



BRUCE KISKADDON

Collected Poems

RANGE VERSE, LOS ANGELES POEMS, AND LATER WORK · 1919–1950

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers | Los Angeles, 2026

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November 25, 1878 – December 7, 1950

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*Edited by Brian Kim Stefans
The Text-Tech Papers*

CRITICAL READER'S EDITION

This is a reset edition, not a facsimile. It gathers 147 distinct poems from the complete project copies of *Rhymes of the Ranges* (1924) and *Western Poems* (1935), together with seventy-six later and recovered poems. Every poem begins on a new page. Stanza divisions and poetic lineation are retained; typographic wraps caused by narrow source pages are joined.

Bruce Harvey Kiskaddon

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CONTENTS

Archival Images	8
Introduction	12
Rhymes of the Ranges (1924)	24
<i>Introductory</i>	25
<i>When They've Finished Shippin' Cattle in the Fall</i>	26
<i>The Midwinter Bath</i>	30
<i>The Willow Creek Wedding</i>	32
<i>The Parson's Shotgun Chaps</i>	41
<i>The Cow-Boy's Dream</i>	45
<i>The Old Moss Back</i>	50
<i>The Air That They Breathe Out West</i>	52
<i>When to Get Tough</i>	53
<i>The Adventurer</i>	56
<i>Our Sweetheart</i>	57
<i>When You're Thrown</i>	58
<i>The Muley Steer</i>	60
<i>The Discovery</i>	63
<i>The Old Night Hawk</i>	65
<i>A Character</i>	69
<i>An Experiment</i>	70
<i>The Disaster</i>	72
<i>The Time to Decide</i>	74
<i>The Lost Mines</i>	76
<i>Our Boss</i>	80
<i>The Dark Horse</i>	82
<i>The Gray Wolf</i>	87
<i>The Parada Shark</i>	90
<i>The Long-Eared Bull</i>	92
<i>Bonnie</i>	95

<i>Between the Lines</i>	96
<i>Who Told the Biggest</i>	99
<i>The Stampede</i>	103
<i>The New Mexico Stray</i>	106
<i>The Cow-Boy's If</i>	107

Western Poems (1935)

109

<i>Turnin' the Summer Hosses Out to Graze</i>	110
<i>Savin' the Baby Calf</i>	111
<i>When Winter's Nigh Done</i>	112
<i>Springtime</i>	113
<i>Matching Wits</i>	114
<i>Flankin'</i>	115
<i>High an' Wicked</i>	116
<i>Challengin' the Trail</i>	117
<i>Movin' to Winter Range</i>	118
<i>Cuttin' Out the Calves</i>	119
<i>After the Fall Roundup</i>	120
<i>The Cowboys' Christmas Dance</i>	121
<i>The Purebred Bull</i>	122
<i>That Little Blue Roan</i>	124
<i>The Livestock Show</i>	126
<i>All Dressed Up</i>	127
<i>New Boots</i>	128
<i>The New Cook</i>	129
<i>The Long Horn Speaks</i>	130
<i>The Chuck Wagon</i>	131
<i>The Thoroughbred</i>	132
<i>The County Fair</i>	133
<i>Wet Boots</i>	134
<i>That Letter</i>	135
<i>The Old Time Christmas</i>	136
<i>Cow Sense</i>	137
<i>Shoveling the Ice Out of the Trough</i>	138
<i>When the Grass Is Short and the Old Cows Die</i>	139
<i>Ridin' Fence</i>	141
<i>Pullin' Bog</i>	142
<i>The Rope Hoss</i>	143

<i>Colts</i>	144
<i>The Brandin' Corral</i>	145
<i>Thinkin'</i>	146
<i>Lockin' Horns</i>	147
<i>The Cow and the Calf</i>	148
<i>The Cow Boy's Shirt Tail</i>	149
<i>A Calf's Troubles</i>	150
<i>The Marking Knife</i>	151
<i>Caught Nappin'</i>	152

Later and Recovered Poems

153

<i>Alone</i>	154
<i>Ants In His Pants</i>	155
<i>Alkali Ike's Zippers</i>	156
<i>The Balky Hoss</i>	157
<i>Bill The Snake Charmer</i>	159
<i>The Broncho Twister's Prayer</i>	160
<i>The Buckboard</i>	162
<i>The Buggy Shack</i>	163
<i>Bulls and Bears</i>	164
<i>The Bunk House Mirror</i>	165
<i>The Coming Change</i>	166
<i>Cow Boy's Pants</i>	167
<i>Cow Milkin'</i>	168
<i>A Cowboy Funeral</i>	169
<i>The Creak of the Leather</i>	170
<i>Doing Her Best</i>	172
<i>The Drag Driver</i>	173
<i>Drinkin' Water</i>	174
<i>The Duel</i>	175
<i>Feedin' Time</i>	176
<i>Figger It Out</i>	177
<i>The Fight In The Dark</i>	178
<i>Forgotten</i>	180
<i>The Gentle Hoss</i>	181
<i>Ghost Canyon Trail</i>	182
<i>The Ghosts at the Diamond Bar</i>	185
<i>Graves By The Side Of The Trail</i>	188

<i>The Hacamore Colt</i>	189
<i>Her Neighbor's Kids</i>	190
<i>Honest John's Five Aces</i>	191
<i>Hoof Beats</i>	192
<i>Hook 'Em Cow</i>	195
<i>The Hoss Round Up</i>	196
<i>How a Cow Puncher Rode</i>	199
<i>How They Made the Royal Gorge</i>	201
<i>The Joshua Shade</i>	203
<i>Judgment Day</i>	204
<i>The Line Camp</i>	206
<i>Looking Backward</i>	207
<i>The Man On The Fence</i>	209
<i>Old And Foxy</i>	210
<i>The Old Cow Pony</i>	211
<i>Old Frosty</i>	212
<i>The Old West</i>	214
<i>The Panther Track</i>	216
<i>The Pet Hoss</i>	217
<i>Pullin' Leather</i>	219
<i>Puttin' On A Show</i>	220
<i>The Race For The Wagon</i>	221
<i>Rain</i>	222
<i>The Rifle</i>	224
<i>The Rope Corral</i>	226
<i>The Running Iron</i>	227
<i>Sidin' His Dad</i>	228
<i>The Silk Shirt</i>	229
<i>The Stage Driver</i>	230
<i>Stan</i>	231
<i>Swimmin' the Herd</i>	233
<i>That Smoke</i>	235
<i>Them Store Clothes</i>	236
<i>They Can Take It</i>	237
<i>To Those Who Have Gone Before</i>	238
<i>The Troop Hoss</i>	239
<i>The Veiled Rider</i>	240
<i>Warmin' One Side</i>	241

<i>Was It Scare?</i>	242
<i>When A Pony Slips His Pack</i>	244
<i>When Connors Rode Rep For The Lord</i>	245
<i>When He Cold Jaws</i>	246
<i>When You Buried Your Face In The Alkali Drink</i>	247
<i>Winter Work</i>	249
<i>Workin' It Over</i>	250
<i>The Wreck</i>	251
<i>You Never Tell That</i>	252
<i>Your First Saddle</i>	254
<i>Your First Trip</i>	256
 Editorial Note	 259
 Bibliography	 261
 Colophon	 263

ARCHIVAL IMAGES

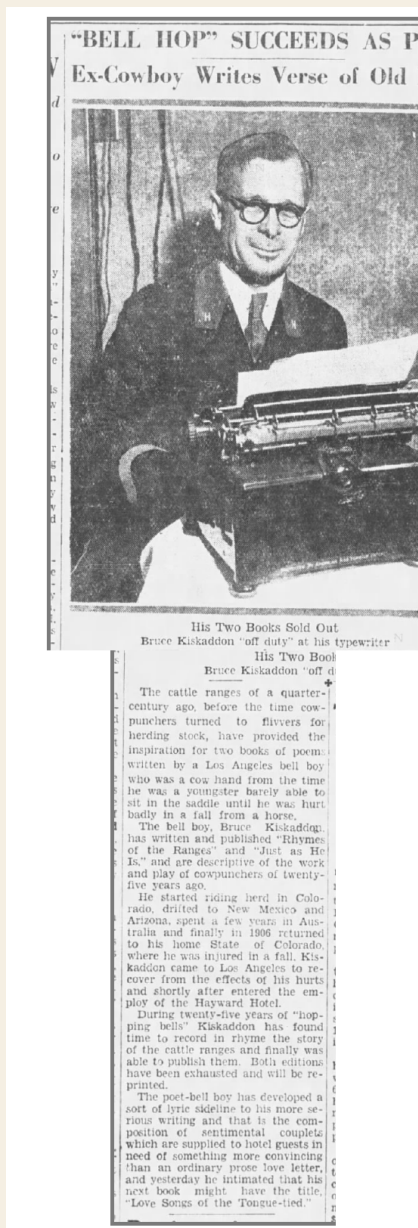
Three witnesses: poet, public profile, and artistic collaboration

This brief archival section introduces Kiskaddon as a working writer and preserves one example of Katherine Field's documentary art. Images are cropped from the project's complete source witnesses.



Bruce Kiskaddon

*Bruce Kiskaddon and signature, from the title page of the editor's copy of *Rhymes of the Ranges and Other Poems* (1947).*



Kiskaddon at his Hayward Hotel typewriter, in the Los Angeles Times profile "‘Bell Hop’ Succeeds as Poet," January 11, 1932.



Katherine Field's illustration for "Flankin'," in Western Poems (1935).

INTRODUCTION

A working life in range verse

Bruce Kiskaddon moved between ranch work, Australian cattle stations, Army mule trains, downtown hotel lobbies, Los Angeles stockyards, and the public gatherings where working cowboys heard their own lives spoken back to them. He wrote about branding, bogged cattle, wet boots, camp cooks, balky horses, aging hands, and the judgment that keeps both riders and animals alive; the old West in these poems is less a gunfighter's stage than a place of hard work, dry comedy, loss, and exact knowledge. From the 1930s onward his poems traveled through the *Western Livestock Journal*, Los Angeles Union Stockyards calendars, live recitation, and Katherine Field's closely observed drawings, then returned to speech at the modern cowboy-poetry gatherings. This edition resets 147 distinct poems: all thirty-one poems in *Rhymes of the Ranges* (1924), all forty in *Western Poems* (1935), and seventy-six additional poems preserved in the project's later archival witness. It follows the original sequences and stanza forms, joins narrow-page hanging wraps back into their poetic lines, and repairs damaged readings by collation rather than reproducing the scans as facsimiles.

Documented outline

Born: November 25, 1878, Pennsylvania. Foxburg is the place given by the best modern biographical study; Kiskaddon's 1942 draft registration card says Pittsburgh. The conflict is unresolved in the surviving project evidence.

Died: December 7, 1950, Los Angeles, California, age seventy-two, of pneumonia.

Occupations: Cowhand, horse breaker, ranch hand, hotel bellman and bell captain, United States Army mule skinner, poet, short-story writer, occasional advertising versifier, and possibly motion-picture extra.

Principal importance: Kiskaddon is one of the central writers in the oral and printed tradition of cowboy poetry. His work is exceptional for its

insider's knowledge of ranch labor, its refusal of Wild West melodrama, its dry humor and ethical seriousness, and the unusual publication network that joined books, a livestock weekly, advertising calendars, public recitation, and the art of Katherine Field.

Research status: This account distinguishes documented facts, Kiskaddon's own recollections, family tradition, contemporary publicity, and later repetition. The principal authority is Bill Siems's introduction and notes to *Shorty's Yarns* (2004), which draws on Kiskaddon's 1938 autobiography, the papers of Kiskaddon's granddaughter Lynn Held, family interviews, city directories, periodicals, and vital-record indexes. It is supplemented here by project scans of Kiskaddon's books, a 1932 *Los Angeles Times* profile, his 1942 draft registration card, institutional catalog records, and current evidence of his performance legacy.

Childhood and first stock work

Bruce Harvey Kiskaddon was born on November 25, 1878, the second of four children of James S. Kiskaddon and Caroline Kepler Kiskaddon. Siems identifies the birthplace as Foxburg, Pennsylvania, drawing on a January 1951 obituary in *The Cattleman* and family genealogical work. Kiskaddon's own 1942 draft registration card instead gives Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Foxburg lies in western Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh may have served as the better-known geographic designation, but the evidence does not justify silently choosing one over the other. The exact birthplace should therefore be printed as Foxburg with a note recording the self-reported Pittsburgh discrepancy.

His siblings were an older sister, Mary K. Kiskaddon Bradford, later of Los Angeles; a younger sister, Eleanor Kiskaddon, later of Canon City, Colorado; and a younger brother, Lowrie Daniel Kiskaddon, later of Los Angeles. By the time Bruce was ten, the family had moved to southwestern Missouri. His later story about Barry County may indicate the locality, though Siems treats that identification as provisional.

Kiskaddon's 1938 autobiographical sketch says that at twelve he spent a summer with three other boys day-herding cows on remaining unfenced country near camps of people anticipating the opening of Indian Territory. The chronology points to about 1891. He rode a small Indian pony and returned home at night. The experience was not yet professional cow work,

but it gave him the stock knowledge, childhood danger, and memory of social change that later entered his writing.

Early in the 1890s the family moved again, this time to Trinidad in Las Animas County, southeastern Colorado. Kiskaddon described himself as too small for the coal mines or railroad shops. A brief job at a furniture store ended when a horse bolted after seeing its reflection in a dresser mirror Kiskaddon was holding. J. M. John then hired him as a chore boy and eventually lent him a good saddle. That employment began his practical education in ranch work.

The extent of his formal schooling is uncertain. His writing refers vividly to rural school life, and contemporaries emphasized his lack of literary training, but no surviving record in the present file establishes a final grade completed. It is safer to describe him as largely self-educated in literature and thoroughly educated in the work culture of horses and cattle.

Range work in Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona

Kiskaddon drifted among small outfits in southern Colorado and neighboring country. At Bowen's ranch he partnered with a horse breaker named Johnson, whom he described as half Cherokee. Johnson taught him methods of handling raw horses that remained useful throughout his range career. He also worked for E. B. Templin, a breeder and trainer of large workhorses; for J. S. Gresham, later sheriff of Las Animas County, who bought and shipped horses; and, in the summer of 1902, for Nels Nelson between Limon Junction and Deer Trail, where Kiskaddon first saw cattle dipped.

His own later summary dated the start of his cowboy career to 1898 in the Picket Wire district - cowboy speech for the Purgatoire River country - although his teenage work clearly began earlier. Siems reasonably interprets 1898 as the point at which Kiskaddon left home for full-time ranch employment rather than his first experience with stock.

Kiskaddon's range geography in the decade from about 1896 through 1905 included southeastern Colorado, northeastern New Mexico, and Arizona. He worked around the lower Picket Wire and the Dry Cimarron, handled rough and cold-backed horses, broke stock, gathered cattle, and learned a short-rope, tie-fast, double-rigged saddle tradition. His 1938 autobiography names working men rather than famous outlaws and emphasizes technique, judgment, endurance, and care for animals. This is important to the later poetry: his

authority comes from ordinary labor and the social code of the hired hand, not from frontier spectacle.

One remembered incident, probably in 1904, involved a flash flood on the Picket Wire. Kiskaddon and other riders crossed rising water to release cows and calves trapped in a flooded enclosure. A twelve-year-old rider, Tommy Carter, followed on a hackamore colt; more than twenty years later Kiskaddon encountered him working as a riding actor in Hollywood. The episode joins two worlds central to Kiskaddon's life: actual range labor and Los Angeles's community of former cowhands employed by the film industry.

In 1906 Kiskaddon suffered a serious injury that made him believe he would never ride again. His autobiography does not describe the accident. A contemporary *Los Angeles Times* profile of January 11, 1932, says he was badly hurt in a fall from a horse, returned to Colorado, and later came to Los Angeles to recover. Siems found newspaper evidence suggesting that after the injury Kiskaddon worked as a bellhop in a succession of cities, including Boston. These accounts may compress or omit intermediate moves; they agree that the injury interrupted his range career and pushed him toward hotel work.

Hotel employment was neither a brief embarrassment nor a mere footnote. It became his dependable trade for much of the rest of his life. The hotel lobby gave him income, an audience, time between calls to write, and a vantage point on city manners. The 1932 profile shows him in uniform at a typewriter and presents the bellhop who writes cowboy poems as its central human-interest contrast. Yet the continuity is stronger than the contrast: both ranch and hotel work demanded observation, patience, service, and a practiced reading of people.

Australia and the First World War

About 1912, after roughly seven years away from sustained ranch work, Kiskaddon traveled to Australia and found employment on cattle stations in western Queensland. He recalled a British company with three stations of approximately 12,000, 50,000, and 90,000 acres. He learned Australian terms and practices: station for ranch, muster for roundup, draft for remuda, yard for corral, girth for cinch, and the use of flatter saddles, knee grips, and long stockwhips.

Kiskaddon respected the Australian stockmen's skill and nerve. His later prose uses the episode not as exotic color but as comparative working knowledge. The 2004 publisher's summary describes about two years as a drover; Kiskaddon's autobiography says he stayed a year longer than intended. He left after war began in Europe in August 1914, when many companions enlisted and employment conditions worsened. This chronology corrects a common online error that places Australia after his American military service.

Between his return from Australia and American entry into World War I, Kiskaddon again held city jobs and may have worked for George T. "Tap" Duncan at the Diamond Bar Ranch in northern Arizona. A successor ranch later claimed that he worked and wrote there in 1915, but Siems appropriately marks this as probable rather than certain.

Family tradition also held that Kiskaddon appeared as one of the Keystone Kops between 1915 and 1917 and drove a chariot in the 1925 silent *Ben-Hur*. Lynn Held believed her family collection contained relevant artifacts, but Siems had not located them during his 2003 examination. These claims should not be converted into firm screen credits without studio payroll, cast, or production documentation.

