

Thoughts on Tall Tales and Back Porch Music

By
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Man has a compulsion to document himself. It is a safe bet that even before the first drawings appeared on the walls of ancient cave dwellings, songs and stories were in place to celebrate heroes, remember significant events and relive emotions and passions. The songs and stories of our collective existence are artifacts of life and living just as the buildings we built, the tools we used or anything else ultimately left behind.

As distant cultures came to America, their stories and songs were a connection to things left behind and held dearly. These oral histories found their way to pioneer campfires, chain gangs, work crews, sea voyages, army camps, slave cabins, proper parlors, bawdy saloons and back porches on warm summer evenings. However, with the passage of time new heroes and events emerged along with fresh passions and causes deemed worthy of celebration and posterity. As civilization changed and adapted so did the stories and songs. Those that had been used and reused for generations would continue to evolve.

Familiar themes and melodies were adapted to situations and events relevant to the time. A young man dying in a London hospital became a cowboy dying in the dusty streets of Laredo. A tired drover added a verse or two to a trail song to commemorate his own unique experience. A jaunty Irish fiddle tune received a new name in honor of a battle won and words were set to a haunting African melody sending veiled messages to other slaves under the guise of celebrating the religion of the masters.

Millions of songs and versions of songs have been written and performed through countless centuries. The mundane and uninteresting have become chaff in the swirling winds of time. The remaining have become part of man's collective consciousness, memorable enough to be carried through the centuries in the hearts and minds of those who toiled, suffered and rejoiced through the ambling progress of civilization.

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