



**THE
GOLD RUSH SONG
PRIMER**

**A COMPANION TO THE
“GOLD RUSH SONG SAMPLER” CD**

**AN OVERVIEW OF THEIR
PROGRESSION AND SIGNIFICANCE**

**CAUTION:
OFFENSIVE HISTORICAL LYRICS**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Primer, a companion to “The Gold Rush Song Sampler” CD!

This Primer is an overview of material documented in my book, “The Strychnine Banjo”, available at www.nevadamusic.com If you find this short summary interesting or controversial, you should purchase “The Strychnine Banjo”. That book contains a lot more detail plus sources. Its particular focus lies in the song, “The Days of ‘49”. Still, it includes an extensive overview of gold rush song from its onset.

While most discussions of gold rush song see it as a broad manifestation of American emigration and break it down by subject—a sort of folk music—this is a look at gold rush song as a series of artistic compositions as the identity of gold rush 49ers—their sense of who they are—developed over time. As the 19th century proceeded, some of these songs played a central role in defining California/Nevada mining culture. This effect occurred as the result of changing ideas reflected in changing song. This Primer is far from a complete look at gold rush song. However, while most collections look at it by subject, this Primer looks at gold rush song as a progression of the most significant songs from 1849 to 1868—echoing the story of the “elephant” as discussed in my book, “The Strychnine Banjo”.

Note that racist language and religious slurs were not uncommon in gold rush song and these lyrics are no exception. Hopefully, one can disapprove of those ideas and still appreciate the history that is related here. It is my hope that musicians and historians will learn more about the world in which the "boys" lived--their hopes, their experiences and the fate of their dream. And about the gut strung minstrel 1860s banjo.

I am available for presentations on the subject. Visit the website and email me!



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ABOUT THE BANJO AND MUSIC

This Primer is about history. It contains offensive historical lyrics.

On the CD, “A GOLD RUSH SONG SAMPLER”, I accompany these songs on an 1860s gut strung minstrel banjo—the kind of banjo played by Jake Wallace and Charlie Rhoades. There are pluses and minuses to this approach. On the one hand, there is little evidence for banjo accompaniment to these songs during the early gold-rush. The banjo was new. Its early repertoire in the East was generally limited to black-face minstrel songs and, later, Civil War songs.

On the other hand, the music to these songs is distinctly pre-Civil War in its nature—strongly melodic in the English or early-American fashion without strong emphasis on chord progression as an accompaniment. The banjo is perfect for this and, as played in the “stroke style” until that style began decline around 1870, it suits these melodies well. I play the melody as I sing the words—this being my impression of what is historically accurate—rather than chording behind the singing. A strongly arranged or chordal view of music came to American popular music mostly with German musicians beginning during the Civil War.

I have used either scans of historical music or rewritten the tunes out—placing them in G. On the CD and in general, I play them on the gut strung minstrel banjo tuned down to D. Anyone interested in the historical instrument should search “minstrel banjo” on line to learn more about its tuning and techniques. My impression is that there was great flexibility in key—depending on the need of the singer, the singing being paramount to all performance. Also, based on my experience as well as on reading about Crabtree accompanied by Wallace or Burbank accompanied by Rhoades, my feeling is that when accompanied by an instrument the narrative gold rush songs—as they were novelties-- were presented on the professional minstrel stage by a singer accompanied by a banjo or, occasionally, a guitar. Parlor performance or small town performances by small troupes, however, could be done with the banjoist accompanying his own singing—as when Jake Wallace campaigned “The Days of ‘49”, but this required dedication to a song over time.

The minstrel banjo today is popular in Civil War re-enactment as well as among those playing the early minstrel show repertoire. The CD and this PRIMER touch the surface of a far-West banjo song and tune repertoire that arose during the 1850s and 60s and that, particularly in the hands of musicians like Jake Wallace, endured among the “old-timers” or 49ers through much of the 19th century.

As evident from the writings of Alf Doten, the banjo entered the diggings early on—1849. Like gold rush song itself, the minstrel banjo was little found on the overland trails during the 1850s. Its use to accompany mining verse probably grew gradually in California during the 1850s. After 1855 or so, the banjo may well have accompanied any of these songs in the far West. In California and Nevada, with the influence of English saloon theater melody, banjoists developed a repertoire much different from the more exclusively black-face or “Ethiopian” tunes of eastern banjoists. On the one hand, this reflected large numbers of English melodies as well as Irish

melodies, often filtered through English influence. Note, a number of these songs are in 6/8 time. On the other hand, the popularity in gold rush California of the “promenade to the bar” at the dance and the “fandango house” in California and Nevada seems to have leant to a ragged, idiosyncratic performance style, driven by lyric. In the performance of gold rush songs, this meant much audience involvement. It may also have lead toward syncopation—the two going hand in hand.

1. OH, CALIFORNIA, 1848

Those about to depart for California or who not yet arrived could feel great optimism about picking up gold off the ground. Happy, expectant songs about the gold rush come mostly from those on ship, before coming ashore in California. On December 23, 1848, with six others, John Nichols took passage on the bark Eliza and departed Salem, Massachusetts. They arrived in San Francisco on June 1, 1849. The first ship to depart Salem for California, as it set sail, hundreds waved good-bye from the wharf and heard John and two other passengers sing a parody of Stephen Foster's recent minstrel hit, "Oh Susanna". The song was later sung in California, as described by Alf Doten in 1849.