When the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917, Kiskaddon was thirty-eight, above the usual enlistment age. In his autobiography he said that he understated his age by five years in order to enlist. A Ventura *Daily Free Press* clipping preserved by the family, dated August 6, 1917, was titled "Hotel Employee Joins Cavalry Troop." Kiskaddon served twenty-six months in the United States Army, sixteen of them overseas, and was mustered out in June 1919. Siems describes his actual work in Europe as mule skinner. The evidence therefore supports a careful formulation: he enlisted through a cavalry context but spent the overseas period handling Army mules and transport. Later summaries that simply call him a cavalryman obscure the documented work.

Becoming a poet of work

Kiskaddon later credited Tap Duncan with urging him in 1922 to stop merely parodying songs and write verse about what really happened on the range. That encouragement was decisive, but it was not the literal beginning of his writing. A 1919 letter to his mother in the Held collection contains a finished poem. Newspaper clippings in the collection also suggest earlier publication.

Most strikingly, John A. Lomax's *Songs of the Cattle Trail and Cow Camp* (1919) prints "When You're Throwed" anonymously on pages 97-99. A close version later appeared in Kiskaddon's 1924 *Rhymes of the Ranges*. This proves that the text, or a very near form of it, circulated before his first book. It does not by itself prove authorship: the 1919 attribution is anonymous, and oral transmission can produce unstable texts. The sound editorial conclusion is that the poem entered print anonymously by 1919 and was claimed or adopted within Kiskaddon's corpus by 1924; attribution should be discussed, not assumed.

In 1922 Kiskaddon went to visit Tap Duncan at a ranch about sixty miles from Kingman, Arizona. He intended to stay two weeks, helped with one cattle work, then another, and did not leave until late November 1924. Duncan's practical directive - write what really happens - shaped Kiskaddon's mature subject and aesthetic. Instead of gunfights and saloon mythology, the poems record shipping, branding, winter riding, bogged cattle, wet boots, tired horses, camp cooks, bosses, drifters, weather, injury, age, and the long silences of people who work together.

At nearly forty-six, with eyesight bothering him and his hair graying, Kiskaddon concluded that hard riding in rough country was no longer an old man's work. His own explanation is unsentimental: aging reduces the quickness needed to survive a falling horse, a rope wreck, a buckner, or hours of ground work with calves. He returned permanently to the Los Angeles area, carrying the lived material of the previous three decades.

Los Angeles, marriage, and the first books

Kiskaddon self-published *Rhymes of the Ranges* in Hollywood in 1924, printed by Earl Hays. The roughly sixty-page paperbound book contained thirty-one poems. Its introductory poem defines the project as plain tales of work on roundups and trails rather than stories of saloon violence. Among the collection's durable poems are "When They've Finished Shippin' Cattle in the Fall," "The Old Night Hawk," "The Time to Decide," "Between the Lines," and "When You're Thrown."

The 1927 Los Angeles city directory lists Kiskaddon as a salesman living on Hyperion Avenue near Sunset Boulevard. In 1928 he self-published *Just as Is* through Hoffman Press in Los Angeles. Its twenty-eight poems included thirteen pieces from *Rhymes of the Ranges*, some abbreviated, and fifteen new poems that ranged beyond cowboy subjects. Only a few institutional or family copies were known to Siems in 2004. The 1932 *Los Angeles Times* reported that both early books had sold out and been reprinted, but surviving copies are so scarce that edition histories remain unresolved.

The same newspaper profile says Kiskaddon had then spent about twenty-five years ringing bells, a rounded figure that accords with the hotel work beginning after 1906. It identifies his employer as the Hayward Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. A later account by Hal Cannon names the Mayflower Hotel, but the contemporary article and Kiskaddon's 1942 registration card independently support the Hayward. It remains possible that he worked at more than one hotel.

On May 7, 1930, Kiskaddon married Margaret Amelia "Mellie" Larsen, born September 20, 1891, in Copenhagen. The marriage license was in the Held family collection. Mellie had been widowed twice and had two children: an adult daughter, Mildred, and a young son, Gene. They lived with Bruce and Mellie and functioned as his stepchildren, though Siems says Kiskaddon did not formally adopt them and they did not take his surname. Gene later used the name Val Stassan; Mildred's later married name was Van Der Linden.

Family tradition says Bruce met Mellie through hotel work, where he was a bell captain and she an elevator operator. His granddaughter Lynn Held was confident that this was Kiskaddon's only marriage. Siems noted hints in fictional writing that might suggest earlier marriages, but no documentary

evidence has surfaced. The responsible record therefore recognizes one verified marriage and labels all speculation about previous wives as unproved.

By 1934 the city directory lists Bruce as a bellman, Mellie - misprinted as Nellie - as his wife, and their address as 1706 West 53rd Street. His 1942 draft registration card repeats that address, gives "Millie" Kiskaddon as the person who would always know his whereabouts, and identifies the Hayward Hotel at 624 South Spring Street as his workplace. The card also records his telephone number and age, offering a rare self-signed civic document.

The *Western Livestock Journal*, calendars, and Katherine Field

Kiskaddon's widest lifetime audience came not through bookstores but through the *Western Livestock Journal* and Los Angeles Union Stockyards calendars. On August 25, 1932, the Journal launched its "Longhorn" section under associate editor Frank M. King and publisher Nelson R. Crow. The first installment placed Kiskaddon's "Cow Sense," illustrated by Katherine Field, on the front page and included his prose piece "It Was a Draw!" Reader response was immediate. By October the Journal advertised Kiskaddon's work as worth many times the one-dollar annual subscription; in November King announced plans for an illustrated book.

Katherine Field, a New Mexico rancher and largely self-taught pen-and-ink artist, became Kiskaddon's defining collaborator. Their pairing was remarkable because family testimony says they never met. Usually Field received a finished poem and made the drawing; occasionally a drawing prompted Kiskaddon to write. Her knowledge of horses, cattle, weather, and terrain matched his verbal knowledge. The result was not generic illustration but a shared documentary art of ranch work.

Three publishers made this collaboration possible. Crow provided the periodical. King promoted both artists and controlled the Journal sections in which their work appeared. John A. McNaughton, vice president and general manager of the Los Angeles Union Stockyards, initiated monthly advertising calendars. The calendar series began in early 1933 and continued without interruption for twenty-seven years, reissuing Kiskaddon poems after his death through 1959. By June 1933 the Journal and Stockyards were sharing material, though the Stockyards ultimately printed more consistently.

Field's work was interrupted by the financial and caregiving demands of her family ranch. From 1943 through 1948, Amber Dunkerley illustrated Kiskaddon's poems. Field resumed the collaboration in 1949, only for Kiskaddon to die in December 1950 and Field to die of cancer on June 28, 1951.

Kiskaddon did not remain only a printed voice. The Chuck Wagon Trailers, a Los Angeles social organization of cowhands who had worked the range before 1901, formed after a large reunion in May 1931. Kiskaddon joined in the fall of 1932 and was elected one of five directors in spring 1933. He wrote poems for the group's roundups and recited before crowds at its spring and fall meetings and at the annual Great Western Livestock Show.

These events placed him in a dense Los Angeles western network that included former ranch hands, livestock workers, riding actors, and cowboy entertainers. Documented visitors to Chuck Wagon Trailers gatherings included the Arizona Wranglers, Powder River Jack Lee, and Curley Fletcher. Kiskaddon almost certainly knew them at least socially, though the degree of each relationship cannot be established.

Kiskaddon was also a substantial prose writer. Siems located sixty-four articles in the *Western Livestock Journal* published from August 1932 through October 1939. Early reminiscences gave way in 1934 to connected humorous stories narrated by "Shorty," a lightly fictionalized version of Kiskaddon. Recurring figures include Bill, Rildy Briggs, Eph, Zeb, Ike, and a succession of bosses and outsiders.

The stories draw on stock jokes and tall-tale structures but are not simple stereotypes. Ranch knowledge governs who succeeds: the best worker combines courage with judgment, cares for horses, helps with unglamorous labor, and refuses bluster. Land, water, class, gender, aging, and modernization enter the comedy. A 1936 Armistice Day sequence strongly resembles Kiskaddon's return to Trinidad. The last article, published in 1939, is a nonfiction account of Bruce and Mellie's driving visit to Tap Duncan and other Arizona friends.

Kiskaddon's May 31, 1938, autobiography, written at readers' request, is the backbone of any reliable life. It names his early employers, explains regional methods, dates Australia and military service, and tells how a two-week visit to Duncan became a two-year return to ranch work. Because it was written four decades after some events and shaped for magazine readers, it requires

corroboration; nevertheless, no later summary should override it without stronger evidence.

The *Western Livestock Journal* published *Western Poems* in December 1935. Nelson Crow contributed a preface, Wheaton Hale Brewer a foreword, and Katherine Field the illustrations. The paperbound volume collected forty poems from the first three years of the collaboration and sold for one dollar. The project copy confirms the title page, copyright, publisher, and Field's credit.

In 1937 Kiskaddon and Field produced thirteen additional illustrated poems for Holaday & Hampton Livestock Commission Company advertisements. Kiskaddon used "The Holaday & Hampton Poet" as a pseudonym for most of them. In 1938 he probably wrote six unsigned jingles for Gorman & Monheim, another livestock commission firm; the attribution is stylistic rather than signed. These commissions show cowboy poetry operating as industry advertising as well as literature and oral performance.

Kiskaddon never abandoned hotel work. The final Los Angeles directory in 1940 still lists him as a bellman at the West 53rd Street address. His 1942 registration card names H. C. Friman of the Hayward Hotel as employer. This evidence resists the romantic story of the poet trapped in a demeaning uniform. Both his own work ethic and surviving photographs suggest that he treated hotel service as skilled, honest labor.

Last years and the 1947 collection

Kiskaddon self-published *Rhymes of the Ranges and Other Poems* in Los Angeles in 1947. Its 159 poems made it the most comprehensive lifetime collection. Frank M. King supplied a foreword praising the practical experience behind the poems. Only one Katherine Field drawing appeared, so the book preserved the texts but not the full collaborative record.

The Journal continued to print roughly ten or twelve Kiskaddon poems annually through 1947, then only ten during the final three years of his life as the paper shifted toward a more purely commercial postwar livestock focus. Kiskaddon remained at 1706 West 53rd Street with Mellie.

He died of pneumonia in Los Angeles on December 7, 1950. The *Los Angeles Times* obituary of December 8 named Mellie, Val Stassan, and

Mildred Van Der Linden. He was cremated at Angelus Rosedale Cemetery, Mortuary and Crematorium. The crematory told Siems that the ashes were released to the funeral service rather than placed in its mausoleum. Their final disposition is unknown; consequently, online memorials with “burial details unknown” should not be treated as proof of a grave.

Afterlife in cowboy poetry

Kiskaddon’s poems survived in ranch scrapbooks, clipped Journal pages, Stockyards calendars, family recitation, and anthologies. At the first Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko in 1985, Waddie Mitchell recited a Kiskaddon poem. Hal Cannon included Kiskaddon prominently in *Cowboy Poetry: A Gathering* that year and edited *Rhymes of the Ranges: A New Collection of the Poems of Bruce Kiskaddon* in 1987. Mason and Janice Coggin’s *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon* followed in 1998, based substantially on books, periodicals, and a near-complete calendar collection.

Jana Marck and Walt “Bimbo” Cheney issued calendar-poem booklets in 2001, 2002, and 2003. Bill Siems restored the prose and a detailed biography in *Shorty’s Yarns* in 2004. His limited edition *Open Range: Collected Poems* appeared from Old Night Hawk Press in 2006: 609 pages, 481 poems, textual notes and variants, and 242 Katherine Field drawings rejoined to their poems. William C. Reynolds’s 2007 review presented that edition as the first complete collection.

The tradition remains active rather than merely commemorative. The Western Folklife Center calls Kiskaddon, Omar Barker, Curley Fletcher, and Gail Gardner bedrock figures in cowboy poetry. Its performance archive features Kiskaddon texts, and contemporary poets continue to name “When They’ve Finished Shipping Cattle in the Fall” and “Between the Lines” as classics. Waddie Mitchell has described Kiskaddon’s simple diction as carrying complex ethical and philosophical weight. This reception confirms the key fact of Kiskaddon’s afterlife: his poems remain spoken, memorized, and judged by working-cowboy standards as well as read on the page.

The work of the poems

Kiskaddon's mature work is a literature of labor. Its characteristic subjects are procedures and consequences: how to start a horse on a freezing morning, pull cattle from bogs, save a calf, ship a herd, judge a hand, endure wet boots, remember a dead partner, or recognize that age has ended a working life. Technical terms are not decorative local color. They establish who knows the work, and knowledge in these poems is usually ethical.

His humor is similarly occupational. Boasters, careless rough riders, visiting experts, sentimental city people, and impractical bosses become comic because their claims fail against animals, weather, terrain, or shared experience. The strongest characters are competent without display. Kiskaddon's self-mockery lets him criticize cowboy vanity while preserving the dignity of the work.

The poems often use regular stanza forms, strong end rhyme, and a speech-based line. Meter can flex around vernacular syntax. That apparent plainness supports public recitation and memorization, while repeated phrases carry emotional pressure. In the autumn and night-herding poems, silence, exhaustion, distance, and memory make the voice elegiac without abandoning ranch vocabulary.

His stance toward modernization is neither simple nostalgia nor celebration. He mourns the passing of open-range practices and the social equality of older outfits, yet his poems also record danger, loneliness, broken bodies, poor judgment, and economic insecurity. The 1930s audience could recognize both the loss of a work culture and the necessity of adapting to scientific breeding, feedlots, corporate management, fences, trucks, and changing markets.

The prose extends this world. Its exaggerated dialect spellings are more aggressive than those of the poetry, and its comedy can move suddenly into death, love, land conflict, or bitterness. A responsible modern edition must also contextualize racial slurs, stereotypes, period assumptions about Indigenous people and ethnicity, and gender comedy. Historical fidelity does not require editorial silence: original wording should be documented and explained, not normalized as harmless dialect.

RHYMES OF THE RANGES

(1924)

Book One | The complete thirty-one-poem first collection

Introductory

These are just a few rhymes of old friends and old times,
And I hope before I am through—
Just once in a while, they will bring a broad smile,
To the face of some old buckaroo.

Wherever he worked in the days that are past,
On the mountain, the plain or the valley,
What matters it now if he tied hard and fast—
Or tumbled his steer with a dally.

If he wrangled the bunch, if he rode gentle strings,
If he topped off the wild ones that shimmy—
If he rode with his leathers through centre fire rings,
Or sat on a double-rigged rimmy.

If he worked for big outfits far out on the plains,
Where they never had use for a packer,
Or back in the hills in the snow and the rains,
With the regular old greasy sacker.

If he worked as a drifter and trusted to luck,
If he managed a bunch of his own;
If he cooked at the wagon and put up the chuck,
Or held down a line camp alone.

They are plain simple tales, of the round-ups and trails,
When he worked on the range with the cattle;
Not of wild woolly nights, nor of gambling hall fights,
But the days and the nights in the saddle.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 8–9.

When They've Finished Shippin' Cattle in the Fall

Though you're not exactly blue,
Yet you don't feel like you do
In the winter, or the long hot summer days;
For your feelin's and the weather,
Seem to sort of go together,
And you're quiet in the dreamy autumn haze.

When the last big steer is goaded
Down the chute, and safely loaded,
And the summer crew has ceased to hit the ball;
And a feller starts a draggin'
To the home ranch with the wagon—
When they've finished shippin' cattle in the Fall.

Only two men left a standin'
On the job for winter brandin',
And your pardner, he's a loafin' at your side,
With a bran-new saddle creakin',
But you never hear him speakin',
And you feel it's goin' to be a quiet ride.

But you savvy one another,
For you know him like a brother—
He is friendly, but he's quiet, that is all;
For he's thinkin' while he's draggin'
To the home ranch with the wagon—
When they've finished shippin' cattle in the Fall.

And the saddle hosses stringin'
At an easy walk a-swingin'
In behind the old chuck wagon movin' slow.
They are weary, gaunt and jaded,
While the mud and brush they've waded,
And they settled down to business long ago.

Not a hoss is feelin' sporty,
Not a hoss is actin' snorty,
In the spring the brutes were full of buck and bawl;

But they're gentle when they're draggin'
To the home ranch with the wagon—
When they've finished shippin' cattle in the Fall.

And the cook leads the retreat,
Perched high upon his wagon seat,
With his hat pulled 'way down furr'ud on his head.
Used to make that old team hustle,
Now he doesn't move a muscle;
And a feller might imagine he was dead,

'Cept his old cob pipe is smokin',
As he lets his team go pokin',
Hittin' all the humps and hollers in the road.
No, the cook has not been drinkin'—
He's just settin' there and thinkin'
'Bout the places and the people that he knowed.

And you watch the dust a trailin',
And two little clouds a-sailin',
And a big mirage like lakes and timber tall.
And you're lonesome when you're draggin'
To the home ranch with the wagon—
When they've finished shippin' cattle in the Fall.

When you make the camp that night,
Though the fire is burnin' bright,
Yet nobody seems to have a lot to say.
In the spring you sung and hollered;
Now you git your supper swallowed
And crawl into your blankets right away;

And you watch the stars a shinin'
Up there in the soft blue linin',
And you sniff the frosty night air clear and cool.
You can hear the night hoss shiftin'
As your memory starts a driftin'
To the little village where you went to school,

With its narrow graveled streets,
And the kids you used to meet,
And the common where you used to play baseball.
Now you're far away and draggin'

To the home ranch with the wagon—
For they've finished shippin' cattle in the Fall.

And your school-boy sweetheart, too,
With her eyes of honest blue—
Best performer in the old home-talent show.
You were nothing but a kid, '
But you liked her, sure you did—
Lord! and that was over thirty years ago!

Then your memory starts to roam
From Old Mexico to Nome,
From the Rio Grande to the Powder River:
Of the things you've seen and done—
Some of them was lots of fun—
And a lot of other things they make you shiver.

Bout that boy by name of Reid
That was killed in a stampede—
'Twas away up north, you helped 'em dig his grave.
And your old friend Jim, the boss,
That got tangled with a hoss,
And the fellers couldn't reach in time to save.

