. Fred Guffy of Belton.

<sup>3</sup>Reported by Miss Lena Armstrong of Belton as told to her by her father.

In the country around Houston and Galveston many Negroes burned charcoal and sold it in the two cities. Their cries varied only in the way they pronounced the product they had to sell. Some sounded like "Choc-coal!"<sup>1</sup> Others droned, "Chaw-coal!"<sup>2</sup> In Galveston one Negro peddler called Mose would add, "Heah's yo' chaw-coal man!"<sup>3</sup>

When many people used wood stoves for cooking and keeping their houses warm in the winter time, the wood wagons made their regular rounds. While many cried only "Wood! Wood!"<sup>4</sup> or "Wood for sale!",<sup>5</sup> one in Belton called "Stove wood!"<sup>6</sup> and another devised a simple rhyme, using his own name:

Buy your wood from Horace Hood;  
Its heat will do you good.<sup>7</sup>

Recalling that wood sold at three dollars a cord fifty years ago, Mrs. Lillie Stegall of Lufkin said, "We thought that was high, but now it costs twelve dollars a cord." In that town that developed because of its sawmills, which nourished on the thick pine forests of the area, the mills would

<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. I. Lee Campbell of Houston.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mrs. W. L. Love of Galveston.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Peter Lelsz of Galveston.

<sup>4</sup>Recalled by Mody Boatright of Austin and Miss Ida Hillenkamp of Nacogdoches.

<sup>5</sup>Recalled by Mrs. F. D. Biddle of Texarkana.

<sup>6</sup>Recalled by Miss Ione Kimball of Belton.

<sup>7</sup>Reported by Miss Lena Armstrong of Belton as told to her by her father.



send out peddlers with small slivers that were no good for lumber. This was sold as kindling wood to ignite fires in cook stoves and fireplaces. Because it was used to kindle, or light, a fire, it became known as "lightnin' wood"<sup>1</sup>---or "lighterd" (light wood), as it was slurred by Negro peddlers in Houston.<sup>2</sup> Most of these peddlers also had bark and pine knots in their wagons to sell for use in fireplaces because of the rich aroma they gave off while burning.

The advent of gas and electricity for heating and cooking purposes put W. A. Willingham of Salado out of the business of peddling oak and cedar wood, but he peddled cedar posts for fences as late as 1936. During the week before Christmas in Texarkana in the days when people had to go to the woods after their yule trees, peddlers would accommodate parents by bringing wagonloads of trees through the streets. They also had bamboo, mistletoe, and holly to be used for house and table decorations. One mother would send her children to the home of a neighbor while she purchased and hid her tree; then she would return the favor by taking care of the neighbor's children. This was in families whose children were taught that Santa Claus brought the tree along with his sleigh-full of toys on Christmas Eve.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mrs. W. J. Townsend, Sr., of Lufkin.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mrs. I. Lee Campbell of Houston.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Mrs. F. D. Biddle of Texarkana.

On the campus of the University of Texas during the goldfish-eating, flagpole-sitting twenties, collegiates sang a song that may have been inspired by a wood peddler:

My name is Kind-lin' Wil-lie, and I come from Ten-nes-see, and I'm  
 sell - in' kind - lin' wood to get a - long. If you  
 have - n't a - ny mon-ey, I will sell it to you free, but I'm  
 sell - in' kind - lin' wood to get a - long. Kind - lin' wood,  
 Kind-lin' wood. I'm sell-in' kind-lin' wood to get a-long. If you  
 have - n't a - ny mon-ey, I will sell it to you free, but I'm  
 sell - in' kind - lin' wood to get a - long.\*

PLATE XXXI

\*Recorded as recalled by Miss Emma Normand of Huntsville.

Once part of the street scene in Mexico and South Texas, ballad hawkers have been found occasionally within the past fifteen years in some towns. One named Bartolo Ortiz was heard around Haymarket Plaza in San Antonio, singing his ballads for sale, according to Brownie McNeil. "After haranguing the crowd for several minutes with ballads, impromptu speeches on life in general and a tune or two on his fiddle made by himself from a battered two-gallon oil can, he peddles his printed verses," McNeil wrote. "If you care to buy you had better be quick about it because he will suddenly break off selling, whether all customers are taken care of or not, and will insist on giving another performance."<sup>1</sup> The ballad vendors date back to the sixteenth century in Madrid, and were familiar street singers in England the next two centuries.

A more recent replica of the ballad hawkers are the newsboys, one of the few types of vendors who still hawk their goods on city streets. Their cries are not so easy to understand, for they usually are a garbled hodgepodge with emphasis on the most sensational news of the day. Perhaps intentionally, and to entice curious customers to buy their papers, the newsboys frequently slur their words into an unintelligible gumbo of sounds. But they invariably end with

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<sup>1</sup>"Corridos of the Mexican Border," Mexican Border Ballads, Publication of the Texas Folk-Lore Society, XXI (1946), 5.

an appeal that everyone can understand: "Read ALL a-BOUT it!"

Remote duplicates of the medieval mountebanks in England and France wagged their silver tongues at susceptible Texas audiences, who were hungry for entertainment and easy targets for the wily salesmanship arrows fired in their direction. The medicine men who brought their camouflaged smoothtalk to Texas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sold their chill tonics and other patent drugs almost as fast as they could lift a bottle---after they had hypnotized their prospects with a minstrel performance or other tomfoolery. The "snake oil" man, as they sometimes were called, traveled in platform wagons, on which they gave shows to snare crowds into their selling orbit. If you listened to their claims, you could believe the drugs they sold would cure anything from corns to malaria.