This evening a band of music belonging to the Mary Anna had a concert on shore in a small boarding house; I was invited and went. The band consisted of four or five violins, a lyre, a banjo, a base viol and five or six other pieces which were not present. It is a first rate cotillion band; part of it constitutes a band of dark minstrels. There were considerable many of the young Chilian senioritas present, some of whom waltzed beautifully. We got them to dance cotillions with us, and they made out very well considering that they never knew what a cotillion was before and could speak but little English. When we got tired of dancing the darkey band played and sung several popular ethiopian songs, among which were "Oh! Susanna," "Dearest May," "O Carry me back to old Virginny," "Johnny Booker," and several other familiar songs. One in particular is heard everywhere and is the most popular song of any yet; it is Oh! Susanna. The greater part of the girls here can sing it. And then the California song which is adapted to it, "Oh! California, that's the land for me," just suits our case, and we can hardly pass a house but we heard some one singing it.



Ironically, stationary showing the Eliza illustrate the elephant and, at the end, a miner in a grave—suggesting the message home was, ultimately, not so optimistic but a tale of hardship—consistent with widespread, early experiences of the diggings and the reality of the gold rush.



Oh California

Words by Jonathan Nichols, 1848

Music "Oh Susanna" by Stephen Foster

I come from Salem City with my washbowl on my knee,
I'm going to California, the gold dust for to see.
It rained all night the day I left, the weather it was dry,
The sun's so hot I froze to death. Oh brothers don't you cry.

Oh California,
That's the land for me.
I'm bound for San Francisco,
With my washbowl on my knee.

I jumped on board the Liza ship and traveled o'er the sea,
And every time I thought of home, I wished it wasn't me. The vessel reared like any horse
that had of oats a wealth,
I found it wouldn't throw me, so I thought I'd throw myself.

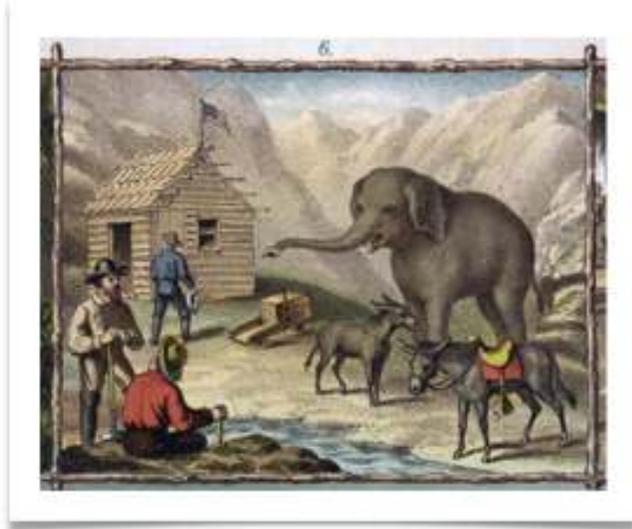
I thought of all the pleasant times we had together here,
I thought I ought to cry a bit but couldn't find a tear.
The pilot bread was in my mouth, the gold dust in my eye,
And though I'm going far away, dear brothers don't you cry .

I soon shall be in Frisco and there I'll look around,
And when I see the gold lumps I'll pick them off the ground.
I'll scrape the mountains clean, my boys, I'll drain the rivers dry,
A pocket full of rocks bring home so brothers, don't you cry.

2. CALIFORNIA AS IT IS, 1849

“California As It Is” popularized the metaphor "seeing the elephant"—a phrase repeatedly widely by gold rush immigrants on the way to California and in California from 1849 to 1851. The phrase may well have been used previous to this publication. However, its spread to gold rush miners stems from the singing of this song to thousands in New York City during early 1849. The phrase remained in gold rush literature through the end of the decade.

During late 1848, news arrived in the port of New York that the gold strike at Coloma was, indeed, associated with vast riches, not simply another token find. In New York City, the temperance movement sought to counsel young men that going to California would be foolish and possibly immoral. Picking up gold off the ground was not honest work.



"California As It Is" was written when, seeking to ally himself the temperance effort. P.T. Barnum produced a musical called "Gold Mania". When he commissioned lyrics for a song expressing the moralistic, temperance sentiments of the show, he hired newspaperman Thaddeus Meighan. As a metaphor for flim flam and humbug, Meighan referred to the elephant. From Illinois during 1842, Barnum had imported a mastodon bone to his American Museum. He referred to it as an "elephant." At his museum, one paid to see a bone.

In fact, going to California to pick up gold off the ground proved extremely difficult and was profitable for few miners. Nonetheless, hearing this good advice, young men ignored it. They appropriate the phrase, “see the elephant.” They went West to be crushed, eaten and trampled by the elephant and have fun doing it. They adopted the phrase and, during the first, hard years, repeated it to each other to signify their determination to endure hardship and have a good time.

JEANNETTE AND JEANNOT.



California As It Is

Words: Thaddeus W. Meighan, 1849

Music: "Jeannette and Jeannot", Charles W. Glover

I've been to California and I haven't got a dime,
I've lost my health, my strength, my hope, and I have lost my time.
I've only got a spade and pick and if I felt quite brave,
I'd use the two of them 'ere things to scoop me out a grave.
This digging hard for gold may be politic and bold,
But you could not make me think so; but you may if you are told,
Oh! I've been to California and I'm minus all the gold,
For instead of riches plenty I have only got a cold,
And I think in going mining I was regularly sold.

I left this precious city with two suits of gallus rig,
My boots, though India-rubber, were sufficiently big
For to keep the water out, as well as alligators,
And I tell you now my other traps were very small potatoes:
I had a great machine, the greatest ever seen,
To wash the sands of value and to get the gold out clean,
And I had a fancy knapsack filled with sausages and ham,
And of California diggers I went out the great I Am,
But I found the expedition was a most confounded flam.