You were there when Ed got his'n—
Boy that killed him's still in prison;
And old "Lucky George," he's rich and livin' high.
Poor old Tom, he came off worst—
Got his leg broke, died of thirst—
Lord! but that must be an awful way to die!

Then them winters at the ranches,
And the old-time country dances—
Everybody there was sociable and gay.
Used to lead 'em down the middle,
Jest a prancin' to the the fiddle—
Never thought of goin' home till break of day.

No! there ain't no chance for sleepin',
For the memories come a creepin',
And sometimes you think you hear the voices call;
When a feller starts a draggin'

To the home ranch with the wagon—
When they've finished shippin' cattle in the Fall.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 9–11.

The Midwinter Bath

I'm home plenty early, I reckon—
It's too soon to start cookin' grub,
So before I begin with my bakin'
I'll take me a bath in that tub.

I'll build up a plenty big fire,
And git all the kittles well filled;
If there's one thing that I don't admire,
It's gittin' in water that's chilled.

That wind is some cold and plum nosey—
It's comin' right in through the cracks—
But I'll fix the place up warm and cozy,
And stuff that broke window with sacks.

Wow! Wow! But it sure makes you shiver—
A man wouldn't really suppose
It would chill him plum into the liver,
The minute he takes off his clothes.

Now, there is old Billy McRady—
He's eighty, and got his third wife.
She's quite a respectable lady—
And old Bill never bathed in his life.

When did I bathe last—I remember,
Although I ain't put the date down—
I had one the first of November,
The last time I went into town.

It's weak'nin', a man can't deny it,
But I'm takin' a chance, anyway;
It won't hurt a feller to try it,
For this here is Volunteen day.

I'll git that new bar of Fels Napthy
And doll myself sweet an' clean,
And come out all purty an' happy—
Like somebody's sweet Volunteen.

Ouch! Say, but my feet must be tender—

But then a man should understand,
When he feels of the water, remember,
That his feet ain't as tough as his hand.

I don't think it hurts your endurance,
Except when a feller jest soaks,
Fur baths is a common occurrence
Among the society folks.

The men, kids and the women
Put on little short-legged skirts,
And goes in the ocean a swimmin';
They don't reckon as how that it hurts.

I've read about them in "The Tattler."
Great goodness! jest look at them heels;
I'm sheddin' my hide like a rattler—
It's turrible how a man peels.

T'v got some clean under-clothes ready,
But the others is still warm for me;
I'll go at this thing sort of steady—
Too much of it mightn't agree.

Les' see, now—November, December—
And this here is Volunteen Day;
I'll mark down the date and remember
I'm good 'till the first of next May.

It may cause a feller to weaken,
It may sort of shorten Life's path;
But I'll tell you right here, plainly speakin',
I sure do enjoy a good bath!

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 11–13.

The Willow Creek Wedding

So you think it's sort of funny,
Bill got such a handsome wife;
I know how it happened, sonny—
And it was, you bet your life.
Twenty years ago tomorrow,
On a Wednesday of the week,
We stirred up some joy and sorrow,
Over there on Willow Creek.

It was old Joe Norton's daughter—
Started things to move and buzz—
For no woman hadn't oughter
Be as purty as she wuz.
And my pal, our broncho twister,
Called him Colorado Jim,
Seemed to like that little sister,
And she shore seemed fond of him.

But her folks soon stopped their buzzin'—
They objected on the score
That he'd killed her father's cousin
Half a dozen years before.
Well, that finished up their courtin',
But folks gossiped, like they will,
For that little Jessie Norton
Started goin' round with Bill.

Jim, he didn't seem down-hearted,
Though us boys did kid him some;
And I noticed that he started
Gittin' letters—how they come!
When a bunch of letters landed,
Every other one we saw
Would be mighty plainly branded
With the name of "James McGraw."

Now the school marm was a widder,
And she stayed at Norton's house;
She was never any kidder—

She was quiet as a mouse.
But our boss, first time he met her,
Shore declared upon the spot
That he aimed to try and get her,
And he hoped she could be got.

He'd a buggy and two hosses,
Always kent 'em fat and sleek,
And that outfit of the boss's
Often went to Willow Creek.
It created quite a ripple
When, into our camp one night,
Come old Jim Buchanan Whipple,
Givin' out the big invite.

There would be a sure 'nough weddin'
Barbecue for all the mob;
And old travelin' Parson 'Teddin
Would be there to do the job.
Everybody got invited
To the weddin' and the dance,
For to see them two united,
And to shake our feet and prance.

Norton's house—it was too little,
And too far back in the hills,
So they sent word by old Whipple
That they'd pull it off at Bill's.
On the weddin' day we started—
Jim was nowhere to be seen;
So we thought he was down-hearted,
And was feelin' sort of mean.

We got there in plenty season,
And we turned our hosses out;
And we saw no special reason
Why we shouldn't look about.
Our uneducated vision
Saw a sight that made us thrill,
But we come to the decision
That the thing we saw was Bill.

'Twas his sisters that had dressed him,
And his new white shirt was biled;
Wore a suit so tight it pressed him,
And his hair was smooth and 'iled,
Like a colt that's finished sheddin' —
Oh, he surely did look sleek,
When they fixed him for his weddin'
Over there on Willow Creek.

Then our boss drove in a flyin'
With the school marm and the bride,
And there wasn't no denyin'
He was all blowed up with pride.
They'd the school marm in the middle,
And they said they aimed to go
For to git a extra fiddle
At the house of Andy Roe.

Well, we waited, and we waited,
Till it wasn't any joke.
Young Tom Graham hesitated,
Then he rose right up and spoke:
"I don't like to mention trouble,"
Tommy says, "but you folks knows
They've had time enough and double
To come back from Andy Roe's.

T'"ll jest git my hoss and foller,
Fur as strange as it may seem,
I'm game to bet a dollar
They've had trouble with that team."
We all looked in Bill's direction
And somebody says to him:
"Everybody in this section
Is accounted for, but Jim."

Then a big hoss come a swingin'
Up to the canon into view,
With the parson on him singin'
Like a drunken buckaroo.
Talked jest like some old cow-waddy—
You could tell he'd had some booze—

Shakin' hands with everybody,
And a tellin' them the news.

"Folks!" declared old Parson Teddin',
"Listen to me if you can!
I was headed for this weddin'
When I met a hold-up man.
But it turned out fine and dandy,
Like a lot of other jokes,
Fur he took me up to Andy's
And I married four young folks.

One as purty a little critter
As a feller ever spied.
Oh, I never will furgit her!
And haw, haw! I kissed the bride!
We'd some toddy for the weddin'—
Oh, it was the best of jokes."
Then old Bill gasps: "Parson Teddin,
What's the name of them there folks?"

"Why," the parson answered gaily,
"Then two gals I never saw,
But the one man's name was Bailey,
And the other's was McGraw."
Bill displayed some agitation
When he heard what had been done;
He made hostile demonstrations,
And he went and got his gun.

"Bill," I says, "put up that weepin—
Don't you make that sort of play,
Less you calculate on sleepin'
Till the resurrection day.
You was never much fur fightin'"—
Them's the words I says to him,
"And you're tanglin' with the lightnin'
When you git your gun fur Jim."

Then up spoke old Johnny Brady:
"Bill, you'd best keep on your hat;
Jessie ain't the sort of lady

That would do a trick like that.
Some folks may have got united—
Things sounds queer, I must confess—
But I wouldn't git excited
Till I talked with little Jess."

But the boys begun to holler,
And the girls begun to smile;
Bill got hot around the collar,
And got madder all the while.
There was sure an awful racket,
For the boys begun to roar,
Till a girl named Sally Brackett,
Stepped right out and took the floor.

There was once when she'd got tangled,
And old Bill had rescued her—
She was bein' drug and dangled
From a cord cinch by a spur.
So she always sort of reckoned
That she owed old Bill a debt;
She was stirred up in a second,
And she spoke right out, you bet.

Sally hadn't any mother—
Grew up in the hills, that's all.
Used to work beside her brother,
Wearin' boots and overalls.
She had nerve—jest like a Spartan—
Jest eighteen and full of grit.
We all knew one thing was sartin'—
Sally Brackett wouldn't quit.

She was white and awful rattled—
First real dress she'd ever wore;
But she set her jaw fur battle,
And to even up the score.
Anybody that was human
Couldn't help but let her speak;
She had grown into a woman—
That wild girl from Boulder Creek.

“Folks,” she says, “I ain’t a knockin’
‘ On the ways of any one,
But what I consider shockin’
Is the way that Bill’s been done.
Yes, you boys can stand there grinnin’
Like a bunch of silly apes;
None of you could make a winnin’,
So it’s only sour grapes.

“Everyone of you that’s livin’,
If he’d only jest confess,
Would have swapped his chance fur heaven
Fur a chance to marry Jess.
Though she made her own selection—
Like a woman mostly will—
Any woman in this section
Should be proud to marry Bill.

“He’s dealt square with everybody—
Yes, with every lady here.
Now you poor bow-legged cow-waddies,
Want to stand around and sneer.
Yes, you started in to twit him—
You’re on Jim’s and Jessie’s side—
But you bet I’ll never quit him,
If he likes, I’ll be the bride.”

Bill, he stepped right out beside her,
And he took her by the hand;
And I heard one rough old rider
Swear that Brackett girl was grand!
So the parson done the hitchin’
And the boys cheered fit to kill.
Sally shore looked plum bewitchin’
When she led that first quadrille.

When I’d look at Jessie’s mother
She was lookin’ mighty sad;
But I noticed that her brother
Was plum wide awake and bad.
Jessie’s dad was like a mourner—
Never joinin’ in the jokes.

I set with him in a corner—
I was fond of Jessie's folks.

There had been a heavy shower,
And the sun was out again,
When, as purty as a flower,
Little Jess come walkin' in.
Well, the things that folks was sayin'
Seemed to stop right then and there,
And the fiddles stopped a-playin'—
All the folks begun to stare.

"Folks," she says, "I'm awful sorry
To be gettin' here so late;
But I couldn't make 'em hurry,
And I didn't want to wait.
I'd no idee what was brewin'
When I started out to go,
But there's sure been somethin' doin' '
Over there at Andy Roe's.

"Jim McGraw held up the parson—
It was fun, you bet your life.
Bailey's married to Miss Larsen,
And Jim got the cutest wife.
Fur, you see, I run acrost her,
When I made that trip back east;
Jim's first sweetheart, he had lost her,
And you know she's Andy's niece.

"They was hitched up when I started—
They'll be in here soon, I hope.
I took Jim's horse and departed—
Come the whole way in a lope.
'Twasn't right to keep you waitin',
And I don't go much on jokes."
Then she started hesitatin',
And says: "What's the matter, folks?"

Then I looked at Jessie's mother,
Saw her face looked hard and white,
And her father and her brother

Was jest spilin' fur a fight.
'Bout that time old man Brackett,
He begun to bow his neck,
And I knowed there'd be a racket
If they got him on the peck.

So I says to Jessie's mother:
"Take that little girl away;
You two understand each other—
Tell her what's took place today.
And, in case she wants to beller,
Why she'd ort to be alone,
'Stead of 'mongst a lot of fellers
In another woman's home."

Well, we set around in silence,
Fur you know how people are;
I was glad there'd been no violence
In the whole affair so far.
Jess come back, and she'd been cryin',
But she spoke up clear and slow:
"Folks," she says, "I'm not denyin'
Things looked bad a while ago.

"You all made the wrong guess mainly,
Jest like people sometimes will,
So, I want to tell you plainly,
That I ain't a-blamin' Bill.
Everybody in this valley
Was mistaken 'bout that trick,
So it left a chance for Sally—
Sally Brackett's rather quick.

"Since they're playin' ladies' choices—
And they seem to be in luck—
If there's no dissentin' voices,
Why, I'd like to marry Buck.
That's, of course, if Buck is willin'—
And her face got awful red.
I could feel my back a-chillin'—
Then the joy went to my head.

I was prouder than a turkey,
And I answered with a yell—
If she wanted me for jerky,
I'd be suited mighty well.
"Parson," I says, "come and tie us,
'Fore I lose this streak of luck."
But a voice says right close by us:
"She won't never quit you, Buck."

I could see how things was layin'—
Bill's so jealous he's the bunk;
So I kept them folks a-stayin'
And I got the parson drunk.
Bill, he's sort of slow on startin'—
Seems to sort of hesitate—
But the school marm, she was sartin
Sally Brackett wouldn't wait.

There beside me stood the waddy—
He was wiry, tall and slim—
That had give the parson toddy—
It was Colorado Jim.
That's the story to a letter.
And I'm here to state it's true;
Ali alive and doin' better
Than we'd ever hoped to do.

Yes, Bill's wife, she's shore a wonder—
That there school marm, she was wise.
But, son, don't you make no blunder—
It was me that drawed first prize.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 13–20.

The Parson's Shotgun Chaps

In the early days (as the settlers say),
In the Colorado hills,
A traveling parson used to stray—
And they called him Parson Dills.
He didn't have any church or charge,
He didn't have any bills,
For among the people he roamed at large;
And they all liked Parson Dills.

He had no place of fixed abode—
He wandered here and there,
As over the hills and flats he rode,
On the back of an old brown mare.
They told the parson to cross a creek
Above a big cottonwood log;
But somehow he missed the limestone streak,
And got in an awful bog.

Now, it chanced by luck that one of the boys
Was riding down to the ford,
And he heard the parson making a noise,
As he called on the name of the Lord.
He lifted his horse to a lively lope—
For he seemed to understand—
And he built a loop in his saddle rope,
As he raced for the big quick-sand.

As soon as the cow-boy reached the place,
He whirled his rope and threw;
The parson felt the pony brace,
And he thought he'd be pulled in two.
He also felt his suspenders rip,
And it gave him a vague alarm;
But the rope held fast, with its awful grip,
Till he couldn't wiggle an arm.

A minute or more did the cow-boy try.
With never a chance or hope;
Then he landed the parson high and dry—

At the end of a rawhide rope.
And there on the ground the parson sat,
With the cowboy looking on;
The bog had swallowed his stovepipe hat,
His trousers and boots were gone.

The puncher lighted a cigarette,
And said, as he breathed the smoke:
“You leave it to me, I’ll fix it yet—
If I don’t, well, I hope to choke.”
The mare was almost out of sight—
They saw she was good as done;
So they put her out of her sorry plight
With a shot from the puncher’s gun.

Then the cow-boy rode at an easy pace,
To the cabin of old Buck Vance;
Old Buck was nowhere around the place,
So he started to search for pants.
He found some boots and a cast-off hat,
That he thought would do, perhaps;
But the search for pants was a failure flat,
So he took Buck’s shot-gun chaps.

Said he to the parson: “Tain’t much, it’s true,
But I reckon ’twill hold you down;
You can figger to sort of make it do,
Till somebody goes to town.”
They got the parson another mare—
A sort of speckled gray—
And a suit of red flannel underwear,
Then started him on his way.

The people could not help but note,
And they thought it was strange, perhaps,
That he never unbuttoned his frock-tailed coat
Or took off his shot-gun chaps.
Now, it chanced that one of the buckaroos—
A sort of a rustic clown—
Objected one day to the gospel news,
And hooted the parson down.

Now, Parson Dills was six foot two—
His shoulders were strong and wide.
The people knew what the man could do.
For they'd seen the parson tried.
“Young man,” said he, “you had better cease—
Your manners are very coarse;
In case you do not depart in peace,
I will send you away by force.”

The buckaroo pretended to snore,
Then somebody heard him swear;
The parson threw his coat on the floor
And tackled him then and there.
The tail of his shirt took a rise and flare,
Till it looked like the tail of a doe;
And the seat of his flannel underwear
Shone out with a crimson glow.

The parson had never trained for the ring,
But he never was known to fail;
For when he fought he tackled the thing
With the speed of a Texas gale.
The younger sisters all looked shocked—
The older ones smiled in glee,
While the brethren held their sides and rocked,
And laughed till they couldn't see.

The buckaroo was strong and tough,
But his weight was far too light;
So he finally admitted he had enough,
At the end of a long, hard fight.
As he stooped to pick up his big white hat,
He said, with a side-long glance:
“I reckon a man that can fight like that
Had ort to be dressed in pants.

An' since you're a spreadin' the gospel light,
It's certainly my belief,
That you ort to be dressed like a man that's white,
And not like a Injun chief.
Now, Parson, I'm wearin' a couple of pair,
And the biggest ones—they might do.

Since we've settled our mix-up fair an' square,
I'm givin' that pair to you."

The Parson reached for the cow-boy's hand,
And gave it an awful grip.
Said he, "Young fellow, that suits me grand,
And you're terrible hard to whip."
The Parson said he had changed his mind—
He took a new text and read
About forgetting the things behind,
And tackling the things ahead.

If you've been in the Sangre de Christo range,
Or over by Emery Gap,
Perhaps you have heard the story strange,
Of the parson's shot-gun chaps.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 20–23.

The Cow-Boy's Dream

A cow-boy and his trusty pal
Were camped one night by an old corral;

They were looking for calves with lengthy ears,
And keeping a line on the boss's steers.

The summer work was long since through,
And only the winter branding to do.

When he went to rest there was frost on his bed,
But he pulled the tarp up over his head;

And into his blankets he burrowed deep—
He soon got warm and was fast asleep.

He dreamed he was through with his wayward past,
And had landed safe in heaven, at last.

A city was there, with its pearly gate,
And its golden streets that were wide and straight;

The marble palaces gleamed and shone,
While the choir sang 'round the great white throne.

Outside there were trees and meadows green—
Such a beautiful range he had never seen.

Great rivers of purest water flowed,
Though it never rained, nor it never snowed.

He stood aside on the golden street,
There were heavy spurs on his booted feet;

His bat-wing chaps were laced with whang,
But he listened and looked while the angels sang.

He noticed that he was the only one
With a broad-brimmed hat and a big-six gun.