At the old Hyde Park fair grounds in Austin in the summer of 1887 a medicine man hawked his "Hamlin's Wizard Oil." It was supposed to be a magic cure-all, the Hadacol of its day. After blackface minstrels put on a good show, the "master of ceremonies" would go into his breathless spiel about what his wonder drug would do for the ailing members of his audience. Then he would look at his watch and shout, "Go!" After allowing exactly one minute for eager buyers to respond by grabbing the dollar bargain, he halted the sales, and those

who had not had an opportunity to get rid of their dollars were forced to wait until the next period of selling. When this time arrived, several hawkers mingled through the crowd, each with a dozen bottles. And the bottles were snatched up fast.<sup>1</sup>

Like the "assistants" of Dr. I. Q. of recent radio fame, who introduced quiz-show contestants with, "I have a lady (or gentleman) in the left balcony, doctor," the hawkers of a medicine show in Denton in the early part of this century would drum up business in the audience. When they made a sale, they would call to the chief spieler on the stage or platform, "Mo' medicine, doctor."<sup>2</sup>

When moving pictures presented people with a new form of entertainment shortly after the turn of the century, picture show managers adopted the medicine man's technique to entice patrons inside their theaters. Using hand megaphones to project their voices as far as possible, these criers would walk up and down the street calling out the day's movie fare, such as "Don't fail to see that ONE attraction! All about the big train robbery!"<sup>3</sup> Some fifteen years later in Sweetwater a movie huckster was heard crying, "Perils of

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Dave Dillingham of Austin.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by R. J. Edwards of Denton.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. According to the Columbia Encyclopedia, the first full-length moving picture was "The Great Train Robbery" (1903).

Pauline, showing tonight. Keystone Comedy!"<sup>1</sup>

Besides those who had something material to sell, there were other types of street singers who played vivid roles in the street drama of yesteryear. Because they were so much a part of the setting of a bygone era, they cannot be altogether ignored here.

There was the scissors grinder who rang a bell and rolled his whetstone wheel along the streets, crying, "Scissors grinder! Bring out your knives and scissors!"<sup>2</sup> One in Galveston sang operatic or classical melodies as he walked from house to house,<sup>3</sup> while in Houston a tall Spaniard played tunes on a mouth organ to attract attention.<sup>4</sup>

In Nearly every town there were the small Negro or Mexican boys who sat on apple boxes with their polish, brush, and rag, calling out to passersby, "Shine, mister?" And the chimney sweeps came around every fall to clean out the flues before winter. Usually they were Negroes. A familiar chant in Houston at that time of the year was "Blow 'em down! Blow 'em down! Blow 'em down!"<sup>5</sup>

Throughout Texas there were the street singers who collected rather than disposed of wares. The best-known were

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by C. S. Boyles, Jr., of Sherman.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Lois Griffen of Texarkana.

<sup>3</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Peter Lelsz of Galveston.

<sup>4</sup>Recalled by Mrs. Isabel Caylat Thayer of Houston.

<sup>5</sup>Recalled by Mrs. I. Lee Campbell of Houston.

the ragpickers, and their most familiar cry was "Any rags, any bones, any bottles today?"<sup>1</sup> Some of the old clothes and trash collectors would call out a simple staccato "Rags! Bones! Bottles!"<sup>2</sup> as they drove their junk wagons through the alleys. These cries of the ragpicker are believed to have inspired a popular song of the ragtime era that preceded and lingered during the first World War. A more complete version of the peddler's chant, reported to have been heard in West Texas, was:

Any rags, any bones, any bottles today?  
It's the same old story in the same old way.  
Any rags today?<sup>3</sup>

In Texarkana a Negro woman who hauled trash and gathered junk had an unforgettable verse she chanted that made her a town character whose name is indelibly written in the memories of all who heard her. As she drove her decrepit little wagon through the streets, "Old Aunt Rose" would sing:

Heah ah goes,  
Old Aunt Rose,  
With a wart on mah nose.  
Ah's ragged but ah's still heah.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Recalled by Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Edwards of Denton, Mrs. Lois Griffen of Texarkana, and Miss Mildred M. Oser of Galveston.

<sup>2</sup>Recalled by D. A. Finch of San Antonio and Mrs. W. L. Love of Galveston.

<sup>3</sup>Witte, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>Recalled by J. Q. Mahaffey, Mrs. Lois Griffen, Mrs. F. D. Biddle, Mrs. S. A. Collom, and W. A. McCartney, Sr., of Texarkana.

Before the days of sewerage and modern plumbing, the scavenger wagon was a familiar sight as it trundled through the alleys in the early morning on an unpleasant but necessary job. The driver was an occupational vendor who had only his services to sell, and he needed no cries to announce his approach. But in Fort Worth the young boys in one neighborhood had their own cry to greet him, "Here comes the cabbage wagon!"<sup>1</sup> Most of these "patrolmen of the privies," however, made their rounds at night, or before daybreak.

Unlike the earlier town criers, some still heard in New England only twenty-five years ago, who announced proclamations and called out the time, the last of the town criers in Texas sold their voices to anyone who wanted to announce sports events, auction sales, or theatrical performances. In San Antonio it was Julius Meyer, who took the place of the church bell that used to ring at San Fernando Church to summon people to public meetings, warn the populace of Indian attacks, and call them to the plazas for the governor's speeches. Now only a legend, many people in San Antonio remember Julius. His tools of trade were a weatherbeaten hand megaphone and his leathery lungs, and he used them both to the fullest as he rode through the streets on his sorrel horse

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by J. R. Pampell of Fort Worth.