Now only listen to me and I'll tell you in a trice
That poking in the dirt for gold ain't more than very nice;
You're starved, stewed, and frozen and the strongest man he says
He's bound to have your money or he'll wallop you like blazes;
I was shot and stabbed and kicked, and remarkably well licked,
And compelled to eat poll parrots which were roasted but not picked,
And I slept beneath a tent which hadn't got a top,
With a ragged blanket round me and the ground all of a sop,
And for all this horrid suffering I haven't got a cop.

So here I am without a home, without a cent to spend,
No toggery, no vittles, and not a single friend;
With lizards, parrots, spiders, snakes, and other things unclean,
All crowded in my stomach and I'm very week and lean.
But I ain't the only one that's got tired of this 'ere fun,
For about a thousand chaps are ready now to run
As hard as they can possibly, from there to kingdom come,
For there ain't nobody, sir, but here there might be some,
And enjoy their cakes and coffee and now and then some rum.

Moral:

If you've enough to eat and drink and buy your Sunday clothes,
Don't listen to the gammon that from California blows,
But stay at home and thank your stars, for every hard-earned cent,
And if the greenhorns go and dig, why coolly let them went;
If you go, why you will see, the elephant, yes sirree,
And some little grains of gold that are no bigger than a flea;
I've just come from California and if any here there be
Who is got that yellow fever they need only look at me,
And I think New York will suit 'em, yes exactly to a T.

Life In California



Life In California

Words: David G. Robinson

Music: "Used Up Man", 1845

O I ha'nt got no home, nor nothing else, I spose,
Misfortune seems to follow me wherever I goes;
I come to California with a heart both stout and bold,
And have been up to the diggings, there to get some lumps of gold.

But I'm a used up man,
a perfect used up man,
And if ever I get home again,
I'll stay there if I can.

I lives 'way down in Maine, where I heard about the diggings,
So I shipped aboard a darned old barque, commanded by Joe Higgins;
I sold my little farm, and from wife and children parted,
And off to California saild, and left 'em broken hearted.
But here's a use up man, etc.

"When I got to San Francisco, I saw heap of money,
And the way the folks at monte played, I thought the game quite funny;
So I took my little pile, and on the table tossed it,
And the chap who dealt me out the cards, says, "My friend you have lost it!"
So you're a used up man, etc.

I got into a steamboat, and started up the river,
Where I tho't the darned mousquitoes would ha' taken out my liver;
When I got to Sacramento, I buckled on this rigging,
And soon I found a decent place, and so I went to digging.
But I'm a used up man, etc.

I got into the water, were the "fever-n-ager" took me,
And after I was froze to death, it turned around and shook me;
But still I kept to work, a hopin' 'twould be better,
But the water wouldn't fall a bit, but kept a getting wetter.
But I'm a used up man, etc.

I 'spose if I should die, they'd take me to the Mission,
Or else Jim Riddle'd sell me off to pay up my physician;
I've tried to keep up courage, and swore I wouldn't spree it,
And here's my pile for five months' work, I'd lief as not you'd see it.
For I'm a used up man, etc.

I don't know what to do, for all the time I'm dodging,
To hunt up grub enough to eat, and find a decent lodging;;
I can't get any liquor, and no one seems to meet me,
Who'll take me by the collar now, and kindly ask to treat me!
For I'm a used up man, etc.

I'd got up to the "Woodcock," and see if Tom wont trust me,
For Tom has got too good a heart, I'm sure, to try to bust me;
But if they should'nt know me there, or say I can't be trusted,
Why then, kind friends, without your help, the poor old miner's bursted.
For I'm a used up man, etc.

I don't know how it is, but I've a dreadful feeling,
If I don't get some business soon, I'll have to take to stealing;
I'd like some city office here, and the tax law wants correcting,
I'd make a first rate Mayor too, and only want electing.
For I'm a used up man, etc.

But to my friends I see to-night, my thanks, I can't express 'em,
And for their generosity, can only say, God bless 'em!.
For what of kindness they don't know, I'm sure aint worth the knowing,
So with my warmest thanks, kind friends, I think I'll be a going.
For I'm a used up man, etc.

4. THE RETURNED CALIFORNIAN, 1852

The first song to come out of the Sierra Nevada describes the frustration of many—albeit with the dry humor that would become a hallmark of gold rush lyric and, often, literature. During 1852, James Pierpont published the song in Boston, perhaps after his return East. It was performed in the Sierra Nevada during 1853 under the title, “The Miner’s Farewell”, the earliest notice of a mining song performed in the diggings.

The Returned Californian

Words: James Pierpont, 1852

Music: Charles W. Glover, “Jeannette and Jeannot”. See music above.



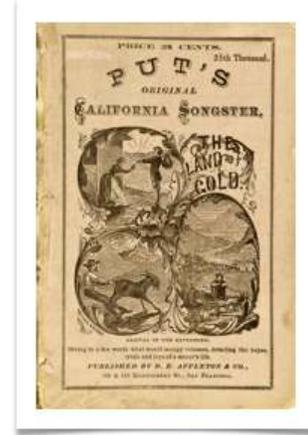
I'm going far away, from my creditors just now,
I've not the tin to pay 'em, and they're kicking up a row.
There's the Sheriff running after me with his pocket full of writs,
And my tailor's vowing vengeance—he swears he'll give me fits.
There's no room for speculation, and the mines ain't worth a d—n,
And I ain't one of the lucky coves that works fer Uncle Sam.
And whichever way I turn, I'm sure to meet a dunn,
So I think the best thing I can do, is just to cut and run,
So I think the best thing I can do, is just to cut and run.