So he said to a saint, "I'd shore admire
To be dressed like one of that angel choir.

Instead of these chaps an' spurs an' gun,
An' I reckon as how it could be done."

So they took him into a room aside,
And fastened wings on his toughened hide;

They dressed him out in a flowing robe,
Like the lady who looks in the crystal globe.

They gave him a crown and a golden harp,
And the frost lay thick on the cow-boy's tarp.

He twanged his harp and he sang a while,
Then he thought of something that made him smile,

For he was not one that sits and sings,
When they'd fitted him out with a pair of wings.

Said he: "I reckon these wings would do
To show some mustangs a thing or two.

I'll jump a bunch an' I'll flop and swoop;
I'll kick their tails and I'll yell and whoop;

I'll light astraddle of one of the things,
And I'll flop his flanks with my angel wings;

I'll ride him bare-back, but if I fail
An' he bucks me off, I'll simply sail."

So he hunted wild horses in his dream,
But all he found was a chariot team

That old Elijah drove in there;
And to pick on them would be hardly fair.

So he seated himself beneath a tree
And rested his crown upon his knee.

He watched the beautiful angels go—
Flying and fluttering to and fro.

At last one landed and started to walk—
She came up close and began to talk.

She had lovely hair of golden brown,
And was dressed in a flimsy silken gown.

She had dimpled cheeks and her eyes were blue,

And her fair white skin was beautiful, too.

The cow-boy gazed on the angel's charms,
And attempted to clasp her within his arms.

"Stop! Stop!" she cried, "or I'll make complaints
To the great white throne, and the ruling saints."

So the cow-boy halted, I must confess,
And failed to bestow that fond caress.

Said he: "Miss Angel, it's shore too bad,
'This sort of a country makes me sad.

Where there ain't no night, an' it's always day,
And the beautiful ladies won't even play.

Where there's wonderful houses and golden streets,
But nobody sleeps and nobody eats.

'Them beautiful rivers, it's sad to think,
There ain't no hosses nor cows to drink.

There's all this grass a-goin' to seed;
There ain't no critters to eat the feed.

A man can't gamble—there's so much gold
He could pick up more than his clothes would hold.

What's the use of the judge and the great white throne,

Where troubles and fights was never known?
I'm sorry, Miss, but I tell you true,

This ain't no place for a buckaroo."
Then she asked him about his former life;

She learned he had never possessed a wife.
But this angel lady, so sweet and nice,

Informed him that she had been married twice.
Her husbands had both been quiet men—

She thought if she had it to do again
She'd have to decide between just two—

A sailor boy, or a buckaroo.

She seated herself upon his knees,
And gave his neck such a hearty squeeze.
Just then he heard an excited call—
’Twas a gray old saint on the city wall.
He flopped his robes and he waved his arm
’Till a crowd had gathered in great alarm.
And then the cow-boy stood alone
Before the judge, and the great white throne.
“What’s this?” the judge of creation cried;
“How came this fellow to get inside?
Age must be dimming Saint Peter’s eye
To let a spirit like that get by.
Just look at his face, with its desert brown,
And his bandy legs ’neath his angel gown.
He’s a buckaroo, I know them well;
They don’t allow them even in Hell!
He hasn’t been here a half a day,
And he started an angel to go astray.
We can’t permit him to stay at all—
Just pitch him over the outside wall.”
So the saints and angels gave him a start,
And he went toward the earth like a falling dart.
But he never remembered the time he lit,
For he wakened before the tumble quit.
The winter wind blew cold and sharp—
And the frost lay thick on the cow-boy’s tarp.
His beautiful vision had come to grief,
So he baked his biscuit and fried his beef.
And he drank some coffee, black and strong,
But all that day as he rode along
He thought of the saint who had butted in,

And he said to himself (with a wicked grin):
“I wish I had hold of that old saint chap,
I’d grab his whiskers and change his map.
I’d jump on his frame and stomp aroun’
”Till I tromped him out of his saintly gown.”
And all his life, as he roamed and toiled,
He thought of the vision so sadly spoiled.
The meddlesome saint that caused it all,
When he gave the alarm from the jasper wall.
He didn’t repent, nor he didn’t pray,
But he always wished they’d let him stay.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924)*, pp. 23–26.

The Old Moss Back

I'm feelin' some sad and down-hearted,
I'm feelin' some mad and plum queer,
To think I've been fooled and out-smarted
By jest a long-legged old steer.
I started out early this mornin'
On the sorriest hoss in my string;
And I jumped the old cuss without warnin'
Upon the divide by a spring.

He wouldn't head out toward the valley—
He took up the wash in a lope;
I tightened my cinch for a dally,
And was after him swingin' my rope.
I knew I was slated for trouble,
For the very next thing that I saw,
He had dodged 'round a rock and had doubled,
And was off up a little side draw.

I climbed 'till I got in above him,
But he seemed to be usin' his brain;
I could turn the old brute, but Lord love him!
Every time that I'd turn him, he'd gain.
He was fuller of tricks than a nigger—
He wouldn't turn backward nor stop;
He'd a system that I couldn't figger,
And he beat me out onto the top.

Well, when we got out in the open—
Although there was brush and some rocks—
Old hoss took a hand in the lopin',
And we builded right onto his hocks.
I was swingin' my rope fur to bed him,
But he dodged and got into the scrub;
I circled around fur to head him,
But he played me right there fur a dub.

He was raised on that range with his mother;
We finished up out on the rim—
Him out on one point, me another,

And a canyon betwixt me an' him.
He headed right down to the river—
There wasn't no trail on my side.
Although it did give me a shiver,
I went down a little rock slide.

And just when I thought I had caught him,
My hoss put his foot in a hole;
We follered him plum to the bottom—
We both took a turrible roll.
I tracked him an hour and found him
'Twixt a big timber drift and a log;
And just when I went to go round him,
My hoss blundered into a bog.

He histed his tail and departed
Like a sky-rocket does when it's lit.
I hadn't no chaps when I started;
I hadn't much pants when I quit.
My hoss couldn't chase him no furdur—
He couldn't go fast as a trot;
The way I had run him was murder—
He was lame and run down and red hot.

That steer he's past six, comin' seven;
The boys hasn't got him ketched yet.
They've about as much chance to make heaven—
And that's a long-shot on a bet.
I'm feelin' some sad and down-hearted,
I'm feelin' some mad and plum queer,
To think I've been fooled and out-smarted
By jest a long-legged old steer!

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 26–27.

The Air That They Breathe Out West

I am doing well enough, I know,
And I'm foolish not to stay;
But I'll tell you true, twixt me and you,
What it is that calls me away.
The people here in the east are fine—
They have treated me better than fair;
I could ask no better, for friends of mine,
But I long for the western air.

For the land where the sun is always bright,
And the nights are always cool,
Where you wake with the birds at morning light.
And you feel as strong as a mule.
Where you're always willing to chance your luck,
And you're happy and free from care,
For there's nothing that fills you full of pluck,
Like breathing the western air.

I love the desert, weird and strange,
I love the canyons deep;
And I love the towering mountain range,
Where the pine trees sing you to sleep.
It's the land of my heart, and I soon will start;
In a few weeks more I'll be there.
I'll be poor, of course, but astride of a horse,
And breathing the western air.

It's better than all that I can recall,
And many the the place I've tried.
So I think I'll stay 'till I'm called away,
Far over the Great Divide.
And I'm going to offer up one prayer
When I start for the land of the blest;
It will be that the air they breathe up there
Is as good as we've got out west.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 27–28.

When to Get Tough

A shy, shrinkin' man makes me tired;
I hate men that bluster and bluff.
The feller I always admired
Was the man that knew when to be tough.
When the boys gather in 'round the fire,
All happy and cheerful of nights,
There's none of them really admire
To hear a man tell how he fights.

But when you meet up with a feller
That never did treat you half white,
And he tells everybody you're yeller,
Till folks begin thinkin' he's right,
You want to be quick, but be steady—
Don't let him win out on a bluff.
Next time that he starts it, be ready—
'That's the time that you want to git tough!

If your hoss is plum gentle and older
Than, perhaps, a good cow-puncher needs,
Don't spur the old brute in the shoulder,
And dig at his ribs till he bleeds.
For you know it don't take a clean sitter,
Nor a man that is awful brave,
To torture some quiet old critter,
That's a-tryin' his best to behave.

But when you git up on a pony
That goes in the air and swaps ends,
And he seems to consider you phony—
Just one of them easy-mark men;
When he goes in the air like a rocket,
When he rocks in his plunges and reels;
When you feel your legs strain in the socket,
And the spurs a'most tear from your heels;

When he's buckin' and bawlin' and screamin',
When he's knockin' you blind with his stuff—
Take to him, old boy, like a demon—

That's the time when you want to be tough.
Don't beat up the broken-down cattle,
Because they can't keep in the lead.
If you're really a-longin' for battle,
Some night the big steers will stampede.

If you help start the leaders to millin',
You'll find you've got battle enough;
Jest help keep the cattle from spillin'—
That's the time for a man to get tough.
Don't set in the shade in the summer,
And tell how you used to buck snow,
'Til you put the whole crowd on the hummer,
And nobody else had a show.

But when you git caught in a blizzard,
And you feel the cold rush of its breath,
You'd better have sand in your gizzard,
For you're matched in a battle with Death.
When you've crouched for perhaps twenty hours
By a fire in under a bluff,
It certainly tries a man's powers—
And it's then that you want to be tough!

When calves are so little they stagger
It don't take a feller that's bright,
To treat them too rough and then swagger,
Like a man in a Spanish bull-fight.
When you rope one as big as his mother,
By a horn and a foot on one side,
And he's up and you're facin' each other,
Before you can git the brute tied;

When your half-broken horse goes a kitin',
And the bull charges in with a snuff—
If you're aimin' to practice bull-fightin',
That's the time that you want to git tough!
When some fellers has opened their throttles
Some roastin' hot night in a shack;
When they've pulled the corks out of the bottles,
And you know that they won't put them back;

If you're feelin' real peaceful and festive,
Why help them to swaller the stuff;
But never git peevish or restive—
It's a mighty poor time to git tough!
When late the next morning you waken,
And find you fell off of your horse,
And you see that the critter has taken
A route that lays out of your course;

When the sun stabs your eyes like a dagger,
When your stomach's so sick that you sway;
When your knees are so weak that you stagger,
Yet you know you must be on your way,
For the sun's getting hotter and hotter—
Mirages and dust-devils dance;
You know it's eight miles to the water—
You must make it or else feed the ants.

Folks that brace up with bromo and fizzes,
They reckon they've trouble enough;
But out where the desert sun sizzles—
That's the place where you'd better be tough!
So it's no use to bluster or bristle—
It's no use to swagger or pose;
They'll learn if it's fat or hard gristle
That covers the bridge of your nose.

Fur if you keep on punchin' cattle
You'll find you've got trouble enough—
Jest hold down your job, and your saddle,
And you won't have to try to be tough!

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 28–30.

The Adventurer

He is one of the kind that you meet by chance
In some far-out place or the city—
A soldier of fortune, a bold free lance,
Who fears no troubles in advance—
A man who is cool and gritty.
He is one of the kind that trusts to fate—

He is cheerful, but half defiant;
He carried his back and shoulders straight;
He walks with a free and easy gait,
And his look is self-reliant.
He is one of the kind whose heart is light—
His spirits never diminish;

He is ready for trouble, wrong or right,
For he's one of the kind that likes to fight,
And he's goin' to stick to the finish.
He is one of the kind who does his share,
Whatever occasion arises;
In war or peace he is always there,

And acts while the others stand and stare—
He is one of the nation's prizes.
He is one of the kind who sometimes sins
(Though he can't be classed as a sinner),
And if, as the wheel of fortune spins,
He finds he's a loser, he only grins,

And he never crows when he's winner.
He is one of the kind that don't last long—
Ambition and dreams possess him;
But he's open-hearted and free and strong,
And you have to admire him, right or wrong,
Because he's a man—God bless him!

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 30–31.

Our Sweetheart

We have a little lady,
That the cow-boys all admire,
And no matter where they meet her,
There are none of them that tire

Of her lively conversation,
Or her presence by their side;
And whenever she is mentioned
They all speak of her with pride.

She don't use a rope or pony,
But you need not think it strange,
She has captured every rider
On this section of the range.

If we had a beauty contest,
She would surely take the prize;
She's the cutest little lady,
With such lovely big dark eyes!

What will happen in the future?
Well, that's something can't be told;
For she's cleared the field already—
And she's only four years old.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 31–32.

When You're Throwed

If a feller's been a straddle
Since he's big enough to ride,
And had had to put a saddle
On jest every sort of hide;
Though it's nothing they take pride in,
Most of fellers I have knowed,
If they ever done much ridin'
Has at various times got throwed.

It is when the bunch is startin'
For a round-up some fine day,
That you feel a bit onsartin
'Bout some little wall-eyed bay,
Fur he swells to beat the nation,
When you're cinchin' up the slack,
And he keeps an elevation
In your saddle at the back.

He starts rarin' and a jumpin'
And he strikes when you get near,
And you cuss 'im and you thump 'im
'Till you get 'im by the ear.
Then your right hand grabs the saddle
And you catch your stirrup, too,
And you 'low to light and straggle
Like a wooly "Buckaroo."

But he drops his head and switches
Ends, and gives a backward jump,
Out of reach your stirrup twitches,
But your right spur grabs his hump,
And "Stay with 'im," shouts some feller
Though you know 'tis hope forlorn,
Yet to show that you ain't yeller
Still you choke the saddle horn.

But you feel one rein a droppin'
And you know he's got his head,
And your shirt-tail's out and floppin'

An' the saddle pulls like lead.
Oh, it ain't no use a-tryin'
For your spurs begin to slip,
Then you're upside down an' flyin'
And the horn tears from your grip.

And you feel a vague sensation
As upon the ground you roll,
Like a violent separation
Twixt body an' your soul.
And you land agin a hummick
Where you lay and gasp fur breath,
An' there's somethin' grasps your stummick
Like the awful clutch of death.

You feel shaky on your trotters
When at last you try to stand,
And the landscape round you totters
And your mouth is full of sand.
An' they swear you beat the circus,
Or the "hoochy-koochy" dance,
Moppin' up the canon's surface
With the busom of your pants.

Tickled plum into conniptions,
Them boys gathers in a group,
And gives various descriptions
How you looped the spiral loop.
Yes, some fellers give perscriptions
How a broncho should be rode,
But there's few that gives descriptions
Of the times when they got throwed.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 32–33.

The Muley Steer

If there ever was a critter
Put creation out of gear,
And could turn a cow-boy bitter,
It's the onry muley steer.
Fur he seems to keep a thinkin'
In his peaked hairy dome,
Has no reg'lar place of drinkin',
Ain't no range where he's at home.

He is always discontented—
Sort of drifts about and mourns;
Seems to drive him plum demented
Cause he hasn't any horns.
In a herd he's always lurkin'
Somewhere's out along the side;
Always keeps your hoss a workin'
Always makes a feller ride.

On the range, if you pursues him,
He takes to it with a rush,
And you're mighty apt to lose him
If he gits into the brush.
For the scrub that stops the others
This onruly critter scorns;
He ain't hampered like his brothers,
'Cause he hasn't any horns.

If you jump him on the mountain,
There's no tellin' what he'll do;
Fur he has his way of countin'
Sure as one and one is two.

You'll most likely find him hidin'
Up among the highest rocks;
And he scoots right down a slidin'
On his haunches and his hocks.

When you ketch him he's a puzzle.
Fur no prongs his head adorns;
Got to rope him round the guzzle,

'Cause he hasn't any horns.

I've heard men set up and holler
That he hadn't any sense;
Well, they simply ort to foller
When he goes around a fence.

He can climb around and plunder
Where you couldn't drive a goat;
He can crawl and burrow under
Like a Poll and Chiney shoat.

If it's wire, he'll undo it—
If you build a brake of thorns—
He's the boy can go right through it,
'Cause he hasn't any horns.

Don't you think he ain't pugnacious,
Just because his head is smooth;
He can deal some awful smashes,
If you want to know the truth.

And you want to keep your distance
If he starts to bow his neck;
Don't you give him no resistance
If he gits upon the peck:

Fur his head is hard and boney—
Look out when he snuffs and warns.
He can sure upset your pony.
If he hasn't any horns.

Yes, I know he was created,
But I don't know why or how;
He don't seem to be related
To no other kind of cow.

Fur his mind is plum unsettled,
Though he masters lots of facts;
He keeps men and horses nettled
By the onry way he acts.

Fur his conscience seems plum pestered.
And his skull has ingrown corns—

Which same keeps his brain box festered;
'Cause he hasn't any horns.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 33 and 46.

The Discovery

The morning was clear, but the west wind was chilly;
The high peaks gleamed white, where it recently snowed.
When there passed through this country so rugged and hilly,
A grizzled cow-puncher, who scratched as he rode.
The expressions he wore on his face were quite funny—
There were times that he smiled, there were times he frowned.
He stopped in a place that was sheltered and sunny—
He reined in his horse, and got down on the ground.

He spread out his “chaps” to protect him from cactus,
And also to keep his clothes out of the dirt;
And then in a way that betrayed former practice,
He started perusing the seams of his shirt.
It made his teeth chatter, but that did not matter—
His skin roughened up in the cold winter breeze;
But he captured some cooties—some diamond black beauties—
The kind that he got when he went over-seas.

His present condition was far from delightful
(Although he had been in predicaments worse).
The language he used was both lurid and frightful—
It’s awful to hear an old cow-puncher curse!
The habit of wearing these things is contagious,
And to boil woolen clothing is surely a shame;
The things that he threatened to do were outrageous,
In case he found out who was really to blame.

He cursed all the Mexicans, Indians and strangers
(He could not remember of meeting with tramps).
He cursed the cow-waddies and government rangers,
The mess-wagons, bunk-houses, ranches and camps.
That night as he sat by the warm bunk-house fire,
He told all the crew what he found in his shirt.
One hot-headed boy called another a liar,
And grabbed up the poker—his feelings were hurt.

