

**Alan Lomax Keynote Address
National Cowboy Poetry Gathering 1987**

Transcription

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Alan Lomax: What I hope to do in my few minutes here is to deepen and broaden if I can, the scope of this marvelous, indigenous poetry movement that I've encountered here for the first time today. I can't tell you how impressed I am; I can't tell you how much I wish that my father, who spent his life celebrating western poetry, how pleased he would be to be here.

I want to begin on that, and stay for a while on that personal note. I wanted to take you back to almost, oh, a good deal more than a hundred years, into a little log cabin in Bosque County, Texas. Young boy, ten years old is waked up early one rainy morning by the sound of music from just down the, just down the slope from him, where the Chisholm Trail ran from south Texas on up north to Oklahoma. There was a herd moving by, and this boy was waked by something like this:

*Whoopee-ti-yi-yo
Get along you little doggies
It's your misfortune and
None of my own.*

*Whoopee-ti-yi-yo
Get along little doggies
For you know Wyoming
Will be your new home.*

Later on that morning when they camped and made their breakfast, he huddled in the bushes and here's what he heard:

*Wake up, Jacob!
Day's a-breakin'*

The camp cook was getting everybody to breakfast on time.

*Beans in the pot
And a whole cake bakin'
Bacon's in the pan and
The coffee's in the pot
Come on boys and*

*Get it while it's hot.
Come on, boys, and grab a biscuit!*

And it was that sound that started my father on his long career of collecting and preserving cowboy poetry and cowboy literature. He grew up a country boy on a country farm in a country neighborhood, and there was music all around, all the time. All sorts of country music. Used to go to the play parties and you could do this one with me:

*Jingle at the window
Tidy-O
Jingle at the window
Tidy-O
Jingle at the window
Tidy-O
Jingle at the window
Lo!*

*Skip one window
Tidy-O
Skip two windows
Tidy-O
Skip three windows
Tidy-O
Jingle at the windows
Lo!*

Remember this was back in the eighteen seventies in rural Texas. The last Comanche's fire had just gone out on Comanche Peak within site of the house. But even so, and they had all sorts of moves towards cultivation in his county, one of them was the old time singing school. I don't know if, how much you know about that, but they learned by shaped notes and they had a whole lot of funny songs that they used to get the country people to study their music. And one I was raised on that came from Bosque County back in that time was the one that went like this:

*Some think there's nothing half so good,
As oysters roasted, fried, or stewed.
While others think there's pleasure more
In sliding down the cellar door.*

*Now some think this and some think that
But all agree there's greater
Satisfaction to be always had
In a singing school as I have said.*

*Oh, the singing-ninging-ninging-ninging
Singing-ninging-ninging-ninging*

*Singing-ninging-ninging-ninging
Singing-ninging-ninging-ninging*

*Singing-ninging-ninging-ninging
Singing-ninging-ninging-ninging
Singing-ninging-ninging-ninging
School.*

*Oh, the singing school
Beautiful
Oh, the singing school
Beautiful*

*I'd be a happy creature if I
Only was the teacher
Of that wonderful
Singing School.*

Songs like that in the country, and the tournaments where his boyhood heroes, the cowboys who did go up the trail, joined the trail herds and took the cattle up, rode at tournaments where they had rings around a circle, and you have to pick up eight rings on the fly on a long lance. Keeping up the traditions of chivalry as they saw it back in those old Southern times.

Well, the boy, my father like Lincoln layed in front of the fireplace at night in this log cabin. There were twenty-two children raised in that house. And read poetry and novels and dreamed of getting an education one time. And finally after, when he was in his twenties, he sold his cow pony and his cow horse, and instead of going up the trail, he went to the local college. And, a little one horse school in Granbury – Granbury, Texas – and there he ran into elocution, and learned among other things the song that he later was to recite all over the country for large audiences. Do you remember the one about Lasca? We don't want to do the whole thing, but "the cattle gained on us." Remember how it ends?