I wish those 'tarnal critters, that wrote home about the gold,
Were in that place the Scriptures say, is never very cold.
They told us of the heaps of dust, and lumps so very big,
But they never said a single word how hard it was to dig.
I went up to the mines, and I helped to turn a stream;
Got trusted on the strength of that, delusive, golden dream;
But when the river we'd turned, we found 'twas all a flam,
And we who damned the river, by our creditors were d-d,
And we who damned the river, by our creditors were d-d.

I'm going far away, but I don't know where I'll go;
'Twont do to turn homeward now, they'd laugh at me I know;
For I told them when I left, I was going to make my pile,
But if they could only see mine now, I rather guess they'd smile.
If of these United States, I were the President,
No man who owed another, should ever pay a cent;
And he who dunned another, should be banished far away—
For attention to the pretty girls is all a man should pay,
For attention to the pretty girls is all a man should pay.

5. THE ARRIVAL OF THE GREENHORN, 1855

Disillusionment with the gold rush and social tensions in California lay the basis for a large number of songs penned by John Stone, an attorney in the Sonora region of the California mines. Stone published under the name “Put”. In his songs, Stone championed “Pike”, the “type” of the overland emigrant, often from Pike County, Missouri. Stone, an attorney, “put” Pike's case. A type, in the mythology of the West, Pike was the first western hero. Pike contrasted Yankee, the other American “type,” the immigrant who came by sea. Yankee came to admire Pike’s guncraft and woodcraft—he seemed well suited to the rigors of life in the diggings.



“Arrival Of The Greenhorn” fully adopts the form of the London saloon theater mock heroic ballad, each verse another comic disaster.

This becomes a common form in western and, later, cowboy vernacular verse. The second verse refers to Native Americans as “Diggers”—a slur. The fourth verse refers to an anecdote popular at the time, stating that the reason rivers in the Great Basin ran into “sinks” rather than to the ocean derived from God running out of energy at the end of week as he created the world.

The title song to Stone’s 1855 songster, "Arrival Of The Greenhorn", is an off-color and hilarious tour de force. It talks about diarrhea, the chief killer of overland emigrants, caused when they consumed alkali water while crossing the Great Basin. In his preface, Stone made clear his desire to write for the miners and referred to criticism of his lyrics already present as he as he and his “Sierra Nevada Rangers” singing group sang his songs in the mountains.

PREFACE.

In dedicating this little Book of Songs to the Miners of California, those hardy builders of California's prosperity and greatness, the author deems it his duty to offer a prefatory remark in regard to the origin of the work and the motive of its publication.

Having been a miner himself for a number of years, he has had ample opportunities of observing, as he has equally shared, the many trials and hardships to which his brethren of the pick and shovel have been exposed, and to which in general they have so patiently, so cheerfully, and even heroically submitted. Hence, ever since the time of his crossing the Plains, in the memorable year of '50, he has been in the habit of noting down a few of the leading items of his experience, and clothing them in the garb of humorous, though not irreverent verse.

Many of his songs may show some hard edges, and he is free to confess, that they may fail to please the more aristocratic portion of the community, who have but little sympathy with the details, hopes, trials or joys of the toiling miner's life; but he is

confident that the class he addresses will not find them exaggerated, nothing extenuated, nor aught set down 'in malice.'

In conclusion, he would state, that after having sung them himself at various times and places, and latterly with the assistance of a few gentlemen, known by the name of Sierra Nevada Rangers, the songs have been published at the request of a number of friends; and if the author should thereby succeed in contributing to the amusement of those he is anxious to please, enlivening the long tedious hours of a miner's winter fireside, his pains will not be unrewarded.

San Francisco, Sept., 1855

Arrival Of The Greenhorn

Words: John Stone

Music: Charles W. Glover, "Jeannette and Jeannot". See music above.

I've just got in across the Plains, I'm poorer than a snail,
My mules all died, but poor old Clip I pulled in by the tail;
I fed him last at Chimney Rock, that's where the grass gave out,
I'm proud to tell, we stood it well, along the Truckee route.
But' I'm very weak and lean, though I started plump and fat,
How I wish I had the gold machine, I left back on the Platte!
And a pair of striped bed tick pants, my Sally made for me,
To wear while digging after gold and when I left says she,
"Here take the laudanum with you Sam, to check the di-a-ree."

When I left Missouri river, with my California rig,
I had a shovel, pick and pan, the tools they used to dig;
My mules gave out along the Platte, where they got alkalied,
And I sick with the "di-a-ree," my laudanum by my side.
When I reached the little Blue, I'd one boot and a shoe,
Which I thought by greasing once or twice, would last me nearly through;
I had needles, threads and pills which my mammy did prescribe,
And a flint-lock musket full, to shoot the Digger tribe,
But I left them all on Goose Creek where I freely did imbibe.

I joined in with a train from Pike; at Independence Rock,
The Indians came in that night, stampeded all their stock;
They laughed at me, said, "Go a-foot," but soon they stopped their fun,
For my old mule was left behind so poor he could not run.
So I packed my fancy nag, for the rest I could not wait,
And I traveled up Sweet Water, till I came to Devil's Gate;
When my mule gave out in sight of where I started in the morn,
I'd have given all my boots and shoes if I had not been born,

Or I'd rather shipped at New Orleans, to swim around the Horn.

I arrived at Salt Lake City, on the 18th of July,
Old Brigham Young was on a "bust," he swore they'd never die;
I went to the see the Jordan, with a lady, God forgive her,
She took me to the water's edge, and shoved me in the river;
I crawled out and started on, and managed very well,
Until I struck the Humboldt, which I thought was nearly hell,
I traveled till I struck the sink where outlet can't be found,
The Lord got through late Saturday night, he'd finished all around,
But would not work on Sunday, so he run it on the ground.