<sup>2</sup>Saluted by Carlos Ashley in his ballad, "Pete Wood'ard," That Spotted Sow and Other Hill Country Ballads (Austin: The Steck Company, 1949), p. 55.



from 1900 until the middle 1920's.<sup>1</sup>

"Foghorn Kelley" was the unofficial town crier of Houston in the prohibition and jazz days of the twenties, before the stock market crash. As he strolled about the streets, he used a small megaphone to announce ball games and other sports events, shows, and auction sales. In his younger days a boxer and once heavyweight champion of New Orleans, his real name was Albert S. Schultz, but few knew him by any other label than "Foghorn Kelley." His booming voice gave him the title, but that voice was smothered when public address systems became the vogue at athletic events. He had been an announcer for the Houston baseball club the last few years of his reign.<sup>2</sup>

Just as the telephone, radio, and public address system ended the need for a town crier, so have other modern inventions abolished the necessity for other types of street singers. Thus, the colorful peddlers of the past have almost completely vanished from the scene. Partly, they have been replaced by new household equipment, faster methods of transportation, and modern modes of living; partly, by government restrictions to safeguard the health of its citizens and protect them from what was considered unnecessary noises.

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<sup>1</sup>Recalled by C. Stanley Banks, Sr., Mrs. Ethel Wilson Harris, and Miss Frances Donecker of San Antonio. Also recorded by Tom McGowen, "Last of the Town Criers," San Antonio Express Magazine, February 8, 1948.

<sup>2</sup>Sam Franklin, "Houston's Town Crier," Houston Chronicle Magazine, July 16, 1950.

## CHAPTER V

### EDDLERS SUBDUED BY PROGRESS

When the phonograph, and later the radio, drove the amateur singers and pianists from the parlors, one phase of family life was brought to an abrupt end. The cozy gatherings around the piano for sing-songs in the evening were abandoned for the professional entertainment provided by the new talking machine and the wireless apparatus that brought the voices and music of trained performers into the living room.

Incredible as they seemed at the time, these were but two of the many inventions that spelled progress in a civilization racing madly into an age dominated by machines. In the wake of these discoveries and the drastic changes in living conditions that resulted, the wandering merchant who had capitalized on the strength of his voice and his door-to-door service found himself being pushed to the forgotten past. His days of usefulness were over. His street songs and cries were no longer heeded; instead, they had come to be considered unnecessary noises that should be abolished.

Less than a century has elapsed since the traveling hucksters first invaded Texas in large numbers after the Civil War. At that time the cattle drives had reached the

height of their colorful history, pushing north to markets in Kansas and Missouri. But when the railroad came to Texas, the herds that had moved slowly over the Chisholm and other trails could be shipped by rail, and by 1880 the chuck wagon had vanished with the buffalo. During the next decade Roy Bean was in his hey-day of dishing out pioneer justice in his Jersey Lily saloon west of the Pecos, and barbed wire fences were bringing an end to the open range.

Still the peddlers were useful and necessary figures. They were part of the scene in the gay and frivolous nineties, when small boys were thrilled by stories of Buffalo Bill, even if they had no chance to see his Wild West show, and by the adventures of Nick Carter they read by candlelight. They were driving their wagons over rough country roads and dirt streets when Charles Dana Gibson's girl set the fashion for women with feathered millinery, leg-o-mutton sleeves, eighteen-inch waists, bouncing bustles, and high-button shoes---and when people were singing "Tell Me Pretty Maiden" and "She Was Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage."

With the beginning of the new century, however, an industrial leaf was turned up on the Texas calendar. With it arrived scores of threats to the occupational street singers. Although they lingered with their lusty voices in many places for thirty years more, by mid-century they were a vanquished

class that had fallen under the wheels of progress.

Only the larger cities had electricity, and the light it offered to replace coal-oil burning lamps and candles, when the century began that would usher in the atomic age. Not until 1912 was the first "high line" built to extend power and light facilities to the smaller towns, and only in recent years have many farms been furnished with electricity as a result of the Rural Electrification Administration.<sup>1</sup> With the spread of electricity came innumerable appliances to ease the work of the housewife, provide many new comforts and forms of entertainment, and at the same time eliminate the need for certain products sold by the peddling salesmen. Electric refrigerators replaced the old-fashioned icebox; the electric iron supplanted the heavy and clumsy flatiron heated on charcoal burners or wood stoves; and deep-freeze units provided a place to preserve meats, vegetables, and other foods. With today's streamlined supermarkets, there was no longer any need to patronize the vendors of fresh meats and vegetables.

Unknown to most of Texas before 1900, natural gas gradually was distributed through pipelines in commercial quantities to heat both homes and business establishments. It took the place of wood-burning fireplaces and stoves, as well as the charcoal burners used for cooking and heating.

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<sup>1</sup>Steen, op. cit., p. 91.

Cities began to develop their water resources, providing their inhabitants with drinking and bathing water piped into their own homes. People no longer had to rely on rain barrels, windmills, and wells. Sewerage installations and drainage facilities were provided, and with them came modern plumbing. Out went the old wash tubs and basins used for bathing, and down came the outhouses that required the services of the scavenger.

During the same period telephone systems came into almost universal use---at first the hand-crank type still found in some small communities and remote rural sections. In addition to providing a means of exchanging gossip, in place of neighborly meetings around the vegetable wagon, the telephone made it possible for women to order their groceries and other needs without leaving their homes.

But it was improved transportation, coupled with legal restrictions limiting their methods of selling, that was the greatest force in driving the peddlers off the streets. Just as the railroad and airline replaced the stagecoach and pony express---and the electric streetcar took the place of the mule-car transit systems---the automobile made the horse-drawn wagon and buggy obsolete. The first "horseless carriages," or "gas buggies," were frightening horses on the

streets of major Texas cities by 1905.<sup>1</sup> After the automobile made its debut, the motorized truck was soon taking the place of horse-drawn vehicles. With this faster means of transportation, distances were shortened in point of time, and women found it easier to go to stores and shops to make their purchases.