Each “Waddy” put in an emphatic denial,
And cursed all the rest for unpurified bums;
But when it was brought to a search and a trial,

They found the whole outfit polluted with “crums.”
They boiled all their clothes, while they grumbled and muttered,
And spoke of the things they intended to do;
On their ropes and the fences their bright blankets fluttered—
Someone was to blame, but God only knows who.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 34–35.

The Old Night Hawk

I am up tonight in the pinnacles bold,
Where the rim rock towers high;
Where the air is clear, and the wind blows cold,
And there's only the horses and I.

The desert swims like a silver sea,
In the light of the big full moon,
And strong and clear there comes to me
The lilt of the first guard's tune.

The fire at camp is burning bright—
Cook's got more wood than he needs.
'They'll be telling some awful tales tonight
Of races and big stampedes.

I'm getting too old for that line of talk—
The desperaters they've knowed,
Their wonderful ways to handle stock,
And the fellers they've seen git throwed.

I guess I'm a dog that has had his day,
Though I still am quick and strong;
But my hair and beard have both turned gray,
And I reckon I've lived too long.

None of 'em know me, but the old cook Ed,
But never a word he'll say—
My story will stick in his old gray head
'Till the break of judgment day.

What's that I see that's walkin' fast?
It's a horse a slippin' through!
He's a tryin' to make it out through the pass—
Come mighty near doing it, too.

Git back there, what are you tryin' to do?
You hadn't a chance to bolt!
Old boy, I was wranglin' a bunch like you
Before you was ever a colt.

It's later now, the guard has changed;

One voice is clear and strong.
He's singin' a tune of the old-time range—
I always did like that song.

It takes me back to when I was young,
And the memories come through my head
Of the times I have heard that old song sung,
By voices now long since dead.

I have traveled better than half my trail,
I'm well down the further slope;
I've seen all my dreams and ambitions fail,
And memory replaces hope.

It must be true, for I've heard it said,
It's only the good die young;
The tough old cusses like me and Ed

Must stay till the last dog's hung.
I used to shrink when I thought of the Past,
And some of the things I've known,
And I took to drink, but now at last,

I'd far rather be alone.
It's strange how quickly a night goes by,
For I live in the days of old.
Up here where there's only the horses and I—

Up in the pinnacles bold.
The two short years, when I ceased to roam,
And lived a contented life;
Then trouble came, and I left my home,

And I never have heard of my wife.
The years I spent in a prison cell,
When I went by another name;
For life is a mixture of Heaven and Hell—

To a feller that plays the game.
They'd better lay off of that wrangler kid—
'They've give him about enough.
He looks like a pardner of mine once did—

He's the kind that a man can't bluff.

They'll find they are makin' a big mistake
If they once git him over-het;
And they'll give him as good as an even break,

Or I'm takin' a hand, you bet!
Look there in the East, is the mornin' star!
It shines with a fiery glow,
'Til it looks like the end of a big cigar—

But it hasn't got far to go.
Just like the people that make a flash—
They don't stand much of a run—
Come bustin' in with a sweep and dash,

When most of the work is done.
I can see the sky is getting gray—
I'll gather the horses soon;
And faint from the valley far away

Comes the drone of the last guard's tune.
Yes, life is just like the night-herd's song,
As long as the years come and go—
You start with a swing that is free and strong,

You finish up tired and slow.
I reckon the horses all are here—
I see that "T-bar" blue;
And the buckskin horse with the one split ear,

I've got em all—Ninety-two.
Just listen to how they roll the rocks—
These sure are rough old trails;
But then, if they can't slide down on their hocks,

They can coast along on their tails.
The Wrangler kid, he's out with his rope—
He hardly misses a throw.
Will he make a cow-hand? I should hope,

If they give him half a show.
They're throwin' the rope corral around,
The horses crowd in like sheep.
I reckon I'll swallow my breakfast down

And try to furgit, and sleep.
Yes, I've lived my life, and I've took my chance,
Regardless of law or row;
I've played the game, and I've had my dance,
And I'm payin' the fiddler now.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 35–37.

A Character

He is a craft that is not new—
Not of the best or worst;
He's sailed 'neath colors false and true,
Ill-fated from the first.

But he has always come to port,
For he was put together
To be the rough-and-ready sort,
That stands the heavy weather.

Though tossed by storms and driven far,
Whene'er the clouds were lifted,
He's had the steam to cross the bar,
No matter where he drifted.

He has no leisure for remorse—
Of worry he is sparing;
And though he steers a crooked course,
He always keeps his bearing.

You meet him traveling on life's sea—
You know not whither going;
But if you seem a friend to be,
You'll find him worth the knowing.

A rogue is he, but white of heart—
He deals fair when they let him;
And none who play an honest part,
Are worse for having met him.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 37–38.

An Experiment

I'm jest an old, hard and fast "rimmy,"
That's allus worked one certain way.
I was talkin' to Eddie and Jimmie—
It's better to dally, they say.
Now you often have heard people talkin'
That it don't hurt a feller to try.
I never was much hand fur knockin'
But I'm willin' to state that's a lie.

I was on the beef hunt last September—
I jumped a big three-year-old steer;
He give me a few to remember—
He went thru' the brush like a deer.
He certainly knowed how to do it—
He was leavin' from there like a bat;
But I says, "Jest you help yourself to it,
I'll soon be around where you're at."

The hoss I was ridin', I'm sayin',
Was lazy, but not very slow;
He had the world cheated for stayin'
If you'd spur him, you bet he could go.
That steer? Hadn't any chance to turn him—
He wasn't the turn-around breed;
So I reckoned I'd start in and learn him,
By breakin' the critter to lead.

I sent my old loop his direction—
I jerked it and let the rope cross;
Then I aimed fur to make a connection
Betwixt that said steer and my hoss.
I dabbed fur my winds on "Old Sally,"
But the hoss sort of shirked and hung back;
I thought I had room fur a dally,
But the steer got away with my slack.

Then my whole constitution jest buckles—
Like when somebody tromps on your corn—
Fur the end of my rope and my knuckles

Was all that I got on the horn.
My hand was all busted and mangled—
Got one crooked finger now, see?
Well, I follered the steer till he tangled,
And got him tied up to a tree.

There is certain sad memories that lingers,
And I reckon that this one will last.
It may be my neck, not my fingers,
But I'll risk it, and tie hard and fast.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 38–39.

The Disaster

There's troubles that keep a man fussin'—
There's sorrows that make his heart bleed.
But the thing that will set a man cussin'
Is to see his old pack horse stampede.
He's a gentle old horse that you trusted—
You didn't expect it of him;
But that rotten old pack cinch got busted
When he tried to crowd under a limb.

He jumps and things start to scatter,
He snorts and then down goes his head;
You see right away what's the matter,
The pack rope is fast in your bed.
Your horse doesn't want to go near him,
The spurs doesn't alter his mind;
It'd make a'most any horse fear him,
With that object a-draggin' behind.

You're swingin' your rope, and you're chargin',
But your horse won't go in for a throw;
He gives that pack horse a wide margin,
And that's just as close as he'll go.
He runs and he bucks without stoppin',
He's hangin' his tail on the moon,
While out of your "Kayacks" comes floppin'
Tomater cans, bacon and prunes.

Your fryin' pan sails like a rocket,
Your coffee pot lands in the rocks;
Some stuff you should have in your pockets,
You left in that pack in a box.
He certainly makes easy trailin—
He leaves a broad track as he goes;
Fur out of your bed there comes sailin'
Tobacker and blankets and clothes.

Your tarp! Yes, of course, twas a new one,
But it's takin' on age mighty fast;
You can see everything that he's doin',

While the rocks and cedars flash past.
He falls, and gits wedged by a boulder,
He lays there all tremblin' and meek;
He's jimmed himself up in the shoulder—
Can't travel for over a week.

Your bed is all cactus and tatters,
Your stuff is strung out for a mile.
You reckon there's plenty the matter—
You set down to figger awhile.
There's troubles that keep a man fussin'—
There's sorrows that make his heart bleed;
But the thing that will set a man cussin'
Is to see his old pack horse stampede.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 39–40.

The Time to Decide

Did you ever stand on the ledges,
On the brink of a great plateau,
And look from their jagged edges,
On the country that lay below?
When your vision met no resistance,
And nothing to stop your gaze,
Till the mountain peaks in the distance
Stood wrapped in a purple haze.

On the winding water courses,
And the trails on the mountain sides,
Where you guided your patient horses
On your long and lonesome rides.
When you saw Earth's open pages,
And you seemed to understand,
As you gazed on the work of ages—
Rugged and rough, but grand.

There—the things you considered strongest,
And the things that you thought were great,
And for which you had striven longest—
Seemed to carry but little weight.
While the things that were always nearer—
The things that you thought were small—
Seemed to stand out grander and clearer,
As you looked from the mountain wall.

While you're gazing on such a vision.
And your outlook is clear and wide;
If you have to make a decision,
That's the time and the place to decide.
Although you return to the city
And mingle again with the throng;
Though you should be softened by pity,
Or bitter from strife and wrong.

Though others should laugh in derision,
And the trails of the past grow dim,

Yet, stick to the cool decision
That you made on the mountain's rim.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 40–41.

The Lost Mines

The tales abound of gold that's found
By lost and bewildered men—
Who cannot retrace their way to the place,
When they try to go back again.
And I heard three tales of these long-lost trails,
At the "Diamond-bar" one night—
By a fireside warm, while the winter's storm,
Was robing the ground in white.

The first was that of a refugee—
An exiled Russian Jew—
Who drifted about on land and sea,
'Till he worked as a buckaroo.
At last his health began to fail—
He started to go away;
But he lost his bearings and missed the trail—
Where he drifted, he could not say.

As the Hebrew lay in a canyon deep—
A victim of dull despair—
A buck flashed out with a graceful leap,
Then paused and began to stare.
He brought him down with a rifle shot
Through the shoulder blade and lung,
And he slid and rolled till his hind leg caught
Between two rocks, and hung.

When the rocks were broken to loose the hold,
And he lifted the injured leg,
The man discovered a piece of gold
As big as a pigeon's egg.
He pounded the rocks and tore the earth,
Till he wore his fingers down.
He had sixteen hundred dollars worth
When he got to a frontier town.

But his water was low and he had to go—
Though he looked with longing eyes;
For you can't drink nuggets of gold, you know,

And the desert don't care who dies.
He died in the crowded city's hum,
But often the tale he told—
And often he begged his friends to come
And search for the ledge of gold.

All he wished to ask if they chanced to find
This gold in the desert far,
Was. they'd help the ones he had left behind,
In the realm of the Russian Czar.
His countrymen came two by two,
From factories, shops and stores;
They copied their course from the map he drew—
On the leg of his under-drawers.

But they never found the wondrous ground,
Nor even a trace or sign.
It's as safe as the bones of Davy Jones,
And they call it the "Lost Jew Mine."
The next was a party of reckless men
Who tried to pursue a course
Beyond the reach of the cow-boy's ken,
Or the range of the desert horse.

Just one of the men returned again,
With pieces of richest rock;
When the others had failed, he found a trail—
And followed the wandering stock.
Now all of those men, save "Nigger Ben,"
Succumbed to the heat and thirst;
And he'd lost his way, when he chanced to stray
To the gold he has often cursed.

Some Indians found his inbound track
When he got to the desert's edge,
And they said if he wished, they would take him back,
To the place he had found the ledge.
They piled up sand in two different heaps,
And explained, when they were through:
"The biggest gold the Indian keeps,
And the little one goes to you."

An Indian covered the Negro's eyes—
He took him for miles and miles—
But not to the place where he found the prize—
And again he built two sand piles.
Then he gave his arm a graceful sweep,
And partially turned his head:
"The big 'un me. The little you keep.
Here gold. You fin' 'um," he said.

He disappeared, and the negro feared
He could never retrace his way.
He found no sign of the Indian's mine,
Though he made quite a lengthy stay.
Once more an Indian came to Ben,
Once more he covered his face;
'Twas a different route that he took him then,
But he came to the self-same place.

Again he searched for the Indian's gold,
And again he was doomed to fail;
Though often again this negro bold
Went out on the long-lost trail.
At last he quit, he had done his best—
He would not try again.
So his lost mine is among the rest,
And they call it "The Nigger Ben."

The next was the tale of the "Peg Leg Smith."
And that was the last of the three.
Now Peg Leg Smith was never a myth,
Whatever his mine may be.
Two men were camped near a desert spring—
One day they stood appalled
At the sight of a hideous, swaying thing,
That staggered and walked and crawled.

He was ragged and dirty as any tramp,
But his pockets were filled with gold.
The prospectors nursed him to life in their camp,
And a wonderful tale he told.
He had seen their fire the night before,
And he took it to be a lamp.

He had managed to husband his scanty store
Of strength till he reached their camp.

He knew he had found bonanza ground, '
But he knew not where it lay;
He was all bewildered and turned around,
For days he had been astray.
They followed his track to lead them back,
For that's what the three had planned;
But the whirling wind like an imp of sin,
Had buried his tracks in the sand.

Some desert rats, with lives like cats,
Went out on the lonely quest;
There were men of wealth and seekers for health,
But each one failed like the rest.
The boys from the ranch and the city street,
They each one tried in turn.
They found 'twas a game they could not beat—
One lesson they had to learn.

Still the desert smiled in her same old way,
And the sun shone brightly down,
Till he made the lights and shadows play,
On her coat of tawny brown.
She flaunted the rags of her rugged crags,
And the waste of her barren plains,
As she laughed at the men who never again
Would walk in the streets and lanes.

For the desert will give, then close her hand,
And when they return again,
She buries deep in her drifting sand—
The lives, and the dreams of men.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 41–44.

Our Boss

He started young and he drifted far—
The owner out at the Diamond-Bar.
He has cattle grazing on many a hill,
But down in his heart he's a cow-boy still.

Though other owners put on airs,
It's little for style that our boss cares;
He wears his boots and his leather chaps,
And everybody calls him "Tap."

He bandies jokes and exchanges news,
As he rides the range with his buckaroos;
He sits his horse with a careless grace,
And rides at a stockman's jogging pace.

But the horses he rides all come of a breed
That are bred for mettle and built for speed.
The thing that he really most enjoys
Is a horse round-up with a bunch of boys.

It's then he rides at a pace that kills,
Through the open flats and the rugged hills;
With spurs set close and with flying reins—
Like he rode when a boy on the Texas plains.

Or else, when he jumps big mountain steers,
That have dodged the round-up for several years—
Down comes his rope, and away they dash,
While the hoof-beats ring and the cedars crash,

Till the bellowing steer on the mountain side,
Proclaims the fact that he's roped and tied.
I have seen him riding at racing speed
Singing in front of a mad stampede—

As calmly as most old gentlemen do,
When sitting at church in a rented pew.
If he did retire and settle down
He would waste away in the sheltered town

Where he couldn't hear the cattle bawl,

The horses neigh, and the coyote's call.
He was raised on the range. and there he stayed—
One of the boys of the old brigade.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 44–45.

The Dark Horse

Some troops were stationed at a fort,
Upon a reservation,
And just to have a little sport
And lively recreation,

They got two horses that could run
And built themselves a track.
The cash these sporting troopers won
Soon grew to quite a stack.

Old “Thunderinboots,” the troopers
Had the fastest horse out west;
And “Cassin,” a horse not bad,
They kept for second best.

Young “Howling-bull” came drifting in
And lounged about the fort—
A savage with a friendly grin,
Who liked to talk of sport.

For Howling-bull had just returned
From far-off eastern schools,
And if they taught him what he learned,
His teachers were no fools.

A bunch of Crows camped near the fort
Left ’twixt dark and dawn;
The soldiers were a race-horse short—
Old Thunderinboots was gone.

The troopers followed fast and hard—
They did not find the horse.
They offered quite a big reward
To get him back, of course.

Young Howling-bull, with stolid face,
Loafed in and out each shanty.
Before a week he matched a race
With his sorrel horse “Tegante.”

They trained the troop-horse to his best,

Although it seemed absurd,
Because Tegante, with the rest,
Ran loose amongst the herd.

The redskins freely bet their furs
(They would have bet their hash);
They bet their ponies, ropes and spurs—
They hadn't any cash.

They'd get no cash, the soldiers feared,
Until that guileless soul,
The buck called "Howling-bull" appeared
And flashed a mighty roll.

The officers had much to say,
The settlers round him hovered;
They had to mortgage six months' pay
Before his bets were covered.

At last the day came for the race—
The soldiers dressed in blue;
And redskins swarmed about the place,
And all the settlers, too.

When bold young Howling-bull appeared,
He certainly looked quaint,
For man and horse were decked and smeared
With feathers, beads and paint.

Tegante wore four bright green socks—
'Twas plain enough to see,
They reached from fets and paster-locks

Clear up to hock and knee.
A rawhide thong around his jaw—
No bridle on his head—
And as he turned the people saw

His face was painted red!
All through his mane and tail was tied
Long beaded buckskin strands;
And painted all about his hide

Were marks of human hands.