The Peyouts stole what grub I had, they left me not a bite,
And now the devil was to pay—the Desert was in sight;
And as the people passed along, they'd say to me, "You fool,
You'll never get through the world, unless you leave that mule."
But I pushed, pulled and coaxed, till I finally made a start,
And his bones, they squeaked and rattled so, I thought he'd fall apart,
I killed a buzzard now and then, gave Clip the legs and head.
We crossed the Truckee thirty times, but not a tear was shed,
We crossed the summit, took the trail, that to Nevada led.

When I got to Sacramento, I got on a little tight,
I lodged aboard the Prison brig, one-half a day and night;
I vamosed when I got ashore, went to the Northern mines,
There found the saying very true, "All is not gold that shines."
I dug, packed and chopped, and have drifted night and day,
But I haven't struck a single lead, that would me wages pay,
At home they think we ought to have gold on our cabin shelves,
Wear high-heeled boots, well blacked, instead of rubbers No. twelves;
But let them come and try it, till they satisfy themselves.

6. SEEING THE ELEPHANT, 1855

Stone published a second songster during 1858. His “Seeing the Elephant” is a parody of a minstrel banjo song, “De Boatman Dance.” The music shown here is from Brigg’s Banjo Instructor, 1855--for the banjo in minstrel, stroke style.

"Seeing The Elephant" is written from the viewpoint of a Yankee who falls in with Pike emigrants--men from the Missouri region, Southerners. Unlike the original Boatman lyric where each verse is simply a comic celebration random boatmen escapades, "Seeing the Elephant" loosely adopts the narrative form, "Arrival Of The Greenhorn", describing a journey.

The song revolves around the plight of young men in the mountains—their clothes becoming tattered, the hair and bears growing long and dirty, sleeping on the sandy bar, getting lice. They go to town and the California girls say, “leave you miner, leave.” The song contains racist language.

DANCE, BOATMAN, DANCE.

The image shows two staves of musical notation for the piece "Dance, Boatman, Dance". The first staff begins with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written on a single line. Below the first staff are several measures of notation with 'F' and 'x' symbols, likely representing fretting or bowing techniques. The second staff continues the melody and includes a 'Fine.' marking at the end.

Seeing The Elephant

Words: John Stone

Music: “De Boatman Dance”, Dan Emmett

When I left the States for gold,
Everything I had I sold:
A stove and bed, a fat old sow,
Sixteen chickens and a cow.

So leave you miners, leave,
oh, leave you miners leave,
Take my advice, kill off your lice,
or else go up in the mountains.

Oh no, lots of dust,
I'm going to the city to get on a bust.
Oh no, lots of dust,
I'm going to the city to get on a bust.

Off I started, Yankee-like,
I soon fell in with a lot from Pike
The next was, Damn you, back, wo-haw,
A right smart chance from Arkansas.

On the Platte we couldn't agree,
Because I had the di-a-ree,
We were split up, I made a break,
with one old mule, for the Great Salt Lake.

The Mormon girls were fat as hogs,
The chief production, cats and dogs;
Some had ten wives, others none,
Thirty-six had Brigham Young.

The damn fool, like all the rest,
Supposed the thirty-six the best;
He soon found his virgin dears,
had all been Mormons thirteen years.

Being brave, I cut and carved,
On the desert nearly starved;
My old mule laid down and died,
I had no blanket, took his hide.

The poor coyotes stole my meat,
Then I had nought but bread to eat;
It was not long till that gave out,
Then how I cursed the Truckee route!

On I traveled through the pines,
At last I found the northern mines;
I stole a dog, got whipt like hell,
Then away I went to Marysville.

There I filled the town with lice,
And robbed the Chinese of their rice;
The people say, "You've got the itch,
Leave here, you lousy son of a bitch."

Because I would not pay my bill,
They kicked me out of Downieville;
I stole a mule and lost the trail,
And then fetched up in Hangtown Jail.

Canvas roof and paper walls,
Twenty horse-thieves in the stalls;
I did as I have done before,
Coyoted out from neath the floor.

I robbed a nigger of a dollar,
And bought unguent to grease my collar;
I tried a pint, not one had gone,
Then it beat the devil how I daubed it on.

The people threatened hard my life,
Because I stole a miner's wife;
They showed me a rope, to give me signs,
Then off I went to the southern mines.

I mined a while, got lean and lank,
And lastly stole a monte-bank;
Went to the city, got a gambler's name,
And lost my bank at the thimble game.

I fell in love with a California girl;
Her eyes were gray, her hair did curl;
Her nose turned up to get rid of her chin
Says she, 'You're a miner, you can't come in.'

When the elephant I had seen,
I'm damned if I thought I was green;
And others say, both night and morn,
They saw him coming round the Horn.

If I should make another raise,
In New York sure I'll spend my days;
I'll be a merchant, but a saw,
So good-bye, mines and Panama.

7. THE PIKE COUNTY MINER, 1856

Some people found Stone's lyrics vulgar. Chief among these, Italian musician Mart Taylor set himself up to write a more proper or acceptable book of mining songs during 1856. He described his "respectable" effort in his introduction to "The Gold Digger's Song Book."