As the cities grew, factories and stores selling every conceivable type of product and article began to mushroom. Bakeries, slaughtering and meat packing plants, dairies, carbonated beverage plants, as well as drug, department, clothing, and grocery stores---with their modern facilities and wide variety of goods---combined to stifle the small independent peddling merchant.

Vaudeville, and then moving pictures, captured the fancy of the crowds that once had sought entertainment offered by the medicine men and the tent minstrel shows.

Though newspaper advertising already had begun to draw business to established stores and standard-brand products, it was the radio---and later television---that stole from the singing peddler the method he used to advertise his wares. For the radio had a voice, and it used that voice to publicize the products of the companies that sponsored the entertainment it had to offer.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 123-25.

This faster, mechanized way of living had a great deal to do with the decline of the street vendors in Texas, but there was another factor that limited their opportunities of earning a livelihood. This was government regulation--- on federal, state, and local levels. Although they were hampered by federal pure food and drugs laws<sup>1</sup> and state health and sanitation laws, it was the local city ordinances that stifled their voices, required them to obtain licenses and pay occupation taxes, and prohibited some from operating at all.

But legal restrictions that hindered peddlers in Texas were not originated in the New World. As early as the fourteenth century in France and England the herbalist was the object of royal decrees issued against the illegal practice of medicine.<sup>2</sup> A hundred years later, in 1421, Henry V issued "an ordinance against the meddlers with physic and surgery," setting up severe punishment for "practitioners not approved by universities (physic) or 'masters of that art' (surgery)."<sup>3</sup> Apparently the laws had little effect, as the wandering quacks merely avoided the cities and sought custom-

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<sup>1</sup>The first of such laws in the United States was the Pure Food and Drugs Act of 1906, since amended and superseded by new laws. Such regulations were not new on this side of the Atlantic. "The classics contain allusions to wine makers and dealers who colored and flavored their wine." ("food adulteration," The Columbia Encyclopedia, 695).

<sup>2</sup>Jusserand, English Wayfaring Life, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

ers in the country areas where they were less likely to be caught. Henry VIII found the medicine men still a problem during his reign (1509-47). To combat what he considered a deplorable condition, the king ruled that anyone "who may wish to practice in London or seven miles around" would have to pass an examination first.<sup>1</sup>

The first statute in England that specifically named peddlers, however, came during the reign of Edward VI (1547-53). Called "an acte for tynkers and pedlars," it described the vendors as "more hurtful than necessary" and ordained that "no person or persons commonly called pedlar, tynker or pety chapman shall wander or go from one towne to another or from place to place out of the towne, parishe or village where such person shall dwell, and sell pynnes, poyntes, laces, gloves, knyves, glasses, tapes or any suche kynde of wares whatsoever . . . ." The statute excepted those who had a license from two justices of the peace, but allowed them to travel only in the "circuit" assigned to them.<sup>2</sup> Edward's sister, Queen Elizabeth I, encompassed peddlers with fencers, minstrels, juglers, tynkers and petye chapmen in her "Acte for the punishment of vacabondes."<sup>3</sup> It was not until William III took the throne (1659-1702) that strict regula-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 236.



tions were clamped on the wandering merchants. Even though he taxed them and required them to certify how they traveled and traded, William's law did not altogether eliminate peddlers, for the pack of the traveling chapman at that time took the place of the well-stocked stores of later eras.<sup>1</sup>

Even before the Revolution in America, the hawkers of patent medicines and peddlers of goods were receiving legal attention. In 1773 Connecticut passed its famous "Act for the Suppression of Mountebanks," which forbade such a person "to exhibit or cause to be exhibited on any publick stage or place whatsoever within this Colony, any games, tricks, plays, jugling or (other) feats . . . . tending to collect together numbers of spectators and gratify vain or useless curiosity." It also prohibited the vending or sale of "any physick, drugs, or medicines, commended to be efficacious and useful in various disorders."<sup>2</sup>

Marblehead, Massachusetts, like other New England towns before the Revolution that feared unfair competition from itinerant hucksters, passed an ordinance forbidding peddlers to sell wares of any kind until after the markets of local merchants and farmers closed at one o'clock. Similarly, New York City, as early as 1691, ordained that hucksters should not sell their wares until after the market had been

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Wright, op. cit., pp. 199-200.

open two hours. Nearly half a century later an import tax of five pounds, plus five pounds for each horse and three shillings for a license, was required under an "Act to Restrict Hawkers and Pedlars."<sup>1</sup> This early legislation indicates that pushcart peddling, still found to some extent in New York and other large cities, was not common until the beginning of the nineteenth century and that it experienced its greatest boom during that period.

As markets and stores were established, the owners of these stationary businesses began to agitate against the traveling vendors who hawked their goods on foot or by wagon. After the Yankee peddler had moved south into the Carolinas late in the seventeenth century, he was grabbing so much of the local business that a law was passed to restrict his operation.<sup>2</sup> However, when the same demand came from merchants in Philadelphia, the governor "refused to sign the bill because the market and the auction afforded buying opportunities for the poor, whereas the stores of the established merchants served only the rich and aristocratic."<sup>3</sup>

Claiming that they paid town taxes while the itinerant vendors paid none, New England merchants applied pressure to legislate the peddler out of business. Some towns estab-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

lished a system of taxes, or fees, which a peddler was required to pay before he could sell within a community. In Connecticut, in 1717, peddlers were taxed twenty shillings for every hundred pounds worth of goods they carried. The cost of a license was raised by the Connecticut Assembly in 1765 to a prohibitive twenty pounds. Five years later all peddlers, hawkers, and petty chapmen were forbidden except those who sold pelts or products raised or manufactured in that or neighboring colonies. A Rhode Island law of 1698 stated that peddlers injured regular trade; two years later a heavy tax was imposed; sale of drygoods anywhere in the state by peddlers was forbidden in 1713; and a more comprehensive law passed in 1728 provided for seizure of merchandise from peddlers caught selling any type of goods.<sup>1</sup> Such laws against peddlers could be found in nearly every state and many communities in the young nation.