*And just as I felt for
My old six shooter behind my belt,
Down came the mustang and down came we
Clinging together – And what was the rest?
A body that spread itself on my breast.
Two arms that shielded my dizzy head.
Two lips that hard to my lips were pressed.
Then came thunder in my ears
And over a serge, and sea of steers
Blows that beat blood into my eyes
And when I could rise
Lasca was dead*

*I gouged out a grave a few feet deep
And there in Earth's arms I laid her to sleep*

*And there she is lying, no one knows
And the summer shines and the winter snows
And for many a day the flowers have spread
A pall of pedals over her head*

*And the little grey hawk hangs aloft in the air
And the sly coyote trots here and there
And the black snake glides and glitters and slides
Into a rift of the cottonwood tree,*

*And the buzzard sails on and comes and is gone
Stately and still like a ship at sea*

*And I wonder why I do not care
For the things that are
Like the things that were
It is my heart lie buried there,
In Texas down by the Rio Grande.*

And so by the time my father was in the mid-twenties, he'd been thoroughly inoculated with the two main streams of western song. The cowboy folk song, the work song of the trail herds and of his admired friends in Bosque County, but he already had begun to become acquainted with the tradition of conscious verse that had sprung up in response to this incredible new experience that Americans were having, as they burst into the vast and fabulous and endlessly adventure and beauty filled part of the country.

He got himself into the University of Texas, and he took with him his little roll of cowboy songs. Now we don't know what he wrote down in this. Way back, written sometime in the late eighteen, about eighteen ninety-five now. This was the first time these songs have ever been written down. And he went to his English professor with a theme containing the words of maybe things like *The Chisholm Trail* and *Get Along, Little Doggies*, and an essay on the literature of Texas. And the next day his professor came and handed it to him and shook his head and says, "That won't do. That's not literature. That's trash."

Well, all by himself on the campus, this country boy who believed in western literature and western verse, he had nowhere to go, he had no one to talk it over with. There was no association of people about it, who knew and cared about this material, and so he went out behind the dormitories as he tells it, and made a little bonfire and burned up his roll of cowboy songs. We'll never know what was in that.

But he was a hard driving young fellow, and he got himself a fellowship to Harvard, and the next time he came up with his cowboy songs as he most surely did, it was in a class of great English professor named Barrett Wendell. And Wendell writes later how his whole seminar was simply struck amazed by this new literature, this realistic literature, this literature that was all unbuttoned, just the way that Whitman had

asked for it. It made everything else in the course seem very boring – this course on American literature and very sterile. Lomax came to them and sang,

*Sam Bass was born in Indiana
It was his native home
And at the age of seventeen
Young Sam began to roam.*

*He first came out to Texas,
A cowboy for to be
And a kinder hearted fellow
You'd seldom ever see.*

*Sam used to deal in race stock
One called the Denton Mare
He matched him at Scrub Races
And took him to the fair.*

*Sam used to coin the money
And he spent it just as free
A freer hearted feller
You'd seldom ever see*

*Sam left the Collins Ranch
In the merry month of May
With a herd of Texas cattle
That Black Hills for to see*

*Sold out in Custer City
And then got on a spree
A harder set of cowboys
You'd seldom ever see*

*On their way back to Texas
They robbed the UP train
And then split up in couples
And started out again*

*Sam's life was short in Texas
Three more robberies did he do
He robbed all the mail
Passenger and express cars, too*

*Sam met his fate in Round Rock
July the twenty first
They filled poor Sam with rifle balls*

And emptied out his purse

*Now Sam is a corpse
In six foot under clay
And Jackson's in the bushes
Trying to get away*

*Sam, Jimmy sold out Sam and Barnes
And left their friends to mourn
Oh, what a scorching Jim will get
When Gabriel blows his horn*

*Perhaps he's gone to Heaven
There's none of us can say
But if I'm riding, in my eyes
He's gone the other way*

[Audience applauds]

Hey! Well, the powers that be in the eastern establishment liked this material; they saw that it was a true extension of the balladry of Scotland and England and Ireland. And they gave them a grant to go out collecting all over the West. And timidly, and yet with much energy, he went about his task. He published ads in all the western newspapers, asking for people to send him the verse, the indigenous verses of the whole of the western part of the country. And he went to barrooms and cattleman conventions with his little hand wound cylinder machine that Mister Edison gave him for the purpose. And he went to libraries, and gradually they developed this file which is really unmatched still in the world today of literally hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of songs. Some came from books, some have been composed, communally composed on the trail, some were written by known authors, some have been composed by cowboys and simply put right in to the oral stream – this whole range of western literature, the like of which hadn't existed anywhere else in America, even though we had rich lumberjack and seaman's traditions. But here you had a whole section of the country suddenly needing to civilize itself, to make itself feel at home in this strange new world.

