"Git Along, Little Dogies"

"Git Along, Little Dogies" is one of the great cowboy songs collected at the beginning of the 20th century, but sung since the mid-1800s. These songs reflect the lonely, rugged life of the cowman. In this particular song, the singer suggests his affection for the herd of cattle, or "dogies." But he also declares he intends to drive them to their destination. A "cowpuncher" is another name for a cowboy. Many cowboy songs are known to have been derived from pre-existing songs when singers improvised new lyrics to describe life on the plains. "Git Along, Little Dogies" is believed to be based on an Irish melody from the 1700s.

"Shenandoah"

Named for a Native American chief living on the Missouri River, this beautiful song was actually a chantey sung on riverboats and later at sea, dating from around the 1820s. Later it became associated with the American West. The melody is a blend of elements from several folksong traditions, including Irish and African American. The songs of many cultures were sung on American ships and in that environment, songs like "Shenandoah" were created. 89

"Sweet Betsy from Pike"

Most likely dating from the gold rush of 1849, "Sweet Betsy from Pike" is a humorous ballad of a couple's attempt to make the difficult journey over the mountains to California. The text is certainly meant to be humorous, but it also captures the danger and exhaustion of life on the trail. Earlier versions of this song include quite a lot of verses recounting the adventures of Betsy and Ike during their travels, usually ending with them reaching California and getting married (and then immediately divorced). 90