A half-grown boy came on the track—
As thin as any spider;
They tossed him on Tegante's back—

He was to be the rider.
The officers at once protest—
The soldiers gather 'round;
It gives Tegante all the best of weight,

By way of thirty pounds.
But Howling-bull does not debate—
He's out today for pelf;
He scorns to quibble on the weight,

And mounts the horse himself.
He throws his blanket on the ground
And pulls his breech-clout tighter.
That suits the people all around—

The jockey's much the lighter.
Down goes the flag—away they dart!
They leap with all their strength;
But see! the jockey has the start—

He's leading by a length!
Cassin's straining every nerve—
He's close against the rail.
And as they race around the curve,

'They're running nose and tail.
'Tegante cannot win the race,
The people say, of course.
The weight, the distance, and the pace,

Will kill the grass-fed horse.
But faster still 'Tegante goes,
Until they plainly see
He travels with his painted nose

Beside the jockey's knee.
They're going at a dreadful rate—
Cassin's running strong;
But Howling-bull throws half his weight

Against that rawhide thong.
Not half a length—not half a yard—
The trooper's horse can gain;
And still the redskin surges hard

Upon Tegante's rein.
Thus down the track the struggle goes—
A cheer the soldiers fetch,
As both the horses, nose to nose,

Swing out into the stretch.
Now Howling-bull begins to gain—
Ten seconds more they'll know;
The redskin slacks his single rein

And lets Tegante go.
In vain the jockey starts to flog—
He can't increase his speed;
As birch canoe would pass a log,

Tegante take the lead.
And fleeting like a painted ghost,
He leaves the thoroughbred,
And whizzes past the winning post

Some three good lengths ahead.
The crowd is gone—the fort is still—
The soldiers all are cross.
Six months must pass before

They will recover from their loss.
They're glum and cowed like green recruits
A shadow on each face,
For first they lost old Thunderinboots,

And then they lost the race.
Thus matters dragged on for awhile,
When Howling-bull appeared.
His heart seemed free from wicked guile,

And cheerfully he leered.
Old Thunderinboots the savage led,
And what do you suppose?
He paid a heavy price, he said,

To get him from the Crows.
Next morning, 'twas the groom, you see,
Excited their suspicion;
Hysterical he seemed to be,

And in a wild condition.
“Come here, come here!” he loudly cried,
“And see what’s to be seen.
Oh, Lord! that blessed Injun lied—

This water’s all turned green.
It happened when I washed his legs;
And when I washed his head,
Why, just as sure as eggs is eggs.

The water all turned red.
“He and Tegante both are sorrel—
As like as twin and brother.
In fact, 'twould make two strangers quarrel

To tell the one from 'tother.
He stole our horse off of the place—
He took him from the stall.
'Twas Thunderinboots that won that race,

And not his horse at all.”
The curses called on Howling-bull
Were wicked, weird and strange;
But he was safe, with pockets full,

Out in the mountain range.
No pang of conscience or remorse
Disturbed his savage breast,
Because he’d raced their fastest horse

Against their second best.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 45 and 50–52.

The Gray Wolf

The stockman lay in his blanket bed—
We were sleeping, he and I.
We each one wakened—he raised his head,
At the sound of a gray wolf's cry.

He knew the sound of that dismal yell—
He knew that it boded ill;
For that long-drawn wail like a howl from Hell.
Was the cry of a wolf at his kill.

Next day we found near a ledge of stone,
Where a yearling gamely fought;
The wolf had torn the flesh from the bone,
To feast while the meat was hot.

He had left his victim torn and scarred,
Though it quivered still with life;
Then the stockman's eye grew bright and hard,
Till it shone like the blade of a knife.

He carefully laid a line of traps—
He tracked with a ready gun.
Said he: "We will get him some day, perhaps,"
But the gray wolf always won.

He seemed to wander and rove at will
Through the rugged, arid land;
And whenever he chose he made his kill,
Regardless of mark or brand.

His great wide track was everywhere,
And I saw his victims bleed
Till I cursed the heart, the hide and the hair.
And the spawn of the gray wolf's breed.

So this warfare of cunning—weird and strange—
Went on from day to day;
And at night, far up in the mountain range,
Rang the powerful, deep-toned bay.

One summer morning, just after dawn,

I found a sign quite plain;
For one of the stockman's traps was gone.
With the drag and the heavy chain.

We saw the tracks of his first mad rush,
Then the marks of tooth and fang,
Where he tore the earth and broke the brush,
Wherever the clog would hang.

He was close by the bank of a dried-up stream—
He did not whine or flinch.
His eye shone hard with an evil gleam,
And he did not retreat an inch.

For a moment we gazed when our prey we found,
But he silently faced we two.
With never a sound he stood his ground,
And died like a rustler true.

The stockman's hand gave an easy sweep—
He balanced his heavy gun.
The pistol spoke with a bark and a leap,
And the great gray wolf was done.

He had lived in that beautiful coat of hair,
Unhampered in race or fight;
Immune to the desert's heat and glare,
Or the storms on the coldest night.

Useless, at last, were those padded feet,
With tendons that never tire;
On the roughest ledge they were sure and fleet—
They could race over bog and mire.

And the yellow eyes with their evil gleam,
That could see by night and day;
And the deep strong chest that had hurled each scream,
Or driven his deep-toned bay.

And the cruel head so full—so proud—
That could plan with such fiendish skill;
I wondered a creature thus endowed,
Should only be meant for ill.

We stripped the hide from his body lean—
I marveled at what I saw:
The wonderful muscles, long and clean,
And the powerful neck and jaw.

The great jaw teeth that could crush the bone,
Or hang at their owner's will;
They were sharp as the edge of a jagged stone,
And the fangs that could slash and kill.

The shoulder wide, and the mighty limb,
That could last through the longest race;
And yet, with all, he was lithe and trim—
A model of strength and grace.

He had used his gifts as their giver meant—
He was not endowed for good.
He, true to the last, and when he went—
He died, as a gray wolf should.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 47–49.

The Parada Shark

Was you ever out herdin' the "Prather,"
On a beautiful clear summer day,
When the cattle all stayed right together,
And none of 'em wanted to stray?

With yer pardner and one other feller—
The grass was so thick and so green—
The breeze was so soothin' and meller,
And you'd jest changed your clothes and felt clean?

You was feelin' plum elegant mental,
An' had et a big dinner beside,
An' yer half-broken hoss was so gentle
He was like a pet pony to ride.

An' the clouds was so white they was gleamin'
While a-driftin' around in the sky,
An' you watched 'em and got sort o' dreamin',
There was pictures up there, betcher eve!

A castle that had a big steeple,
A bird that had beautiful wings,
An' animals, houses an' people—
An' oh! jest a whole lot of things!

An' a plum nach'l lady—but bigger—
In wonderful loose-fittin' clothes;
She shore had a mighty fine figger—
You sort of admired her pose.

You felt like the world was "Sta bueno,"
Or a little bit better than that;
Then you thought you were on a volcano,
An' you flew out from under your hat.

You grabbed for the lady an' castle.
But somehow yer arms didn't hit,
An' you found you had started to wrestle
With a greasewood that grewed where you lit.

The boys chased yer hoss till they ketched him—

You was feelin' all shook up an' cheap.
They'd a plenty to say when they fetched him,
'Bout watchin' you goin' to sleep.

Did you ever let sech a thing happen—
I'm willin' to gamble you did—
Let your hoss go to sleep an' be nappin',
And get bucked off—just like a kid?

And wake up all dusty and shakin'—
But then that's the way with most dreams:
Most folks gits a sudden awakin'—
Things ain't always jest what they seems.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), p. 49.

The Long-Eared Bull

The long-eared bull was three years old,
He was swift, cunning, strong and bold;
His horns were wide, and his neck was full,
And he walked with pride—did the long-eared bull.

He bellowed the notes of his challenge call
Till they echoed back from the canyon wall.
One day there chanced to hear him sing,
A waddy who dangled a wicked string.

When he caught a glimpse of the singer's ears,
His lips went shut like a pair of shears.
They were both untouched and they stood out wide,
So he knew that no brand adorned that hide.

He made quite sure that his cinch was tight,
For he knew he was starting a full-grown fight.
He built a loop for a hasty swing,
And spurred his horse toward the mountain king.

Away they went like a pair of deer—
The buckaroo and the big long-ear.
He cut down the distance—yard by yard—
Till the bull found out he was crowded hard.

He thought he'd retreated far enough.
And he whirled about with a charge and snuff.
The cow-horse dodged, with a sidewise leap;
The cow-boy threw, and he caught him deep.

He got the bull with a shot-pouch hold,
On the ground the horse and the rider rolled.
The puncher saw that it was no use,
So he dropped his dallies and turned him loose.

The bull was off like a prairie gale,
With a dragging rope and a waving tail.
The cow-boy hung his head in shame—
He had lost his rope, and his horse was lame;

His hands were skinned and his clothes were torn;

He had gone for wool, and had come back shorn.
For if either of them got the wool,
The honors lay with the long-eared bull.

Now a fat old cow-man came out one day,
On a gentle old flea-bitten gray;
And this wise old cow-man had a hunch,
He could humor him in, if he took the bunch.

So he worked them along at an easy pace,
And avoided all signs of a fight or race.
He kept well back and he circled wide,
To corral the bull and to brand his hide;

But just when they got where the brush was thick,
The long-eared bull threw a trump on the trick.
When they got in the open the bull was gone,
And the rest of the bunch was traveling on.

A beardless youngster, lithe and slim,
Was riding one day by the canyon's rim—
The happiest youngster in the land,
For just one week he had owned a brand.

He saw the bull, and how he smiled,
For the soul of a cow-man was in that child.
He descended the hill with a cheerful heart,
For little he knew of the fight he'd start.

His horse had been ridden some before,
But was hardly wise to the hackamore.
Yet he felt his pulses throb with hope
As he tied the end of his old grass rope.

Well over his saddle horn he humped,
And took to the race when the long-ear jumped.
He was one of the kind that never lean back—
He grabbed his horse and pitched him the slack.

He rapped his flanks with the ringing steel,
While the long-eared bull shook a nasty heel.
He built a loop that was big and wide—
He made a throw, but the broncho shied,

And sat right back and buried his tail;
Then the button thought he had hooked a whale.
Down went the horse—the youngster fell—
And he used some words that don't print well.

His face was white, but his blood was up,
And he stayed with the fight like a bull-dog pup.
As they buck and bellow, plunge and pull—
The broncho horse, and the long-eared bull.

For the rope was tied and the saddle big
Was cinched with the old-time “rimmy” rig.
Then the kid gave a squeal of joy and thanks,
As the rope went under the long-ear's flanks.

The horse went bucking to the right;
To the left the long-ear took his flight.
When they took up the slack the two of them flopped
Right down on their backs, and the old rope popped.

But the kid was there with an agile spring,
His teeth still clinched on his “hoggin' string.”
He won by a hair, but he did not fail,
For he got his hold on the long-ear's tail.

He tied him down, and he swelled with pride,
As he run his brand on the glossy hide.
The boy has lived to be old and gray;
He has been successful in every way.

It wasn't by luck—it wasn't by pull—
But the spirit that branded the long-eared bull,
In spite of the fall that ended his ride,
And the whirlwind fight on the mountain side.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 53–55.

Bonnie

There is many a horse on the Diamond-Bar force,
They are strong, they are sturdy and tall;
But when they start riding the cut-out,
It's Bonnie that's king of them all.
He's a pet and a wonder for beauty,
But I'll sum him all up in a word:
Whenever he starts doing duty,
They never get back to the herd.

He is sleek and he's fatter than butter—
Nobody rides him but the boss.
He only just works as a cutter,
For he's a professional hoss.
You line him out after a critter,
And almost before she has stirred,
He maps out a course that will fit her,
And she never gets back to the herd.

They can jump; they can scurry like rabbits;
They can slip through the bunch like a rat;
But he don't worry over their habits,
For Bonnie can dodge like a cat.
When they start they are due for the cut-out—
A failure has never occurred.
They can plunge, they can bore, they can butt out,
But they never get back to the herd.

He don't get excited or nervous;
He doesn't get lazy or shirk;
He always is ready for service,
For he saves up his strength for the work.
He's a bundle of nerve, brain and muscle;
He's as light on his feet as a bird;
The joy of his life is the tussle—
And they never get back to the herd.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 55–56.

Between the Lines

There is something I'm not forgetting,
But it's something I could not say.
I could not arrange the setting
And the scene in the proper way.
The air of the desert and mountain,
The smoke of the far-out camp;
The whispering voice of the night wind,
And the picketed horse's tramp;

The tread of the moving cattle,
The song that the riders croon;
The swing and the sway of the saddle
That goes to the lilt of the tune.
The race after wild young horses,
That beats any hunt for game;
And the battle of wits and forces,
Until the wild brutes are tame.

For the strong young steeds are fighters,
That are raised on the hills and the plains:
They must learn to balance their riders—
You must teach them to answer the reins.
It calls for your skillful riders—
Your hardest, strongest men.
The buck and the baw, the sickening fall,
And the whirl of the broncho pen.

The rush of the summer branding,
When the work is rough and hard
Beyond all understanding,
And the shivering nights on guard;
The quiet night in the summer,
When the air is damp and warm,
When you hear the rumbling thunder,
And watch the approaching storm.

When the heavens pour like a funnel,
And the devil his own can claim;
When the sky is black as a tunnel,

Then white, with the lightning's flame!
It is then that the weak go under—
It calls for a hardy breed:
The shattering crash of the thunder.
And the rush of the mad stampede.

The terrible grip of the blizzard,
When the horse and the rider reel;
The curse of the snow-blind puncher.
And the frost-bites that throb and peel.
The nights you hate to remember,
Out in a line camp alone,
When the gray wolves howl in the timber,
And the perishing cattle moan.

You tried to keep track of the slaughter,
But the frost and the storm were kind;
How you chopped the ice from the water,
And prayed for an early spring.
Or down in the desert regions,
And the ranges far to the south,
Where the cattle swarm in legions,
And the stockman is caught in the drouth;

Springs are steadily failing—
Almost no place to go;
Coyotes are always wailing,
Buzzards are circling low.
What once were strong young cattle,
Are only suffering wrecks—
So thin that they seem to rattle
When you stick your knife in their necks.

Cattle too weak to gather—
You must try it although you fail;
Holding them up in the "Prather,"
"Chousing" them over the trail.
On every side they are crying:
"Take your cattle away;
Half of my own are dying—
No grass and water for strays.""

Cow-boys in clothing tattered,
Faces and hands brush scarred;
Saddles and chaps all battered,
Horses look gaunt and hard.
The heat and the dust that smothers;
The tired-out horse that lags;
The calves that have lost their mothers,
Wailing along in the drags.

That's why I'm giving you warning—
There's something I could not tell:
The joys as clear as the morning—
The tortures akin to hell.
They never will reach outsiders,
Who were raised in the town's confines;
But they're here for the hard old riders,
Who can read them between the lines.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 56–58.

Who Told the Biggest

One night a bunch of buckaroos
Were gathered round the fire;
And each one wished to air his views
Before he should retire.

They talked about the world's advance,
They argued on reforms
Until somebody, just by chance,
Began to talk of storms.

"One time," remarked old Angus Greame,
The year I worked for Law,
In Utah, why a cloudburst came—
The worst I ever saw.

"It washed the soil all off the knobs,
The boulders jumped and bounded,
And seven fellers lost their jobs,
On 'count of bein' drowned.

"It rained so hard, Lord bless your souls,
That when it let up, why,
The water from the gopher holes
Rebounded six foot high."

A lank Missourian gave a shrug,
And slowly shook his head;
He bit a chew from off his plug,
As if he chewed on bread.

"I 'low," he said, and then he spat
A dozen feet or so;
"It rained some down where I was at
A couple of years ago.

"It rained an hour, mighty hard;
It drowned our Jersey bull.
The wagon stood out in the yard—
It rained the box most full.

"It lacked of comin' to the top,

An inch or thereabout;
I reckon 'twould have filled it up,
But I'd left the end-gate out."

"I'll tell you what, the fact remains,"
We heard a deep voice say;
"Our blizzards sure beats all your rains,
Back home in Ioway.

"One time a blizzard hit our town,
Along in Nineteen-two;
The stuff that wasn't fastened down
Jest riz right up and flew.

"The roof came off the City Hall,
And tumbled all around.
It blowed our mule agin a wall,
Ten feet above the ground.

"It blowed so hard that I'll declare
You couldn't git your breath;
It held that pore old mule up there
Until he starved to death."

One boy rubbed old John Baize's head—
A smile upon his face:
"That's what that jackass got," he said,
"For stayin' in one place."

"That's right," replied old Johnny Baize,
"It often happens so.
I stay where I was born and raised,
I aint no jackass, though."

A boy from Arizona spoke:
"I'll tell you something strange:
It's sure the truth, an' not no joke—
It happened on this range.

"I had a yellow dog called 'Snap.'
One day I tied him up;
He opened up his mouth to gap—
A whirlwind hit that pup.

“It picked him up and turned him ‘round;
It spun him all about,
And left him layin’ on the ground,
Jest turned plum inside out.”

A man from Kansas then spoke up:
“I don’t exactly know
About a whirlwind and a pup—
I know how cyclones go.

“My Pa and Ma took up a claim,
Along in Ninety-three,
With sister Sue and sister Mame,
And brother Bill and me.

“We built a house and barn and well—
The place did look immense.
We broke up sod for quite a spell,
And built some wire fence.

“And then, one day a cyclone hit——
I heard our old cow beller.
The house went up an’ never lit.
And left us in the cellar.

“The barn got up and danced a jig.
The wire fence broke loose;
Our little poll-and-chiny pig
Flew circles like a goose.

“Down came a hoss and then a boot,
And then a spotted houn’;
It blowed our well plum out by root,
And turned it upside down.

“My mother fainted from the scare,
So did my sister Sue;
We hadn’t any water there,
We couldn’t bring ’em to.

“Us boys, we started on the run,
Close follered by the houn’!
But when we got there we was done—
The well was upside down.

“I had a bucket, Bill a cup—
I don’t know where we got ’em.
We found the well was wrong side up—
The water in the bottom.

“We couldn’t reach it if we tried;
Dad got to lookin’ sadder.
My brother Bill sot down and cried;
I run to git a ladder.

“And jest as I was gettin’ back
The lightnin’ hit the well,
Right on the bottom side—ker-whack—
And blowed it all to—Well.

“That’s jest about the worst cyclone
I ever chanced to see.
We used to talk of it at home—
My brother Bill and me.”

“That may be so.” said old man Carns;
“Of course, I won’t deny
Some of you fellers jest told yarns,
But someone told a lie.”

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 58–61.

The Stampede

The afterglow fades, and the daylight is failing,
Deep gloom settles over the valley so wide;
The slow-moving column of cattle goes trailing;
The men who were silent, now sing as they ride.
For the cattle are nervous—they break and they rally;
They've been getting worse since the set of the sun.
They're used to the mountains, they fear the wide valley;
They're off of their range, and they're ready to run.