One of the things that he did was to go to the Bancroft Library in California and there he found a tremendous store of songs of the Forty-nine. I don't know how many of you know who Putt was, but in a way was a character very much like the cowboy poets I've been meeting. He decided that it was his job to give poetry and song to the lonesome forty-niners out there at the gold rush. And, so he went about that. He had a singing group that toured the mining camps that played there, and they sang songs that Putt had composed for morale purposes. This is one you can sing with me if you like. There's a chorus:

*In the days of old
In the days of gold*

*How oft time I repine
Days of gold, when we dug out the gold
In the days of forty-nine.*

*We're gazing now on old Tom Moore
A relic of bygone days
As a bummer too they call me now
For what cares I for praise?*

*It's oft I say for days gone by
It's oft I do repine
For the days of old
When we dug out the gold
In the days of forty-nine*

*In the days of old
When we dug out the gold
In the days of forty-nine*

*My comrades they all loved me well
The jolly, saucy crew
A few hard cases I will admit
Though they were brave and true*

*Whatever the pence
They never would flinch
They never would fret nor whine
Like go old bricks they stood the kicks
In the days of forty-nine*

*In the days of old and the days of gold
How oft times I repine
For the days of old when we dug out the gold
In the days of forty-nine*

*There was ragshag Jim, the roarin' man
Who could out roar a buffalo, you bet
He roared all day and he roared all night
And I guess he's roaring yet.*

*One night Jim fell in a prospect hole
In a roaring bad design
And in that hole roared out his soul
In the days of forty-nine*

*There was New York Jake the butcher boy
Who was fond of getting tight
And whenever he got on a spree
He was spoiling for a fight*

*One day Jack run into a knife
In the hands of old Bob Syne
And over Jake we held a wake
In the days of forty-nine*

*Of all the comrades that I've left
There's none that's left to boast
And I'm left alone in my misery
Like some old wandering ghost*

*And as I passed from town to town
They call me the rambling Syne
Since the days of old and the days of gold
And the days of forty-nine.*

*In the days of old, in the days of gold
How oft times I repine
For the days of old and the days of gold
And the days of forty-nine.*

[Audience applauds]

You haven't seen me using this guitar yet, because really, most of the western poetry was unaccompanied. And it was sung ad lib, sort of in the fashion that I've been trying to render it to you in. It was a kind of song recitation. Somebody said, "We old cowboys didn't have no voice, sounded like rusty iron rubbing together. And we'd stand getting around the campfire and raise our heads one after another just like coyotes and howl one man and the next man would howl his turn and that's the way we did it."

Well, the collection resulted first in this book in nineteen-ten. Thorpe had published a book, a smaller book a little bit, a little bit earlier. This book made a real national impression. It was well-reviewed by some people, and it sold well. My father, he was trying to raise a family at that time, was mighty encouraged by what happened in it. There were all the standard songs: *Home on the Range*, *Old Paint*, *Jesse James*, *Chisholm Trail*, *Get Along Little Doggies*, *The Gol-Durn Wheel*, the whole repertory of songs that have become national – a good many of them since that time.

And just a little later came this book, *Songs of the Cattle Trail and Cow Camp*, which puts together the conscious verse. The *Lascas*, and the *Cowboy Christmas Ball*, and those songs that were written first, and then some of them passed into oral tradition and were sung. And my father took to the lecture platform to plug this material all over the country, and as he lectured, by that time he was baldheaded and had a little rim of hair

around like this and oftentimes the audiences, who expected a tall rangy cowboy like one of you guys here, would get to giggling when he came out on the steps, out on the stage and lectured.

But he soon got them because he remembered his old teachings from the elocution courses, and he put the songs and the verses over. He, he recited as much as he sang. One of his favorites – and I was raised on this one – I don't whether you were, but it's a big favorite of mine that he put very nearly the beginning of his lectures. I'm going to try to do it with some kind of Johnny Lomax feeling. It's called *The Habit*.