Among the first of the local restrictive laws in Texas was one adopted by Jefferson in 1870 which assessed a fine of twenty to fifty dollars against peddlers caught operating without a license.<sup>2</sup>

When Galveston was rebuilt the year after it was virtually destroyed and thousands killed by the devastating hurricane of 1900, a new charter was adopted with the inaugura-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 89-91.

<sup>2</sup>A Digest of the Laws of the City of Jefferson, Texas (New York: S. W. Green, 1870), Section 221, p. 63.

tion of municipal commission government. The revised ordinances provided occupation taxes for certain types of itinerant vendors and peddlers, regulated the areas and hours certain foods could be sold on the streets, and required inspection of meat, poultry, fish, vegetables, fruits, and garden produce of all kinds to safeguard the health of the community. The patent medicine huckster was required to pay a tax of \$50, while an annual levy of \$125 was specified for the peddlers of clocks, cooking stoves or ranges, wagons, buggies, carriages, surreys, washing machines, and churns. Although traveling vendors of literature, poultry vegetables, fruits, or other country produce were exempt from taxation, other peddlers were assessed according to the method of transportation they used to sell their wares. The foot peddler was taxed \$2.50; those with one horse or one pair of oxen, \$3.75; those with two horses or two pair of oxen, \$5.00; and those with a sail or other boat in Galveston Bay within the city limits, \$5.00. Retail sale of fish was prohibited between the hours of three and nine in the morning.<sup>1</sup>

Occupation taxes similar to those set up by Galveston were later required in many other cities, although the amounts of the taxes varied. When vendors began using trucks after the arrival of the automobile, Houston included a tax

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<sup>1</sup>Charter of the City of Galveston and the Revised Ordinances (Galveston: Clarke and Courts, 1902), pp. 93, 94, 98, 103, 157.

of \$10 for peddlers operating from motor vehicles, while retaining the \$2.50 levy for foot and horseback salesmen and \$5.00 tax for those using animal-drawn vehicles.<sup>1</sup> Belton's taxes on peddlers were much stiffer than those fixed by Galveston fifteen years earlier, but that town's law exempt "blind, deaf and dumb, or wounded persons who have lost a hand or foot," as well as "all ex-Confederate and ex-Federal soldiers, who from old age or other cause, may be incapacitated to do and perform manual labor, and who are actual residents of the State of Texas and are not inmates of any soldier's home or drawing any pension from the United States or any state government."<sup>2</sup>

In a 1905 ordinance, Lufkin city officials made it unlawful for "any hawker, huckster, cheap John, peddler, or other person to sell goods, wares or merchandise by public outcry or private sale, in or upon the squares, streets, alleys or sidewalks" of the city. Violators were liable to a fine of five to twenty-five dollars.<sup>3</sup>

Fish peddlers were allowed to operate in Texarkana in 1908, but they were limited as to the parts of town in which they could sell and the length of time they could stop

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<sup>1</sup>Ordinance adopted November 18, 1931.

<sup>2</sup>Revised Civil and Criminal Ordinances of the City of Belton, Texas (Belton: Belton Evening News, 1915), Chapter 42, pp. 117-20.

<sup>3</sup>Minutes of the City Council, Book C, p. 171.

at any one time. Broad Street, the main retail shopping district, was a prohibited area.<sup>1</sup>

Many towns required itinerant vendors to secure licenses at fixed fees, but persons selling home-grown products were not subject to the charge. In 1917 Marshall regulated the manufacture and sale of ice cream by requiring sanitary inspection of the premises where the product was made and payment of an annual license fee.<sup>2</sup> A license fee of \$750 per month required in Houston under a 1921 ordinance was relaxed and lowered to \$50 for a 40-day period in 1933, during the depression years, but an additional bond of at least \$2,000 was required. This later fee was retained in ordinances adopted in 1935 and 1941, as well as in the Houston City Code of 1942.<sup>3</sup>

Health and sanitation regulations also became part of the legal obstacles that confronted the peddling salesman of foods. To protect the health of its citizens, Texarkana in 1912 required dealers and vendors of food, fruits, fish, and vegetables to "keep the same covered or screened."<sup>4</sup> Another ordinance provided for milk and dairy inspection. Five years later Marshall ordained that all peddlers, as well as food

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<sup>1</sup>Ordinance Books of the City of Texarkana, Texas, Vol. 1, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>Ordinance Books of the City of Marshall, Texas, Vol. 2, pp. 38-39.

<sup>3</sup>Chapter 27, Article VI.

<sup>4</sup>Op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 17.

stores and eating establishments, should keep all food "covered and protected at all times by glass or wood and to preserve the same at all times free from exposure to flies and other pests."<sup>1</sup> Earlier, in 1911, an ordinance was adopted there requiring sanitary inspection of all meat, both before the animals were slaughtered and when the meat was offered for sale.<sup>2</sup>

The peddling of fish and fresh meats from wagons and carts in Texarkana was prohibited in 1917 unless the vehicles were constructed in such a manner that the products could "be kept and sold in a clean and sanitary manner," and not be exposed to "dust, flies and other contaminating agencies." Sufficient icing capacity was another requirement.<sup>3</sup> Because they attracted "flies and offensive odors which endanger the health and comfort of the public," fish and watermelon vendors were prohibited from parking their wagons along the streets of Texarkana to sell their wares.<sup>4</sup>

Similar health precautions caused Houston to include in its city code of 1942 regulations requiring inspection of country produce and sea food. After they had been officially inspected, farm products could be peddled through the streets,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 179-80.