The leaders break back, and the herd ceases drifting;
The cordon of riders looks pitifully thin
For the army of steers that are surging and shifting,
But the boys from the mountains are holding them in.
The horses are ready and up on their mettle;
They know what it means, and they're giving them room.
But slowly the herd is beginning to settle—
The cow-boys are bedding them down in the gloom.

“Oh, beat the drum lowly, and play the fife slowly,”
Two cow-punchers sing as they meet and turn back.
One jolly vaquero sings “Billy Vaniero”;
Another one sings of the “Tumble Down Shack.”
You hear the old tune, with its sad wailing minor,
Of “Bury me not in the lone Prairee,”
While fainter from distance, but clearer and finer,
Rings out the old melody, “Mother Machree.”

The hours drag on and the cattle are sleeping,
Except for the singing it's silent as death.
Through the yuccas and greasewood, the night wind comes creeping,
So softly you scarce hear the sound of its breath.
A gopher hole does it—a horse makes a blunder—
He recovers himself, but he snorts as he leaps.
The cattle are off with a rumble like thunder,
And over the valley the avalanche sweeps.

Race! Race; For the front; every man that's behind them
Get out on the point and help mill the stampede.
The holes and the brush, and the ditches, don't mind them;

And ride for your life, if you're caught in the lead.
There's tons upon tons in their onrushing forces—
These wild mountain cattle, unruly and large.
They're bigger than mules and they're stronger than horses,
And swift in their rush as a cavalry charge.

The well-seasoned riders are not a bit tardy—
The cattle are quick, but the men are the same.
On tough mountain horses, sure-footed and hardy,
The cow-boys are taking a stack in the game.
They are skillful and willing—they start the herd milling;
They circle around them, they sing and they call.
The mad pace grows slower, the dust clouds sink lower;
At last they stop running—they're starting to bawl.

They halt and start backing; they jam—they are packing;
They stop, they are standing all silent and still!
Don't crowd them! Be steady! Keep wide, but be ready;
They may settle down, but they're likely to spill.
A steer snuffs and bellows; two dare-devil fellows
Are caught in the front, but they're off at full speed.
You can hear them both singing—their voices are ringing—
Grim death's at their heels, but they're crowding the lead.

The herd starts to scatter, but that doesn't matter—
It's everyone now to do what he thinks best;
In front or behind them, they race where they find them—
They do what they can and turn over the rest.
At last the light comes, and the stars have all faded;
The bleary-eyed riders look haggard and drawn.
Their strong wiry horses are weary and jaded,
But slowly they gather the herd in the dawn.

On comes the “Remuda” and everyone changes;
They breakfast in relays—they're back on their way.
It's little they worry—these boys of the ranges—
It's just what a cow-puncher calls a long day.
They are everyone used to that sort of a battle;
It is just a hard night; they are glad it is gone.

It is nothing so long as they don't lose their cattle,
And everyone's there when they meet in the dawn.

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 61–62.

The New Mexico Stray

'Twas about a year ago, he came from New Mexico—
He was seasoned to the mountains and the plains;
Almost anybody knew that he was a Buckaroo
By the way he set his hoss and held his reins.
And he seemed to understand ropin' stock and readin' hands,
And at chasin' hosses he displayed some skill!
But one night the conversation led to bets an' speculation—
That a certain hoss could deal him out a spill;

For he wasn't very big, rode a centre-fire rig,
'Though he seemed to be a likely looking lad.
So they cut the boy the hoss, just to see him come across,
For they wanted to discover what he had.
Well, the stranger placed his leather safely on the hoss's weathers,
And he stepped right up aboard him with a grin;
Oh, the crowd was sure in luck when the hoss began to buck,
For they tangled in the air to beat the wind.

Yes, old hoss—he humped and curled,
Then went up, came down and whirled,
On a piece of ground no bigger than a dime;
But the stranger kept a straddle of his centre-fire saddle,
And his quirt and spurs was workin' over-time.
Well, that made us all decide that perhaps the boy could ride—
We were sorry when we found he could not stay;
He was with us half a year, and we wish he still was here,

But some outfit has a cow-boy anyway.
And we'll meet again some day, in some outfit far away,
When I go to meet the round-up with my string,
He'll come joggin' in astraddle of his center-fire saddle,
With his hook-down spurs that have the wicked ring.
Then we'll stop and have a smoke, and we'll gossip and we'll joke,
'Bout the places and the people that we know;
For I'll have you understand that the average cattle hand

Don't forget the times and friends of long ago.

The Cow-Boy's If

If you can keep your head when all the cattle
Are breaking out and running through the brush;
If you can work like mad and not get rattled,
And ride a tired horse, but hold the rush;
If you can ride for long and weary hours,
In summer storms that come a pouring down,
And then pay no attention to these showers,
But wrestle calves upon the muddy ground.

If you can work in mountains rough and brushy,
Or through the cactus on the desert sand;
Or wooded river bottoms, soft and mushy,
And anywhere you go still make a hand;
If you can eat your breakfast in the dawning,
And work as long as you can see the light,
Then crawl out of your blankets, tired and yawning
And take your turn at standing guard at night.

If you have no regard for how you're looking,
And seldom bathe, and let your beard grow dense;
If you are good at butchering and cooking,
If you can shoe a horse or mend a fence;
If you can eat great gobs of beef and liver,
Or run a horse on any kind of ground;
If you can swim a herd across a river,
And not get any cows or horses drowned.

If you can race and head stampeded cattle,
Through darkness, pouring rain and pelting hail;
And then stay up all night to work and battle—
Or rope and tie a steer and seldom fail;
If you can learn to do team work with others,
Or winter brand upon the range alone,
Or trail in heat and dust that almost smothers,
Or ride a bucking horse and not get thrown.

If you can catch a yearling calf and flank it,
Work with rope-burned hands, but never flinch;
If you can kick the snow off of your blanket,

And whistle as you pull your frozen cinch;
If you can shoot and track just like a trapper,
If you can mend a riding gear that's wrecked;
And be good-natured, but still be a scrapper,
That anywhere he goes commands respect.

If you can fix a sweaty blanket
So it won't hurt your horse to ride him hard;
If you can spend your pay and never bank it,
If you can stand to win or lose at cards;
If you can load a horse with various matters,
And throw your diamond hitch and pull the slack,
And fix it so it never slips nor scatters,
Or so it will not hurt the horse's back.

If you can read a brand far in the distance,
Or work in country strange, and never stray;
If you can do all this without assistance,
And never quit the game, and stay, and stay;
If you can live on water that is dirty—
Too thick to swallow and too thin to chew—
You'll be an old man by the time you're thirty;
But then, my son, you'll be a cow-boy, too!

Publication. *Rhymes of the Ranges* (Hollywood: Earl Hays, 1924), pp. 63–64.

WESTERN POEMS (1935)

Book Two | The complete forty-poem Katherine Field collaboration

Turnin' the Summer Hosses Out to Graze

Now the summer time is over and the winter time is here,
You can feel it in the cold and frosty days.
You have done put up the bull boards when you shipped the last old steer,
And you've turned the summer hosses out to graze.

If you watch you'll often see 'em stringin' up along the pass,
Mostly led by old white "Tarp" and "Pinto Bill."
They have been down to the water and they're goin' back fur grass,
When the warm sun hits the south side of the hill.

There is "Jug" and "Buck" and "Brownie" and that cuttin' pony "Chow."
Them there laigs of his ain't longer than a duck's;
He's been in the work all summer and he's kind and gentle now,
But you wait till spring and see the way he bucks.

Yes, they watch the sun a shinin' and they watch the bright stars blink,
All that bunch of hosses, blacks and sorrels and bays.
And you know I sometimes wonder what a cow hoss really thinks
When you turn your summer hosses out to graze.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 9–10. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Savin' the Baby Calf

Now a cowboy may be sort of rough and ready, so to speak,
And he might sometimes knock big fightin' stock around.
But when he finds a little calf that's plum wore out and weak,
He won't ride away and leave it on the ground.

He jest pulls it on his saddle and he drives the mother too,
Although it ain't a pleasant way to ride.
That there calf is stretched and straddled till there's nothin' he can do,
'Cept to bawl and switch his tail and twitch his hide.

The wind is cold and bitter and there's coyotes on the range,
And that calf jest like enough would soon be dead.
So he reckons them two critters would do better with a change
Where they'd git some hay in onderneath a shed.

I reckon that a cowboy might sometimes git sorta rough
When he deals with buckin' hosses or big steers;
But inside of him he's got a streak that isn't quite so tough,
Though he won't admit it in a hundred years.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), p. 11. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

When Winter's Nigh Done

There's some spots where the snow has been melted away.
There's a few early calves with the cows.
I noticed a bunch on the hillside today
Where their mothers was eatin' some browse.

There's a little more heat when you git in the sun,
And there ain't so much sting in the wind.
You can tell that the winter is mighty nigh done,
Fer the wild ducks is travelin' agin.

My red onderflannins is showin' some wear.
My boots will soon need some new soles.
My mackinaw looks like it done had its share—
It's started a couple of holes.

The feed at the home ranch is gettin' down low,
But at that it ain't been a bad year,
Fer it won't be long now till the grass starts to grow,
And the spring time will soon be right here.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), p. 12. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Springtime

They're roundin' the hosses up agin and startin' the work fer spring.
They're gittin' the old remuda in and cuttin' the hands their string.
A couple of boys is out from town and one of 'em talks a lot,
You wait till he lets the hammer down on a few of the mounts he's got.

All winter long they've been runnin' out, they know every rock and trail.
They are bad as the broncs, or jest about, and wild as a bunch of quail.
When you jump a bunch it's shore a race, they're makin' you play yore stack.
You ride till the wind shore whips yore face and hammers yore hat brim back.

But it won't be long till they're all smoothed down, that is, as a gen'ral thing.
The bad uns will go to Sandy Brown; he's ridin' a rough hoss string.
Fer me, he's welcome to all that kind; I figger it is his loss.
There's nothin' that suits me half so fine as a gentle, broke hoss.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 13–14. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Matching Wits

If you mess with a broncho yore likely to find
He has got a whole bunch of ideas in his mind.
And the one that he keeps in the handiest place
Is to try and git both his front feet in yore face.

He's skeert and he's mad and he's ready to fight.
He will strike, he will kick, he will butt and he'll bite.
He circles around you a trompin' plum high,
He aims to git loose and he's goin' to try.

You rope his front feet, he goes high in the air,
When he lights on the ground his front feet isn't there.
You git onto his head with a hacamore too,
And you git him blindfolded before you git through.

You smother his nose and he gits on his feet;
If he only could see he'd be nasty to meet.
But you savvy a trick that will make him stay put:
Before you onblind him you tie up one foot.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 15–16. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Flankin'

When a feller starts a flankin', it don't seem much like work;
He doesn't keer how much them calves can jump and bawl and jerk.
There's some of them is husky and there's some of them is small,
But he'd better stop to figger he must rassle with them all.

'Tain't the fust nor second calf, it's long about the tenth,
When a feller starts to reckon that he'd better save his strength.
They'll mostly keep a settin' back and keep the rope well stretched,
But if they dodge and git some slack they ain't so easy ketched.

Perhaps you notice now and then one kicks you on the shin,
And now and then yo're keerless and you lose a little skin,
Because there's little rocks and sticks a layin' all around,
And they don't sweep off no special place to hold a calf down.

So when the next hand takes his turn you might complain,
But yo're glad to put yo're spurs back on and ride again.
Is flankin' work? Well now I hope it keeps you busy some,
In case you go right down the rope and take 'em as they come.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 17–18. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

High an' Wicked

Wien they cut you out a buckner
why the boys all gathers 'round
Fer to see the hull performance
when you let the hammer down,
They will help you while you saddle
and they ear him down you bet,
Till they git you up a straddle
and you tell 'em that yore set.

Then they jump away and holler
and they hit him with their hat,
And he bucks plum high and wicked
weavin' crooked like a bat.
When he hits the ground he shakes you,
then he lurches though the air—
You cain't see that broncho no place
but you shore can feel he's there.

Now you aim to show that critter
they's a cow boy on his back
So you rake him down the shoulders
and you pitch the cuss the slack.
Then you show the other fellers
how you fan 'em with yore lid,
And the old hoss bucks and bellers
while you hollar like a kid.

Now yore gittin' kinda dizzy
and yore feelin' sorter shook;
You was sartin you could ride him
but you might have been mistook.
But his jumps begin to weaken
and at last his head appears;
It's a welcome sight old cowboy,
is a buckin' hosse's ears.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 19–20. Collated against the clean 1998 transcription.

Challengin' the Trail

In the hot August days when you feel the sun blaze
Till it mighty nigh cuts through yore hat,
Way out in advance little dust devils dance,
While mirages show plain on the flat.

And you've a long ways to go so you ride along slow,
Then yore hoss gives a jump to one side;
You was still on his back when he lit in new tracks,
But he nearly went out of his hide.

The hoss ain't to blame, you'd a done jest the same.
There's a rattlesnake claimin' the trail.
He's a settin' right there with his head in the air,
And a playin' a tune with his tail.

He's a pizen bad snake but he give you a break,
If he did make you draw a quick breath.
It ain't treatin' him square but you cain't leave him there,
So you git down and chunk him to death.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 21–22. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Movin' to Winter Range

Way up along the mountain side and up on the mesas high,
You watch the silent shadows glide as the clouds go driftin' by.
The leaves on the brush turns red and brown. It's fall up there you know,
And it's time to bring the cattle down; it won't be long till the snow.

Back down to the winter range agin; they have been up there since spring.
You must move 'em out or they'll git snowed in; jest hear the cow boys sing.
They reckon it ain't so bad at that; they're travelin' right along.
The hosses and cows and steers is fat and the calves is big and strong.

A lot of them old cows knows the road. They're point and walkin' ahead.
They're a goin' back down just like they knowed, as if they'd been talkin'.
But man, if them steers knowed what was ahead they'd give it another look.
It won't be long till they'll all be dead and hangin' up by the hook.

The fall is the cow man's harvest time; it's the work that makes and pays,
And the cow boy shore earns every dime he draws in the summer days.
September is when the fall begins; it won't be long till the snow,
And so they are driftin' the cattle in to the winter range below.

Publication. *Western Poems* (*Los Angeles: Western Livestock Journal, 1935*), pp. 23–24. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Cuttin' Out the Calves

Well, how them purty little calves has sorter come to grief.
A lot of them is shipped away and et fer baby beef.
But if they don't git shipped away they got to leave their ma;
They got to quit a drinkin' milk and larn to eat and chaw.

Any time a feller thinks they're easy separated,
He'd orta try to cut 'em out and he'll git eddicated.
You cain't tell what a calf will do—he's allus actin' crazy.
I've often thought, twixt me and you, his mind was sorta hazy.

And then a old cow ain't like that. I needn't to explain;
I've seen some heads in onder hats that didn't have her brains.
A crazy calf and foxy cow, when once you git 'em started,
I aim to tell you here and now can pull a lot of tricks.

They make a cuttin' pony sweat; they make a cowboy sore.
They git yore temper overhet and rile you more and more.
You stop and think it ain't so bad, and afterwards you laugh,
But man, it mostly makes you mad before you cut that calf.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 25–26. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

After the Fall Roundup

Now the summer work is over and the wagon's pullin' in,
And we've said good bye to fellers that we mightn't see agin,
Fer a cowboy don't write letters so we mighty soon lose track
Of the boys that stops and works a while and never does come back.

When yore clothes is soter tattered and yore hat brim sags and flops,
And yore boots is wore and battered, them that had the fancy tops,
When the owners and the bosses and the hands is most all in,
And them strings of summer hosses is slowed up and lookin' thin.

When them thin clouds start a trailin' through the soft and pleasant sky,
And you watch old buzzard sailin' soter useless way up high.
And it makes the toughest cow boy soter study after all,
When he's draggin' with the wagon to the home ranch in the fall.

Fer he cain't help but remember that most cow boys don't git old
And he'll get to one November when he cain't stand work and cold;
He shore knows that he'll be sorry when he gits like you and me,
Jest an old man tellin' stories 'bout how good he used to be.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 27–28. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

The Cowboys' Christmas Dance

Winter is here and it ain't so nice tendin'
The feeders and choppin' ice.
Nasty weather to stir about.
Cold in the mornin's a gittin' out.
Puts a sting in your ears and nose;
Gotta watch out or you'll freeze yore toes.
Blowin' your breath on a frosty bit.
Makes you feel like you want to quit.

You like one part of it anyway,
That's when you git yore Christmas day.
Plenty of feed and a right good chance
To shake yore feet at a country dance.
Fiddles a playin', jest watch 'em go.
"Aleman left an' doce do!"
Don't keer none fer the cold and storms.
Dancin' around you soon git warm.

Winter time but it ain't so bad.
When it comes around yore sorter glad.
Even though it's nasty weather,
Folks has a chance to git together.
And plenty of folks that was half way mad
Found out their neighbors was not as bad.
Yes, lots of trouble is checked in advance
By a sociable crowd at a Christmas dance.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 29–30. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

The Purebred Bull

A social neighbor of mine not long ago
Bought a Hereford bull at the livestock show.
He sez to his hands, “We aim to try
And raise some cattle that folks will buy.

“This here breedin’ of scrubby stock
Is what puts cow men on the rocks.
You have to mess with several head
To git the price of one thoroughbred.

“I’ve got this idee in my mind:
Raise fewer head of a better kind.
A herd of scrubs is very well,
But what have you got when you try to sell?

“I aim to improve my herd a lot.
Jest look at this Hereford bull I got.
We’ll git some more in a year or so,
And it won’t be long till the blood will show.

“There’s a heap to raisin’ cows I’ve found,
More than brandin’ and tyin’ ’em down.
You greasy sackers know your stuff,
But this thoroughbred can’t be treated rough.