*I beat my way wherever any winds have blown
I've bummed along from Portland down to San Antone
From Sandy Hook to Frisco, over gulch and hill
For once you get the Habit, you just can't keep still*

*I've settled down quite frequent and I says, says I
"I'll never wander further until the day I die"
But the wind it sort of chuckles, "Well, of course, you will"
And sure enough I does it because I can't keep still*

*I've seen a lot of places that I'd like to stay
But I gets to feelin' restless, and I'm on my way
I was never meant for sittin' on my own door still
For once you get the Habit, you just can't keep still*

*I've been in rich men's houses and I've been in jail
And when its time for leavin', I just hits the trail
I'm a human bird of passage and the song I trill
Is once you get the Habit, you just can't keep still*

*The wind is sort of coaxin' and the road is clear
And the wind is singin' ballads that I just got to hear
It ain't no use to argue when you feel that thrill
Because once you get the Habit, you just can't keep still*

[Audience applauds]

Now, a lot of people sing these days, do the *Sierry Petes*, but the one that was traditional in my family that used to happen almost every time we had a family party – this is the one we children liked the best, I think of all – was the one about High Chin Bob and the Mogollons. Is that one that's still current? I don't know – I haven't heard it this time anyway, so I'm going to put it in. You don't mind my reading it instead of reciting it? Not being a cowboy poet.

*Way up high in the Mogollons
Among the mountain tops,
A lion cleaned a yearling's bones
And licked his thankful chops
When on the picture who should ride
A-trippin' down the road,
But High Chin Bob, with sinful pride
And maverick-hungry rope.*

*"Oh glory be to me," says he,
"And fame's unfading flowers,
All meddling hands are far way
And my good top horse—I ride my top horse here today;
I'm top rope at the Lazy J
Hi, Kitty Cat, you're ours."*

*The lion licked his paw so brown
And dreamed soft dreams of veal.
A circling loop sung down
And roped him around his meal.
He yowled wild fury to the world
Until all the hills yowled back,
The top horse gave a snort and whirled
And Bob caught up the slack.*

*"Oh glory be to me," says he,
"We'll hit the glory trail
No human man as I've read
Doth loop a raging lion's head
Nor ever horse could drag him dead
Until we told the tale."*

*Way up high in the Mogollons
That top horse done his best
Through whippin' brush and rattlin' stones,
From canyon floor to crest.
But ever when Bob turned and hoped
A limp remain to find,
A red-eyed lion, belly-roped
But healthy, loped behind.*

*"Oh, glory be to me," grunts he,
"This glory trail is tough,
Yet even until the Judgment Morn,
I'll keep this dally around my horn
For never was a hero born*

Could stoop to holler 'nough!'"

*Three suns had rode their circle home
Beyond the desert's rim,
And turned their star herds loose to roam
The ranges high and dim
Yet up and down, and 'round and 'cross
Bob pounded, weak and wan
For pride still glued him to his horse
And glory drove him on.*

*"Oh glory be to me," says he,
"He can't be drug to death.
But now I know beyond a doubt
Them heroes I have read about
Was only fools that stuck it out
'Til the end of mortal breath."*

*Way up high in the Mogollons
A prospect man did swear
The moonbeams melted down his bones
And hoisted up his hair
A ribby cow horse thunder by
And a lion trailed along,
And a rider gaunt, but chin on high
Yelled out his crazy song,*

*"Oh glory be to me," says he,
"And to my noble noose,
Oh, stranger, tell my pard below
I took a ramping dream in tow
And if I never lay him low,
I'll never turn him loose!"*

[Break in recording where master tape was turned]

[Audience applauds]

The anthologies and the look at western verse made it clear that the West, along with other things, was a tremendous melting pot, thousands of miles wide and long, where all mankind had come to play out their drama. There would, people from every branch of the human species, and the great many of the cowboy songs that seem to have been made there, grew there, because they seemed so natural, were actually imports that had had their words changed a little bit. Sometimes a great deal, but they had been adapted by

westerns, who would say, had been lumberjacks before or sailors before, so...when we really looked into the history of that magical piece, the, maybe the *chef d'œuvre* of all western songs, we found that *Whoopee-ti-yi-yo*, *Get Along Little Doggies*, was actually related to a very much older song. I ran, when I was working in Michigan, I ran into another way of doing it. There's a chorus:

*Hush-ish-she-ola little baby, lie easy
Who's your real father may never be known
It's weeping and wailing and rocking the cradle
Attending a baby that's none of your own.*