By the earnest of many of my mining friend in California, who have liberally patronized the entertainments given by my "Original Company," I have published in this little volume such of my songs as have been met with favor by the respectable audiences before which they have been sung. I trust that those who may deem them worthy of possessing, will appreciate one quality they have above the only Song Book heretofore dedicated to the Miners of California. I refer to the indiscreet use of vulgar phrases, which characterize the said Song Book; which, I am happy to believe, is not suited to the taste of my friends, the miners--to whom I would respectfully inscribe this little value. M. Taylor, Marysville, May 1st, 1856

Taylor sought to create more acceptable Pike County verse. However, he struggled to meet the tastes of a rough mining audience. A number of his songs were purple drivel. He quit performing around 1859 to write poetry. That didn't go well and he briefly returned to music. To promote his book, during 1856, he found two young girls, Lotta Crabtree and Buella Banks, to perform with him in his family-oriented shows. "The Pike County Miner" is, perhaps, one of his better lyrics.

There was a jolly miller once liv'd
on the river Dee; He work'd and sung from
morn till night, no lark more blithe than he. And
this the burthen of his song for ever used to
be,— I care for nobody, no, not I, Since
nobody cares for me.

The Pike County Miner

Mart Taylor, The Gold Digger's Song Book, 1856

Melody: "The Jolly Miller"

Oh! Once I was a 'right smart' lad,
When I lived out in Pike,
I'd a heap of good things, I never was sad
And I did whatever I'd like

Chorus:

But now I've nothing but rags to my back,
And my boots scarce hide my toes.
And my pants are patched with an old flour sack,
To jive with the rest of my clothes.

I thought when I first started from Pike,
And drove an ox team o'er the plains.
That when I got here I should make a big strike,
And get some pay for my pains.
But now....

I landed at last in the mines, and I find,
That money is hard to be made,
This working in water is not to my mind,
And I'm sick of the pick and the spade.
For now....

I have drifted, I've washed, I've creviced and dug,
I've worked all the flesh to the bone,
But never have had as much as a slug,
That could be considered my own.
And now....

I am sick of the country, "I'm down at the heel"
I'm dirth, I'm ragged, I'm cold,
Though scarce one and twenty, I really do feel,
As thought I was powerful old.
And now....

Now I am resolved to labor and sweat,
'Til something I make like a "strike,"
And just whenever a raise I may get,
This "hombre" will "vamosé" for Pike.

Second chorus:

For there I'll have good clothes to my back,
And boots that will hide my toes,
And never a patch will I cut from a sack
For my pants of the rest of my clothes.

8. SWEET BETSEY FROM PIKE, 1858

Perhaps the most famous of Stone's songs, "Sweet Betsey From Pike" was published in his second songster during 1858. In the early years of the gold rush, few American girls arrived in the Sierra Nevada. After the drought of 1854-55, emigration picked up again and American girls finally began to arrive in the gold country. These were not the frail, pale heroines of New England culture but were strapping farm girls--"Amazonians" as they were called at the time. In 1857 a play was written in California called "A Live Woman In The Mines". The heroine—named Mary Wilson but characterized as "High Betty Martin"—modeled on the High Betty Martin of an old song.

High Betty Martin, tip toe, tip toe,
High Betty Martin, tip toe fine.
Never found a man to suit her fancy,
Never found a man to suit her mind.

In [A Live Woman In The Mines](#), Pike County Jess explained how he won Betty at a Missouri dance:

Ain't I a beauty—ain't I a roarer, a perfect wild bull, on the prairie? Why, the gal don't live on air and hoe cake that kin stand the glance of my eye. We were at a huskin frolic. When it come to the hoe dig, I pulled High Betty Martin on to the floor for a double shuffle breakdown. O, I'm death on the toe and heel. Well, Bill Sampson steps up, and swore he'd dance with my gal fust, and he gin me a push. He mough as well have tried to upset a steamboat. 'Hold on,' says I, 'Bet sees fair play,' and I pitched into the varmint, worse nor a gang of niggers into a cotton field. 'Go your death, boys,' shouted Betty—'I don't care which whips—but Jess Jenkins, if you don't lick him, I'll lick you.' In just two minutes by the watch, Bill Sampson was the worst-licked man in the Settlement, and he owned up that he thought a young airthquake had hold on him. I popped the question to the gal that ver night, and she caved like a young possom—said I was the boy for her beauty. Cock-a-doodle-doo!

Though originally Irish, the song's tune came more directly from an English saloon theater song--"Villikins And His Dinah." The lyric parodies Ben Bolt—an 1850 New England hit about a salt sea sailor who returns home after many years to be confronted with all the good things he has missed at home-- including Sweet Alice. One imagines this to have been quite a popular song among the older folks as their sons were setting sail for California. "Ben Bolt" depicts the ideal Victorian heroine—pale, frail...in fact, she is dead. In contrast, Betsey is what was, at the time, described as an "Amazonian." "Sweet Betsey From Pike" is a remarkable and singular mid-19th century picture of a strong woman, albeit in a comedic song.

Oh don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt
Sweet Alice whose hair was so brown.
Who wept with delight when you gave her a smile,
And trembled with fear at your frown.

VILLIKINS AND HIS DINAH.