<sup>3</sup>Op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 198.

<sup>4</sup>Op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup>Chapter 28, Article IV.

but sale of oysters, shrimp, lobsters, crabs, or other sea food was prohibited except from an established place of business.<sup>1</sup>

Laws to silence the vocal hucksters spread through the state. Texarkana in 1908 prohibited the use of gongs on vehicles other than fire engines, police patrol wagons, or ambulances.<sup>2</sup> Five years later the city ordered a halt to "the use of bells on animals or vehicles while using the streets of the city" unless required by ordinance.<sup>3</sup> Lufkin clamped a ban on "spieling, yelling, loud talking, and advertising of picture shows, circuses, and other attractions by means of or thru megaphones or other contrivances" without first obtaining a permit. A permit also was required before a person could preach, speak, or hawk goods and merchandise on city streets or public squares.<sup>4</sup>

Galveston muffled its singing peddlers in 1917 by making it unlawful for them "to call or shout their goods, wares, or merchandise, or to blow horns or whistles."<sup>5</sup> In regulating the operation of its Farmer's Market, Houston included a provision prohibiting any person selling at the market to make

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., Chapter 23, Article XI.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>Op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup>Ordinances 12 and 15, adopted May 23, 1914.

<sup>5</sup>Revised Ordinances of the City of Galveston (Galveston: Oscar Springer, 1917), Article 290, p. 124.



"any public outcry, or do hawking or 'spieling,' or to give any musical or other entertainment for the purpose of drawing customers or to attract attention."<sup>1</sup>

Only a year ago Dallas and other Texas cities were considering new ways to keep door-to-door peddlers from bothering busy housewives. Under study was an ordinance that had proved successful in Alexandria, Louisiana, and had just a short time before been upheld by the United States Supreme Court. It classified peddling as an illegal "nuisance" unless the home owner had requested an appointment with the salesman ahead of time.<sup>2</sup> Last August, Temple became the first Texas city to adopt an ordinance patterned after the Alexandria measure. Like most other such anti-peddling ordinances in effect throughout the state, the Temple regulation exempts persons engaged in "the sale, or soliciting orders for the sale of milk, dairy products, vegetables, poultry, eggs and other farm and garden products" previously authorized by law.

Although the street vendors have been pushed from city thoroughfares, and their songs and cries have been silenced, their modern counterparts are performing their selling magic over the same airwaves that have helped to make the colorful singing peddler of yesteryear a legendary folklore figure.

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., Chapter 28, Article III.

<sup>2</sup>The Daily Times Herald (Dallas), June 27, 1951.

These modern peddlers hawk nationally-advertised products with radio and television commercials aimed at customers sitting leisurely in the living rooms of their homes.

## CHAPTER VI

### MODERN VERSION OF THE SINGING SALESMAN

Although the singing vendors have virtually disappeared from the streets, they have contributed a tradition of successful selling to one of the major forces responsible for their fade-out. Their use of vocal advertisements to lure customers has been spirited into radio and television channels and transformed into singing commercials that publicize the brand names of products in highly competitive fields. With musical and poetic jingles poured over the airwaves by hired talent, the makers of soap and shortening, toothpaste and shampoo, cosmetics and medicines, cigarettes and beer attempt to entice buyers to the products that bear their trademarks. Frequently the rhymes, verses, and songs seek to glamorize the wares of companies that pay big-name stars to entertain prospective customers sitting comfortably at home. But many of the day-time programs---dubbed "soap operas" because their sponsors are soap manufacturers---are aimed primarily at housewives who buy products that have become modern household necessities.

Predominant users of the singing commercial are firms that sell products for cooking and cleaning, challenged in number by the makers of canned and packaged foods, cigarettes, beauty aids, and medicines to relieve aches and pains. In the

mid-twentieth century years when the term, peddler, has been most popularly linked with the sellers of dope and government influence, the products upon which the average American depends for pleasure, nourishment, and personal appearance are publicized by comedians and crooners, quiz show masters and disco jockeys.

Still some of radio's singing commercials of today may become folk music, for they are as much a part of the contemporary American scene as peanuts and popcorn, hot dogs and chewing gum, drive-in theaters, and nylon. Adelaide Van Wey, an authority on mountain and Creole folk music, has compared the air-wave jingles to the songs and chants of yesterday's street hawkers. Although she said some "are so horrible" they cannot survive, she expressed the opinion that others "might become folk tunes if they are used enough."<sup>1</sup> Among the more popular radio-crooned tunes that have been picked up and sung by youthful listeners are the Pepsi-Cola and Lucky Strike verses.<sup>2</sup> One of the earliest was the Pepsi-Cola song emphasizing the large size of its bottle, which gave a consumer two drinks instead of the usual one:

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<sup>1</sup>The Dallas Morning News, February 27, 1951. The North Carolina-born folk songstress, according to the newspaper article, "has a personal collection of more than 2,000 folk tunes, including Negro and southern white spirituals, the old English ballads of her native state, and Louisiana Creole songs."

<sup>2</sup>The music of these, and other radio commercials included in this chapter, are recorded as heard during the broadcasts.



Pep - si Co - la hits the spot;



Twelve full ounce - es, that's a lot.



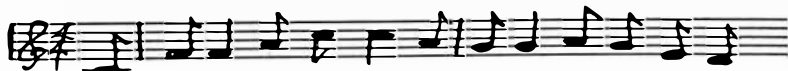
Twice as much for a nick - el, too.