And then there was another chorus that went:

*Singing Hoop-ti-yo-yupe, run along you little doggies
For Montana will be your new home.
And it's whooping and swearing and driving the doggies
It's our misfortune that we ever did roam.*

So there's apparently a parallel between some sort of a orphan baby and the orphan calf, the little doggy who's mama die with a, in a bog hole as the cowboy said, and his daddy had run off with another cow. So the cowboys were always preoccupied with taking care of the little doggies. And I got to, to Ireland and sat down for my first song session with the great Seamus Ennis, the bard of folk music in Ireland. Here's what he sang me. The actual root song of *Little Doggies*. I don't know how many of you have heard it, but it made my hair stand on end because it took me back that hundred years to the starting of my family fortune and the thing that had actually got the first song, cowboy song-hunter on the trail.

*The other evening I chanced to go roving
Down by the clear river I joggled along
I heard an old man making sad lamentation
A rockin' the cradle and the child not his own.*

*"Yee-I-oh, my laddy lie easy
Who's your da-da will never be known
And it's weeping and weary and rocking the cradle
Nursing the baby and the child no me own.*

*"I'm sorry my neighbors, I married this fair one
She favors the neighbors and none of me own.
She's out every evening to balls and to parties
And leaves me here rocking the cradle along."*

*Yee-yi-oh, my laddy lie easy
Who's your da-da will never be known
And it's weeping and weary and rocking the cradle*

Nursing the baby, and the child not your own.

*Come all you young fellows who wants to get married
Take my advise, leave the women alone
For by the Lord, Harry, if ever you marry
They'll leave you there rocking that cradle alone.*

*Yee-yi-oh, my laddy lie easy
Who's your da-da will never be known.
And it's weeping and weary and rocking the cradle
Nursing the baby and the child not your own.*

And when you think about it that was the position that the cowboy was in when he picked up that little orphan calf and flung him across the pommel of his saddle and carried him until he wasn't too tired to go on by himself. He was like the old man with the bastard baby. And when we went out west though, we found the real origin of the song, in an old Gaelic lullaby. An old lady sung us something like this:

[Gaelic lullaby]

And when I asked her where that song came from, "Ah!" she says, "That's the oldest song in the world! The oldest. That's the song that Saint Joseph sang to the little baby Jesus when he was taking care of him." So we have the whole thing complete with the orphan calf and the baby Jesus about whom Joseph had some doubts.

[Audience laughs]

Well, the song came from everywhere. The cattlemen came from everywhere. And as a matter of fact, when I began as an anthropologist to look a little bit deeper into this problem, I found with my recording machine in Europe, that there were cowboy songs and cowboys and vaqueros everywhere. For instance, I learned that the whole of the western, all the western – literal of Europe – had basically been first brought under man's domain with pastoralism; people with their herds who were also fishermen. In Norway this was true, and the Norsemen were cattlemen who went sailing and became pirates and conquered most of the known world eventually, through Russia and then Normandy and then Sicily, and then their descendents actually were the world conquerors. But there was cattle industry all along in western Europe.

Queen Mave, the fabled Queen of Ireland started the great Irish war out of which emerged the hero Cahoolin. When she and her consort got into an argument on the pillow about which one had the most cows. Ireland was cattle country in the days of the great Irish kingdoms and it was a matter of pride, as it's still a matter of pride, who's got the greatest and finest herd, and Queen Mave and her consort actually went to war over this, and the war lasted for as long as the epic lasts.

When I went to Scotland I found that the Scots Highland had once been a cattle pasture until the time of Prince Charlie's defeat, and the British had cleared the Highlands. Cleared the Highlands of cattle and the clans that used them for their sources of power. But there was still some of the lore in the Hebrides, and I discovered there that there was a tradition of singing to the cows to get the milk to come down. That's still carried on when, in American cow barns, where they play the radio for cows, and the Vatican has produced a study showing that music helps feminine lactation, both of an ungulate persuasion and a human persuasion.

But in the Hebrides, the expert milk maids specialized so much that they knew the favorite milking song of each of the cows in their herd. And here is a Hebridian milk maid singing to her cows, to her cow, oh, about three o'clock one summer, bright summer morning. Three AM. Let's hear her.

[Lomax plays recording of milkmaid singing and milking a cow.]