Sweet Betsey From Pike

Words: John Stone, 1858

Music: "Villikins and His Dinah"

Oh don't you remember Sweet Betsey from Pike
Who cross'd the wide mountains with her lover Ike.
With two yoke of cattle and a large yellow dog,
A tall Shanghai rooster and a one spotted hog.
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

One evening quite early they camped on the Platte,
"Twas near by the road on a green shady flat,
Where Betsey, sore-footed, lay down to repose—
With wonder Ike gazed on that Pike County rose.
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

Their wagons broke down with a terrible crash,
And out on the prairie rolled all kinds of trash;
A few little baby clothes done up with care—
'Twas rather suspicious, though all on the square.
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

The shanghai ran off, and their cattle all died;
That morning the last piece of bacon was fried;
Poor Ike was discouraged, and Betsey got mad,
The dog drooped his tail and looked wondrously sad.
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

They stopped at Salt Lake to inquire the way,
When Brigham declared that sweet Betsey should stay;

But Betsey got frightened and ran like a deer,
While Brigham stood pawing the ground like a steer.
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

They soon reached the desert, where Betsey gave out,
And down on the sand she lay rolling about;
While Ike, half distracted, looked on with surprise,
Saying, "Betsey, get up, you'll get sand in your eyes."
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

Sweet Betsey got up with a great deal of pain,
And declared she'd go back to Pike county again.
Then Ike heaved a sigh and they fondly embraced,
And she traveled along with his arm round her waist.
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

They suddenly stopped on a very high hill,
With wonder looked down upon old Placerville:
Ike sighed when he said, and he cast his eyes down,
"Sweet Betsey, my darling, we've come to Hangtown."
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

Long Ike and Sweet Betsey attended a dance,
And Ike wore a pair of his Pike county pants.
Sweet Betsey was dressed up in ribbons and rings,
Says Ike, "You're an angel but where are your wings."
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

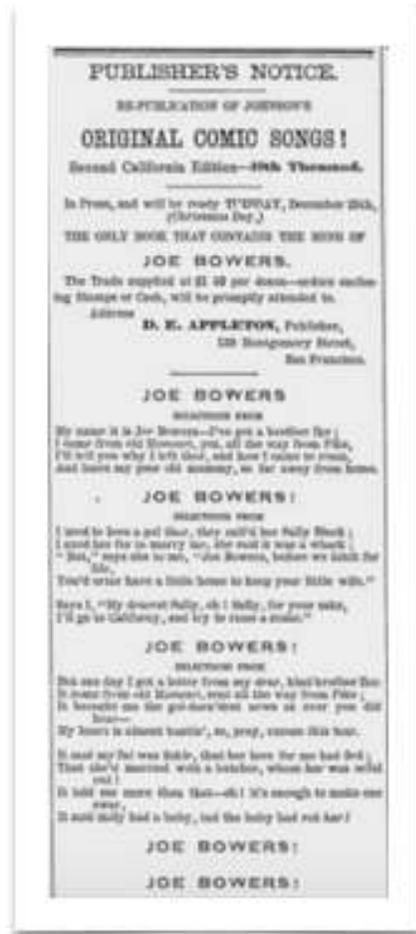
A miner said, Betsey will you dance with me?
I will that, old hoss, if you don't make too free.
But don't dance me hard, do you want to know why,
Doggon ye, I'm chock full of strong alkaki.
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

This Pike County couple got married, of course,
But Ike became jealous-- obtained a divorce.
Sweet Betsey, well satisfied, said with a shout,
Goodbye you big lummo, I'm glad you backed out.
Too ral lal, loo ral la! Loo ra lal la.

9. JOE BOWERS, 1859

In histories of gold rush music, Stone’s songsters have ensured that his songs appear to define mining oriented or gold rush lyric from California. There are many of them and they are all clever. He ranks as a major American song-writer. That being said, when one looks at the record of which musicians or song-writers in the mining vein enjoyed notice or press during that period, one hardly sees Stone mentioned at all. Though written in the shadow of theater and as parodies in the theatrical style, Stone’s songs did not rise to the level of professional theater or performance. The performers from gold rush California who were ultimately recognized in the press and who were long remembered by the 49ers were Lotta Crabtree, Jake Wallace and Charley Rhoades—professional minstrel-show performers.

The song that thrust mining lyric onto the professional stage was probably written during 1858 or ‘59-- “Joe Bowers.” This song gained a great following from the onset. John Woodward appears to have written “Joe Bowers” while performing with J.E. Johnson, perhaps during 1857 at Johnson’s Melodeon, a short-lived theater on Montgomery Street during 1857 but, more likely, during 1858 at the nearby Lyceum where Johnson became Director of Amusements, performing with his Pennsylvanians. The earliest printed mention of the song came during April 1860, a half year before its publication. Johnson seems to have left the Lyceum during late 1859 and joined Mart Taylor so that he could perform as “Joe Bowers” in Monoville. Some time after this, John Stone took on the name “Joe Bowers” and it appears on his headstone. In essence, this song eclipsed all of his own compositions. Johnson published the song in a re-issue of his 1858 *Songster*, simply to capitalize on its popularity.



In “Joe Bowers”, the narrator’s pose seems to derive from Johnson appearing as “Billy Barlow”—hence the boastful declaration in the first verse. The song’s focus on lost love may be a commentary or rebuttal to Stone’s “Sweet Betsey From Pike”. The song revolves around its reference to the color “red.” In “Joe Bowers”, red is the color of money—of the red cent. The song tells the story of a Pike emigrant whose girlfriend back home marries the butcher who has red hair. She then has a baby with red hair—hair the color of money. As such, the song represents a firm step toward a more working class stance among western minstrels—one that would play out more during the 1860s.

Joe Bowers



Joe Bowers

Words and Music, probably John Woodward.

My name it is Joe Bowers, I've got a brother Ike,
I come from old Missouri, yes, all the way from Pike,
I'll tell you why I left there, and how I came to roam,
And leave my poor old mammy, so fer away from home.

I used to love a gal there, they call'd her Sally Black;
I axed her for to marry me, she said it was a whack;
But, says she to me, " Joe Bowers, before we hitch for life.
You'd orter have a little home to keep your little wife."