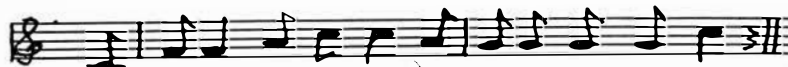
Pep-si Co-la is the drink for you.

#### PLATE XXXII

One of the most popular of the radio singing commercials, hummed and sung by many who have heard it, was the chorus caroled on the Lucky Strike programs advertising that brand of cigarettes. In addition to the familiar chant, L. S. / M. F. T." (Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco), the musical air was:



Be Hap-py, Go Luck-y. Be Hap-py, Go Luck-y Strike.



Be Hap-py, Go Luck-y. Go Luck-y Strike To-day.

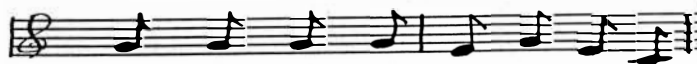
#### PLATE XXXIII

Though he sings no song, page boy Johnny, whose bright figure adorns placard and magazine advertisements, introduces his cigarette sponsor's radio show with a musical chant that sounds strikingly like the calls of hotel pages: "Call for Philip Mor-ris!" And a voice that sounds remarkably like the penguin used in advertisements urges smoking listeners, when their throats are dry, to "Switch from hot to Kools. Smoke Kools! Smoke Kools! Smoke Kools!"

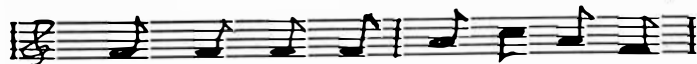
A brewing company whose beer is distinguished from other brands by a blue ribbon label on the bottle or can has used a dialogue appeal to introduce its musical commercial. After the dialogue ("What'll you have?" "Pabst Blue Ribbon."), repeated three times, a chorus proclaimed the smoothness of the drink:



Smooth-er, smooth-er, smooth-er fla-vor,



That's the spar - kle mil - lions fa-vor.

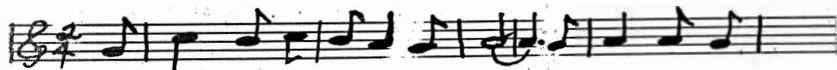


That's the beer with smooth-er flav - or,



Pabst Blue Rib - bon Beer.

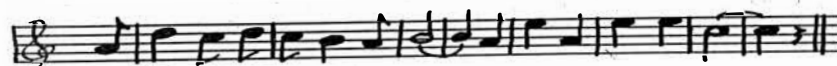
A catchy tune that welcomed listeners with the name of the product it advertised had a simple melody that made it easy to remember and repeat:



Ha - lo, Ev-ery-bo-dy, Ha - lo. Ha - lo is the



sham - poo that glo - ri - fies your hair.



Ha-lo, Ev-ery-bo-dy, Ha-lo. Ha-lo Sham-poo, Ha-lo.

#### PLATE XXXV

A toothpaste maker informed radio listeners that his dental cream provided users with a sweet breath as well as clean teeth:



Brush your teeth with Col-gate; Col-gate den-tal cream.



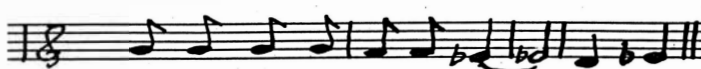
It cleans your breath, while it cleans your teeth.

#### PLATE XXXVI

Among the familiar soap songs was one that advertised an early brand of the powdery product used chiefly for washing clothes and dishes. Its tune was catchy and simple:



Su - per Suds, Su - per Suds,



Get that brand new Su-per Su-u-uds.

PLATE XXXVII

A cleanser whose name prompts the question of which came first---the name or the adjective used to describe it---is advertised vocally:



Try Vel. It's mar - VEL - ous,



V - E - L, mar - VEL - ous Vel.

PLATE XXXVIII

Many of the singing commercials have original lyrics sung to the music of familiar classical or popular compositions. Ranging from Chopin to "Deep in the Heart of Texas,"



the music is arranged in tempos to suit the words of the verse and the products being advertised. A deodorant hawker advised listeners to "Use Arrid to be sure/ Be sure to be sure," to the music of Chopin's "Prelude in A Major." The tune of the French folk song, "Alouette," was used to advertise a medical tablet sold to relieve sufferers of headache or indigestion:

Alka-Seltzer, speedy Alka-Seltzer,  
Have a headache, take it for relief.  
(or, Acid indigestion, take it every time.)

Using a tune that was popular in the early days of the automobile, the commercial publicizing the sleek new 1951 model of the same make claimed, to the strains of "In My Merry Oldsmobile":

Oh, the going's great in the '88!  
It's a driver's dream come true.

To induce customers to try its shortening to assure success in baking breads and pastries, Mrs. Tucker's reached back to the days of the first World War and picked out a popular air, "Smiles." Using this melody, the commercial vocalists sang, "There are breads that make you wonder/ The kind of shortening that's used," followed by a spiel proclaiming the many advantages of using Mrs. Tucker's shortening.

A Texas mill that produces mash for cattle and chickens adapted its commercial to the music of Stephen Foster's immortal "Camptown Races." To music played by a hillbilly

string band, a western-voiced chorus sang:

Tex-O Feed, it's in the bag,  
Burrough's Tex-O.  
There's Tex-O Feed for every need,  
Better balance, too.  
For cattle, pigs, and sheep,  
For ducks and chickens, too.  
Burrough's Feed for every need  
Means best results for you.

To a typical square-dance tune, a Texas brewery urged radio and television listeners to "join the swing to Pearl." Singing the ditty, the vocal peddler ended his sales song with a spoken "Bottle of Pearl, Please."