Alan Lomax: [To person playing recording] A little more.

Milkmaid: That will get more milk when she hears me singing.

Alan Lomax: And now here's an amazing song from the Swiss Alps where you have a whole community taking its cattle herd up into the mountains for summer pasturage, and you hear the cowbells ringing, each heifer has her own particular bell, and all the people of the village are yodeling and singing in a style that really takes us back to the dawn of time.

[Recording is played.]

Alan Lomax: It's very remarkable when you look at the world map in relationship to pastoralism, herding. Actually herding is the most important thing, all the way from China through Europe, people base their lives around the cultivation of animals that produced hides and milk and meat. The most useful way to have supplies and keep them ready for next season was to have a living animal that you took care of and this animal had incredible potential to make life richer and more possible.

Also made conquest easier, and cattle people have always been aggressive conquistadores, from the time of the first Arian tribes to now. They have sacked the big empires and then become sedentary and then sacked then sacked them again. And it, the Spanish who first brought cows and horses into this continent were also, traveled with their animals and it was those animals that made their conquest of America so secure so early.

And the properties of these cattle countries – these cattle cultures – were very similar. In spite of amazing differences of language and scene and so on, cattle people have always been highly patrilineal, with big families, with the authority located in the big man, the big chief, and all of the people connected with him very loyal to what he

thought should be done, because they were dependent on him for the protection of their animals and for their actual future. Cattle cultures have, they've always been nomadic. Cattle cultures have fostered also a great deal of individualism and a great deal of independence on the part of their membership, so you have this dichotomy between loyalty to the center, and tremendous independence – both of which were essential to keep any cattle culture going.

And that became even more pronounced in the new form of pastoralism that came to be in this country. The ranching system which was, which was set up to feed the growing industries and urban centers of the nineteenth century. Suddenly, but there was a big change that occurred when this new American industry was set up. There was no more time to have cattle people, cowboys, vaqueros, as they were called in Spanish, have settled homes. They had to live a bunkhouse life.

And so, the American cowboy tradition was quite different from anything that had ever preceded it. Always before, women had been close by or involved. But in America for the first time, were these enormous trail drives and the establishment of these huge ranches in wild country, women were far away and men lived on their own. And there was tremendous, there was this tremendous loneliness that afflicted the souls of the western cowboys. So many of the songs deal with loneliness and deprivation and fear of dying far away from home and the songs are sown with that. But at the same time, the songs have always been full of the marvels of life where every man was basically his own boss. He could leave the outfit whenever he wanted to and go and find another job and he didn't have to take any sauce from anybody. There was a song that we collected very late from Texas cow punchers, it goes like this:

*I'm bound to follow the long-horned cows before I get too old
It's well I work for wages, boys, I get my pay in gold
The bosses they all like me well, they say I'm hard to beat
They, could I give them the bull standoff they know I've got the cheek.*

*Ki-yi-yippie-yippie-yea.
Ki-yi-yippie-yippie-yea.*

*Yes, I'm a rowdy cowboy, just off the stormy plains
My trade is cinching saddles, boys, and pulling bridle reins.
Yes, I can tip a lasso and it is with graceful ease
I can rope a streak of lightning, boys, and ride her where I please.*

*Ki-yi-yippie-yippie-yea.
Ki-yi-yippie-yippie-yea.*

Whoop.

It's always been a puzzle to me, until I thought about this old, deep, patriarchal background of the cowboy world that so few of the songs and so few of the poems that

I've so far heard – the modern poetry of this new movement that's becoming maybe our first regional movement in working class verse – that there's no song, there are no protests against the, the conditions of the cowboy's life. A man who is always underpaid, overworked, put into all kinds of dangerous positions and required to be everything, and then when he got old was just put out to pasture someplace. And this makes the whole institution seem a kind of feudal system, and yet, curiously enough, there's not been anything much said about this. I've sort of wondered what, when and if this vein was going to be, going to be explored by all these splendid new poets that are coming along.