Says I, "My dearest Sally, oh! Sally, for your sake,
I'll go to California, and try to raise a stake."
Says she to me, "Joe Bowers, oh, you're the chap to win,
Giv me a buss to seal the bargain," and she threw a dozen in!

I shall ne'er forgit my feelings when I bid adieu to all;
Sally cotched me round the neck, then I began to bawl;
When I sot in, they all commenced—you ne'er did hear the like,
How they all took on and cried, the day I left old Pike.

When I got to this 'ere country, I hadn't nary red,
I had sich wolfish feeling I wish'd myself most dead;
But the thoughts of my dear Sally soon made these feelins git,
And whispered hopes to Bowers—Lord, I wish I had 'em yit.

At length I went to mining, put in my biggest licks,
Come down upon the boulders jist like a thousand bricks;

I worked both late and fairly, in rain, and sun, and snow,
But I was working for my Sally, so 'twas all the same to Joe.

I made a very lucky strike, as the gold itself did tell,
And saved it for my Sally, the gal I loved so well;
I saved it for my Sally, that I might pour it at her feet,
That she might kiss and hug me, and call me something sweet.

But one day I got a letter from my dear, kind brother, Ike-
It come from old Missouri, sent all the way from Pike;
It brought me the gol-darn'dest news as ever you did hear-
My heart is almost busting, so, pray, excuse this tear.

It said my Sal was fickle, that her love for me had fled;
That she'd married with a butcher, whose har was orful red!
It told me more than that—oh! it's enough to make one swar.
It said Sally had a baby, and the baby had red har.

Now I've told you all I could tell about this sad affar,
Bout Sally marrying the butcher and the butcher had red har.
Whether twas a boy or gal child, the letter never said,
It only said its cussed har was inclined to be a red!

Bound For The Land Of Washoe

Words and Music: Mart Taylor

Exciting times,
All around the town,
Glory, Glory to Washoe.
Stocks are up and stocks are down,
Glory to old Washoe.

Washoe! Washoe!
Bound for the land of Washoe,
And I own three feet in the "Old Dead Beat,"
And I'm bound for the land of Washoe.

There is the big Gould and Curry,
And the Great Wide West,
Glory, Glory to Washoe.
O! I think they are the largest and the best,
Glory to old Washoe.

There is the Yellow Jacket tunnel,
And my Mary Ann.
Glory, Glory to Washoe.
Oh, Johnny, how is your dog, or any other man,
Glory to old Washoe.

Oh, see the crowd,
On Montgomery Street,
Glory, Glory to Washoe.
Everybody is talking feet,
Glory to old Washoe.

11. THE DAYS OF '49, 1868

Jake Wallace returned to Virginia City performance during 1865. Charley Rhoades also performed there that year—beginning four years during which he and his minstrel troupe would create song and parody specifically aimed from the professional stage at the prospector audience. During this period he wrote the song that became the most famous in Virginia City—“Baldy Green”, also known as the “Pioneer Stage Driver.”

At the very end of that four years he wrote the song that would become the most famous of gold rush songs, sung by pioneer societies through the rest of the 19th century—“The Days of '49.” Rhoades was ill and died young. It was Jake Wallace who campaigned the song throughout the California mining camps during the 1870s and beyond. See my book, "The Strychnine Banjo." In a number of versions the last line is repeated and, evidently, could be sung as a refrain by the audience of listeners.



Shown here are the version I play on the banjo—based on “The Old Sexton” and a typical oral version—this one from Columbia, California.

The Days Of '49-Leon Ponce recording, 1939



The Days Of '49--based on The Old Sexton



The Days of '49

Words: Charley Rhoades

Music: "The Old Sexton", adapted.

Lyrics here as sung by Jack Wallace, 1894, at the Midwinter Exposition.

Oh! here you see Old Tom Moore,
A relic of former days;
A bummer too they call me now,
But what care I for praise.
My heart is filled with the days of yore,
And oft do I repine
For the days of old, the days of gold.
In the days of '49.

I'd comrades then that loved me well
A brave and jovial crew.
And all the boys that now remain
I know there is but few.
They were good souls, they never flinched
Or never yell or whine,
But like good old bricks They stood the kicks,
In the days of '49.

There was Monte Pete, I'll ne're forget
The pluck he always had.
He'd deal for you both night and day
As long as you had a scad.
One night a pistol laid him out;
Twa's his last lay-out in fine,
It caught Pete sure, right in the door
In the days of '49.

There was Poker Bill, one of our boys
And always in for a game.
And whether he lost or whether he won
To him 'twas all the same.
He'd pass the "buck" and ante a slug,
And go a hatful blind,
But in the game of death Bill lost his breath
In the days of '49.

There was New York Jack
A butcher boy, so fond of getting tight,
Whenever Jack got on a spree

He was spoiling for a fight.
One day he ran against a knife,
In the hands of old Bob Cline,
And over Jake we held a wake
In the days of '49.

There was Rattlesnake Jim,
Who could outrun a bull you bet.
He roared all day and he roared all night,
I believe he is roaring yet.
One night he fell into a prospect hole,
Twa's a roaring bad design.
In that hole he roared out his soul
In the days of '49.

There was old lame Jess a hard old cuss
Who never did repent.
He never missed a single meal,
And never paid a cent.
But poor old Jake like all the rest,
Did at length to death resign.
For in his bloom he went up the flume
In the days of '49.

Of all the comrads I had then,
There's none left to boast.
And here I walk around the Camp
Like some poor wandering ghost.
And as I go from place to place,
Folks call me a wandering sign,
And say there's old Tom Moore
A bumner sure, of the days of '49.