Swing it pardner, swing to Pearl,  
The 3-X Brand in Big Demand,  
Xtra Dry....Xtra Light....  
Xtra Mellow....Tastes Just Right.  
For X-tra Pleasure Every day  
Join the folks who always say:  
...BOTTLE OF PEARL PLEASE.<sup>1</sup>

With the hand-claps included, "Deep in the Heart of Texas"---popular across the nation and overseas during the second World War---provided the musical background for a commercial advertising Clover Bloom margarine. Appealing principally to young children because of its familiar tune is the "Motorola TV" commercial sung to the music of "Happy Birthday to You."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>As printed in an advertisement in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, January 10, 1951.

<sup>2</sup>In his "Big D" column in the Dallas Morning News (June 15, 1952), Paul Crume wrote of a group of children at a birthday party who switched from the traditional song to "Motorola TV."

Without music, but with the jingle of a Mother Goose nursery rhyme, the maker of Kerr glass jars presented a parody on "There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe." In this verse, however, the woman was a nice one who knew what to do. Listeners were urged to follow her example and "Buy Kerr, always Kerr, for the canning you do."

In addition to appropriating the salesmanship tactics of the singing street peddlers, the radio and television advertisers have adopted the custom of the pilón. These free gifts are offered through coupons, box tops, or package labels. Purchasers of products with these pilón application blanks may obtain a gift at no extra cost if they mail their coupons or labels to the manufacturers. Cereal makers are the principal barterers, offering gifts that appeal to children, so they will plead with their mothers to buy "box-top" products.

After the Tex-O Feed program announcer explains the offer of a cold drink tumbler in exchange for every tag from a Tex-O Feed bag, and urges listeners to "sashay down to your dealer" to get the free gift, the string band swings into a square-dance tune, and the caller sings out his do-si-do appeal:

Promenade one, promenade all,  
Heed your Tex-O dealer's call,  
He has tumblers there for you.  
Buy Tex-O Feed; that's all you do.

In a syncopated chant emphasizing the free towel given away with every box of the soap powder he advertised, one radio peddler called out his foot-tapping rhythmic appeal:

Get the large size box of Silver-Dust  
With the big Cannon face towel, today.

The vocal vendor for Pure-Snow flour promised in a musical verse "complete satisfaction or your money back" and tempted listeners with the assurance that there would be a "coupon in every sack."

Numerous radio advertisers seek new customers with snappy punch phrases or poetic catch lines that are easy to grasp. Recalling the days when most people used only rain water to wash their hair, White Rain announcers told listeners that its shampoo gave "rain-water results." An announcer reading the commercial of a cleaning fluid maker urged people tuned in on his broadcast to "Keep it clean---with Energine."

Sticking to a slogan used in billboard, newspaper, and magazine advertisements before the invention of the radio, Maxwell House turned the printed phrase describing its coffee into an oral one---"Good to the Last Drop." A coffee competitor assured its radio listeners that "What Mr. Chase Doesn't know about coffee, Mr. Sanborn does."

"You'll rave and you'll save with Jewel," boasted a company that markets that brand of shortening, while a rival presented a musical chant, "We're cooking with Crisco, C-R-I-

S-C-O."

Outnumbering any other product on the market in the monopoly of radio time are the soaps and detergents that have invaded the washing machine and the kitchen sink. Selling the soap that its makers have long claimed is "99.44 per cent pure" and "floats," Ivory appealed to housewives to use its soap flakes in their dishpans to protect their hands. "Tide's in, dirt's out" and "Perk up your washday with Perk," two others have chanted, while Oxydol claimed that its "deep cleaning" product made clothes sparkle. Another bragged of the many uses of its product:



PLATE XXXIX

When television spread through the nation after World War II with the opening of local stations and later cross-country networks, the manufacturers of the new wireless machine, that enabled people to see as well as hear, started a selling campaign. Appealing to the Christmas trade a year or so ago was a singing commercial that spread to the lips of young and old alike who had crowded around the sets of their friends and neighbors to see Howdy-Doody, Hop-a-Long Cassidy,

and Faye Emerson:



PLATE XL

Joining the peddler ranks behind the microphone have been famous entertainers paid fabulous sums to sell the products of big industry. The voice of a comedian who topped popularity polls with a radio quiz show at mid-century was sponsored by an automobile manufacturer. Groucho Marx concluded each program on a musical note, "So be sure to see your Plymouth-DeSoto dealer."

Not one, but four big-name performers were signed up by Chesterfield to draw listeners---and customers---to its broadcasts. Crooners Bing Crosby and Perry Como and Comedians Bob Hope and Arthur Godfrey promoted the cigarette that paid their salaries with a musical appeal bolstered by drumbeats: "Sound off! (drum rolls) Sound off! (drum rolls) Try a pack of Chesterfields TO-day!" The previous year they opened and closed their programs with a song:

Chesterfield, Chesterfield,  
Always takes first place.  
That milder, mild tobacco  
Never leaves an aftertaste.  
So, open a pack, give 'em a smell,  
Then you'll smoke 'em.

Even though they may wield the popular appeal to attract listeners---and perhaps even customers among those who refrain from flipping the dial at the hint of a commercial---the radio and television peddlers can never replace the color provided by the occupational street songster. Their songs, supported by instrumental accompaniment, lack the heart-warming appeal of the musical chants that floated through the quiet streets of yesteryear, for the salesmen of the airwaves are merely promoting someone else's product for pay, while the street peddlers were selling their own.

The vendor who trudged the streets with a pack on his back, a basket in his hand, or a tray on his head---or who rumbled along rough roads in his horse-drawn wagon loaded with watermelons or vegetables---has earned his place in the folklore annals of Texas, just as he has throughout America, and, for many centuries, in foreign lands.

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