Another thing that was true for the cowboy period of the West, and which has not been much looked at – it seems to me that would provide another incredibly interesting subject – and that was the fact that, if it hadn't been for the trail drives and the settlement of the West with, by cowboys, the Sioux Indians and the Plains Indians would have been far more difficult to defeat. The fact is that the settlement waited on the edge of the plains for nearly fifty years before, or made dashes across the plains to California, because the Plains Indians or the mounted Indians were the equal of any army that could be sent against them. It was really the cowboy with the trail herds that provided, that broke the power of the Indians right across the West, because they were hard riding people who could live on the ground like the Indians, and who could establish settlements and defend them against, against the Indians. And there's a cowboy verse – I don't know if you know that:

*I'd rather hear a rattler rattle
I'd rather buck stampeding cattle
I'd rather go to a greasy battle – greaser battle
Than to fight, than to fight the bloody Indians*

*I'd rather eat a pound of dope
I'd rather ride without a rope
I'd rather from this country lope
Than to fight, then to fight the bloody Indians.*

But now, as times have changed, and small ranchers and individual cowboys who want to pursue this fabulous profession that the Mexican vaqueros began and that the American cowboy has made into a fabulous skill and a way of life that the whole world has fallen in love with through the film, through books, and through getting to know it, on dude ranches and other places. This whole way of life is threatened by all kinds of economic encroachments and governmental regulations that you all know much more about than I do. And so, it, the cowman and cowmen and cattlemen and cowboys are maybe in the position maybe that the Indians once were.

And it seems to me, that since if the Indians and the cattle people who have made the West a place to live in, since it's their place, their sign is on the land, that, that, this new poetry movement could do something about putting the two parts of the West together, bringing it close together. Getting people to understand the Indians better, getting a hearing for their troubles and a co-identification with the whole job of making

the West as wonderful in the future as it has been in the past for a place for people to live, because things are more, there are more things important than money and profits. What's an important thing is values, beauty, and relationship, a decent relationship to the land, and the environment. Both cowboy and Indians understand this in different ways, but the two things, cultures it seems to me might somehow make common cause.

And finally the thing that I think is so deeply impressive about the cowboy literature, and this is what impressed Barrett Wendell and, the Harvard professor, and Teddy Roosevelt, both of who gave their blessing to my father's original collections of these songs and poems. The fact that this was realistic literature, produced by people who knew what they were talking about, about their own lives. It was every, it was the literature of everyday. It was Whitman come alive. It was Sandburg come out of the, of the, of the studio into the barroom, and to the bunkhouse, and it was poetry, it's poetry and song that, that deals with things as they are.

And there's a magic in here that comes only when the artist is in true contact with his audience. Today, as you know, poetry, most poetry, fine art poetry's written somewhere in an ivory tower, and it's a lot more like mathematics sometimes than poetry. It's, it's looks better on the page than it listens. There's no thought of if being actually enjoyed by an audience. That's not what it's for. But this whole new cowboy movement has changed that. And now again, poetry is what it used to be in the days of the Iliad and the Odyssey. And the days when poets were the kings of their villages and their tribes around the world. The poet here in Elko and in this new cowboy movement is with his audience. He represents what they need, what they feel. He speaks directly to them and so those things have an honesty and an honor and a reality and a bite that you can't get any other way. The reason that jazz and the blues have triumphed in the world was that they were produced for a people who needed them in New Orleans and along, in the Mississippi Valley, and they meant, they still carry the power of that, of satisfying those deep needs and so I think this movement that you all have put on the, on the, into the world is going to have an incredible, it can have an incredible effect that, on American literature and on man's view of himself, because of this close tie between the poet and his audience and the environment where the poetry is produced.

I, as I said when I began, I just wish Johnny Lomax were here making this speech instead of me. I wish he could know that the thing he believed in so much when he was a young man, that he fought for so hard when he was a young fellow and for which he really risked himself so much, had had such a fabulous fruition. I know that everything doesn't go well with you poets, but let me tell you just one more story. When my father was ramping around the country with his book and making his lectures, we had a reactionary governor in the state of Texas who, named Jim Ferguson, who was against the University. He was against progress of all kinds, and he used to go stump the states, saying, "We got a man down there in the biology department," attacking the university, "Down there in the biology department trying to grow hair on an armadillo's back and put the sheep man out of business. And we got another feller down there collecting up these nasty old cowboy songs." And when he told that, the crowd would go wild. Well, I'm sure there's still a bit of that sort of opposition to what you all are doing, but I'm sure it's going to fade, and I'm sure this cowboy poetry movement will go on to be a splendid part of the culture of America, and of the world. Thank you.

[Audience applauds]