“He’s as gentle and tame as a dog.
I’ve found purebreds ain’t made to be knocked and choused around.
And so I’m a tellin’ you plain and straight,
The hand that does it will git the gate.”

That night in the bunk house Long Jim spoke:
“This purebred bull is shore a joke.
Jest stop and figger a passel of stock
That can’t travel faster than a walk.

“And a bull with a halter on! What next?
The cattle pretty soon will be wearin’ specs.

But fer business and profit the boss is right;
He'll make more dough by a whale of a sight."

Publication. *Western Poems* (*Los Angeles: Western Livestock Journal, 1935*), pp. 31–32. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

That Little Blue Roan

Mast all of you boys have rode hosses' like that;
He wasn't too thin and he never got fat,
His ears always up; he had bright wicked eyes
And don't you forgit he was plenty cow wise.

The old breed that had a moustache on his lip
He was high at the wethers and low at the hip,
His head and his fets and his pasters was black,
And a stripe of the same run the len'th of his back.

Cold mornin's he'd buck and he allus would kick;
No hoss for a kid or a man that was sick.
But Lord what a bundle of muscle and bone,
A hoss for a cowboy that little blue roan.

For an after noon hoss for workin' the herd,
He could turn any thing but a lizzard or bird.
He could pull a rope and the way he could squat:
'He could hold any critter when once he got sot.

And for ropin' outside? How that hoss could move out,
He was to 'em before they knowed what 'twas about,
And runnin' down hill didn't faize him aytall.
He was like a buck goat and he never did fall.

One day in the foothills he gave me a break.
He saved me from makin' an awful mistake.
I was ridin along at a show, easy pace.
Takin' stock of the cattle that grazed in that place.

When I spied a big heifer without any brand.
How the boys ever missed her I don't understand;
For none of the stock in that country was wild.
It was like takin' candy away from a child.

She never knowed just what I had on my mind.
'Til I bedded her down at the end of my twine,
And wropped her toes up in my old hoggin' string
And was buildin' a fire to heat up my ring.

I figgered, you see, I was there all alone,

'Til I happened to glance at that little blue roan.
He seemed to be usin' his nostrils and ears,
And I knowed right away there was somebody near.

Instead of my brand, well, I run on another,
I used the same brand that was on the calf's mother.
For my hoss he was watchin' a bunch of pinon,
And I shore took a hint from that little blue roan.

I ontied her feet, pulled her up by the tail,
With a kick on the rump for to make the calf sail.
I had branded her proper and marked both her ears
When out of the pinons two cow men appears.

They both turned the heifer and got a good look
While I wrote the brand down in my old tally book,
There was nothin' to do so they rode up and spoke,
And we all three set down for a sociable smoke.

The one owned the critter I'd happened to brand.
He told me his name and we grinned and shook hands.
Which he mightn't have done if he only had known,
The warnin' I got from that little blue roan.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 33–35. Collated against the clean 1998 transcription.

The Livestock Show

The man that's fond of critters ort to see the livestock show,
Where the judges stand the critters up in rows.
Which ones ort to git the prizes is a thing them judges know,
'Cause most everything that's there is mighty close.

The rodeo, too, with its hosses and steers,
The wickedest buckers that's happened in years,
The riders and ropers, the best to be found,
They all gather in from the country around.

It's purty to watch 'em a judgin' the stock;
Them critters so fat that they cain't hardly walk.
The owners and judges don't always agree,
But the judges has mostly the proper idee.

Yes, I like to see the stock show and I go every year.
It's a place a feller shore can learn a heap.
I have spent some time and money, but it ain't been wasted,
Fer I've learnt the sort of stock a man should keep.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), p. 36. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

All Dressed Up

Things is pickin' up as most folks knows,
So I sent to town fer to git new clo'es.
Some onderwear and a big hat box,
A couple of shirts and a passel of socks.

Some overalls and other truck,
Three red bandannys throwed in fer luck,
My boots aint new but they'll do right well,
Ireckon I'll make them last a spell.

I'll be the pride of the whole derved spread
With a fust class Stetson on my head.
A bran new slicker tied on behind—
It's strange how yore clo'es improves yore mind.

Nice new clo'es purtects the hide
And sorter contents a man inside.
Clo'es does a heap toward makin' the man.
Try goin' without and you'll understand.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), p. 37. Collated against the clean 1998 transcription.

New Boots

I got my new boots and they fit me jest right.
Of course all the other hands sez they're too tight.
Some sez they're too small, and some sez that they figger
They're shore big enough, but my feet's a heap bigger.

Last night a dumb waddy was springin' a joke,
How I pulled the tape measure so tight that it broke.
I've got the Lumbago—the hands all got cute.
Said I ruint my back pullin' on my new boots.

The boss sez the heels is too high fer his likin'.
Well he shore ort to know I don't use boots for hikin'.
They fit me jest perfect. The tops is stitched fine
The bosses boots never was e'kul to mine.

I ordered them boots and I paid the cash down
And they's no better boots in the country around.
I know why them fellers won't let me alone,
When they look at my boots they're ashamed of their own.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), p. 38. Collated against the clean 1998 transcription.

The New Cook

The mean big cook he quit, and the new one has lit,
But his looks ain't impressive no way.
He's pale, peevish and thin, he don't never grin,
And furthermore never has nothin' to say.

I thought if a man wrangled pots,
Good cookin' should be his ambition.
The grub that he cooks ort to show in his looks
And fine him up fat in condition.

Though he will jam with the hoss wrangler Sam,
And the chuck wagon wheeler mule Jack,
If his grub keeps him thin, where do us boys come in?
I'm askin' you now fer a fact.

Well, the boss is the head, he's a runnin' the spread,
But I think he was foolish at that.
As fer me I'd have took and have got me a cook
That was husky, good natured and fat.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 39–40. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

The Long Horn Speaks

The old long horn looked at the prize winning steer
And grumbled, "What sort of a thing is this here?
He ain't got no laigs and his body is big,
I sort of suspicion he's crossed with pig.
Now, me! I can run. I can gore. I can kick.
But that feller's too clumsy fer all them tricks.

They're breedin' sech critters and callin' 'em Steers!
Why the horns that he's got ain't as long as my ears.
I cain't figger what he'd have done in my day."
They wouldn't have stuffed me with grain and with hay;
Nor have polished my horns and have fixed up my hoofs,
And slept me on beddin' in under the roofs.

Who'd have curried his hide and have fuzzed up his tail?
Not none of them riders that drove the long trail.
They'd have found mighty quick jest how fur he could jump
When they jerked a few doubles of rope of his rump.
And to me it occurs he would not look so slick
With his tail full of burrs and his hide full of ticks.

I wonder jest what that fat feller would think
If he lived on short grass and went miles for a drink,
And wintered out-doors in the sleet and the snow,
He wouldn't look much like he does at the show.
I wouldn't be like him; no, not if I could,
I cain't figger out why they think he's so good.

His little short laigs and his white baby face—
I could finish him off in a fight or a race.
They've his whole fam'ly hist'ry in writin', and still
He ain't fit fer nothin' exceptin' to kill.
And all of them judges that thinks they're so wise,
They look at that critter and give his first prize.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), p. 41. Collated against the clean 1998 transcription.

The Chuck Wagon

She ain't what she was in the days of her prime,
Fer years she has stood in the cottonwood shade.
But if she could talk, she could tell you some time
Of her days on the range, and the part that she played.

The old mess box built in her back is still there,
But the canvas is gone that we put on her bows.
Each year she went out fer the roundup somewhere,
And came back from the beef hunt along with the snows.

When we got on the camp ground I sure did admire,
How the cook and the wrangler would unhitch the team.
Then they threwed the old dutch oven into the fire—
Them biscuits he baked I can taste in my dreams.

With the boys sleepin' 'round her she looked sort of lonely,
Like a small country church in a little grave yard.
But she looked plenty good when you slid off your pony,
When you came into camp fer to wake the next guard.

But the wagon was home and we gathered around her;
Chuck riders came in when the pickin's was short.
Some of 'em would eat till they'd mighty nigh founder—
It was there in the night we held kangaroo court.

I liked them old hands with their gaze cool and level.
They furnished the subject fer many a tale.
It was little they feared either man, beast or devil,
Them riders that follered the chuck wagon's trail.

But the time I liked best, as I clearly remember,
Is one every cow puncher likes to recall:
When the work was all finished along in November,
And he follered the chuck wagon home in the fall.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), p. 42. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

The Thoroughbred

The thoroughbred's a plaything. He's a funny sort of hoss.
You don't bust him out and show him who is boss.
His education and his schoolin' is at the tracks;
The little saddle is the only weight he packs.

He is a public plaything that could never take his place
Except among the people that enjoy a hoss race.
He's bred fer racin', and you bet the cuss can race;
There ain't a public plaything that could ever take his place.

The sport of racin' hosses keeps the country from gittin' tame,
And it takes a lot of money to keep up the race hoss game.
We've got a splendid country in the old Southwest,
Where a man can race his hosses every day in every year.

We never have much trouble keepin' hosses in good health,
Warm and dry and healthy, free from all disease.
Don't let anybody tell you that the race hoss goes away;
They will keep on racin' hosses till the ending of the day.

There's no thrill in any pastime that has got a race beat,
When the field is in the homestretch and the crowd is on their feet.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 43–44. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

The County Fair

The county fair was a wonderful place.
I like to remember the old trottin' race.
They would flog and they'd holler and yell,
When the judge would call 'em all back with the bell.

They had blindfolds and hobbles and braces,
Before they was fixed to git into them races.
They held the pore critter up close to the rail,
While they pulled on the lines and sot down on his tail.

The preserves that the wimmin folks made,
The vinegar that sold us the red lemonade,
The wheel of fortune that took all your dimes,
And you won a cheap walkin' cane, mebby, sometimes.

The man that led you away to one side
And looked mighty scared with his eyes open wide.
He found a big diamond that somebody lost,
And he wanted to sell it fer half what it cost.

But what made 'em take out was a runaway team.
How the men hollered "Whoa!" and the wimmin would scream,
While a couple old mares come a runnin' and draggin'
Two broke halter ropes and a heavy farm wagon.

What wouldn't you give to slip back thirty years
And hitch up the old team with a set of chain gears,
To drive into town and enjoy your full share
Of a warm autumn day at the old county fair?

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 45–46. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Wet Boots

A cowboy goes onder a turrible strain,
When he tries to wear boots that's been soaked in the rain.
He pulls and he wiggles, and after he's tried,)
He gits him some flour and sprinkles inside.

Then he gits him two jack knives; puts one in each lug,)
And he stomps and he pulls till his eyes start to bug.
Next he tried a broom handle—a awful mistake.
Which same he finds out when he feels the lug break.

The toes and the heels they bust out of his socks,
And it's awful to hear how that cowpuncher talks.
He open his knife and it shore is a sin,
Fer he cuts his new boots till his feet will go in.
I reckon old timer, you know how he feels.

You have kicked bunk house walls and the chuck wagon wheels.
And you know when yore older, there's nothin' to gain

From buyin' tight boots if you work in the rain.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 47–48. Collated against the clean 1998 transcription.

That Letter

I rode to that box a settin' on a post beside the trail,
 That our outfit used fur gettin' all their messages and mail.
 There I got a little letter and the envelope was pink,
 It shore set me feelin' better but it soter made me think.
 Yes the feelin' was surprisin' onderneath my Stetson hat.
 I could feel my hair a risin' like the bristles of a cat.

Well I tore the letter open and I read it through and through.
 All the time I was a hopin' I would savvy what to do.
 Men is quick upon the trigger, comes to tangle ups and fights,
 But a woman, you cain't figger what she means by what she writes.
 It was purty and invitin' like a sunny day in spring,
 She had done a heap of writin' but she hadn't said a thing.

Now, when men folks start to writin' you can mostly understand,
 And the stuff that they're a sightin' stands out plain jest like a brand
 They don't never do no playin' they've a sort of sudden way,
 For they start right in by sayin' what they started out to say.
 Men is given to expressin' what they mean, right then and there,
 But a woman keeps you guessin' till your mind goes everywhere.

Fer a spell I'd do some thinkin' then I'd start agin and read;
 I kept frownin' and a blinkin' till at last I got her lead.
 In that letter there was lurkin' jest one simple plain idee.
 When I got my mind a workin' it was plain enough to see.
 Fer she said her and her mother, come a Saturday next week
 Would be over with her brother to the dance on Turkey Creek.

On the start, you see, I never had no notice what she meant.
 She had fixed it up right clever in the way the letter went.
 Man! I shore did whoop and beller when the idee hit me fair.
 She would come without no feller and she aimed to meet me there.
 It shore made me like her better fer that bashful gal of mine,
 Went and built that whole durned letter, jest to write that single line.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 49–50. Collated against the clean 1998 transcription.

The Old Time Christmas

I liked the way we used to do,
When cattle was plenty and folks was few.
The people gathered frum far and near,
And they barbacued a big fat steer.
The kids tried stayin' awake because,
They reckoned they might ketch Santa Claus.
Next mornin' you'd wake 'em up to see,
What he'd been and put on the Christmas tree.

It was Christmas then fer the rich and pore,
And every ranch was an open door.
The waddy that came on a company hoss
Was treated the same as the owner and boss.
Nobody seemed to have a care,
You was in among friends or you wasn't there.
For every feller in them days knew
To behave hisself as a man should do.

Some had new boots, which they'd shore admire
When they warmed their feet in front of the fire.
And the wimmin folks had new clothes too,
But not like the wimmin of these days do.
Sometimes a drifter came riding in,
Some feller that never was seen agin.
And each Christmas day as the years went on
We used to wonder where they'd gone.

I like to recall the Christmas night,
The tops of the mountains capped with white.
The stars so bright they seemed to blaze,
And the foothills swum in a silver haze.
Them good old days is past and gone.
The time and the world and the change goes on.
And you cain't do things like you used to do
When cattle was plenty and folks was few.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 51–52. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Cow Sense

You have heard people a sayin' "As dumb as a cow."
Well they ain't seen much cattle I'll tell you right now.
A cow she knows more than some people by half;
She's the only thing livin' that savvys a calf.

A cow don't know nothin'? Well, how do you think
They suckle young calves and walk miles fer a drink?
You have watched an old cow; or I reckon you did,
If she's got a young calf why she keeps it well hid.

She has planted it out where it jest cain't be found,
And she won't go near there if there's anything 'round.
You jest make that calf give a jump or a beller,
And that old cow is there to charge into a feller.

If there's several young calves in a bunch, you will find,
When their ma's go to drink they leave one cow behind.
And when they git full and come back to the bunch
She goes out to git her a drink and some lunch.

You kin talk of day nurseries. I reckon as how,
They was fustly invented and used by a cow.
Perhaps you have noticed some times on a drive
With cows, men and hosses more dead than alive,

When you got near the water, as soon as they smelt;
Them old cows went fer it jest hellity belt.
Then the drags was all calves but they didn't furgit 'em;
When they drunk they come back and they shore didn't quit 'em.

They let their calves suck and kept out of the rush,
So them calves didn't git in the mud and the crush.
I'm tellin' you people without any jokes,
Cows make better parents than plenty of folks.

If folks thought the thing over, I reckon as how,
They wouldn't be sayin' "As dumb as a cow."

Publication. *Western Poems* (*Los Angeles: Western Livestock Journal, 1935*), pp. 53–54. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Shoveling the Ice Out of the Trough

It's frosty in the mornin' when you wake up in the shack.
When you roll out of yore blankets, makes the chill go up yore back.
By the time you've got yore breakfast it is nice and warm inside,
But it's time to git a goin'. You must saddle up and ride.

There is thick ice every mornin' and you've got to chop it off.
Ice is all right in a highball, but it's no good in a trough.
If the cattle don't git water it soon begins to show.
They don't keep in good condition jest a lickin' up some snow.

I read once in a paper what some wise perfessors think.
They claim it's only water that us humans ort to drink.
I'm jest speakin' fer the cowboys, and I reckon as a class
They'll drink nothin' else but water when perfessors live on grass.

The cows and calves looks sorry, a walkin' through the snow,
With their backs humped up and shiverin', and bawlin' soter low.
A cowboy's life's a tough one but I reckon anyhow,
I'd sooner be a cowboy than I would to be a cow.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 55–56. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

When the Grass Is Short and the Old Cows Die

When you have a drouth and the grass don't grow,
When the market is down and the price is low;
When the stock goes into the winter thin,
And a lot of them don't come out agin.

When the cold and the hunger take their toll,
And you find cows dead at each water hole,
You can bid the profits all goodbye,
When the grass is short and the old cows die.

When the grass is thin and the old cows die,
And some pore little calf is standin' by,
With nothin' to eat in the wind and cold—
He cain't know much at a few weeks old.

The coyotes begin to hang around.
They know that his mother is dead and down.
I reckon you wouldn't give a lot
Fer that baby calf and the chance he's got.

It's enough to break a rancher's heart
When he's worked and worried to git a start.
He knows his cattle and what they cost.
If he sells too cheap his outfit's lost.

He figgers there's only one thing to do.
An open winter might pull him through.
But that was the year hard winter came,
And he found he was playing a losing game.

When the spring time comes and there ain't no snow,
When the grass is green and the warm winds blow,
When the sky is clear and the sun is bright,
You will see bones a bleachin' white.

It is better to sell 'em fer what they'll bring
Than to find them bones in the early spring.

And overstockin' the range ain't wise,
When the grass is short and the old cow dies.

Publication. *Western Poems (Los Angeles: Western Livestock Journal, 1935)*, pp. 57–58. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Ridin' Fence

Ridin' along at a easy walk with your steeples and hammer and pliers,
Keepin' a watch fer the tracks of stock or the weeds blowed up on the wires.
You find some sign of coyotes, too, and plenty of rabbit tracks,
And down in the wash some calves crawled thru and scraped the hair off their
backs.

You must fix the gate on the other side along where the road goes through.
The past's big. It's a good long ride and they's allus a heap to do.
You find a place where a big old bull went through in that patch of oak.
They's a picket out and some steeples pulled and a couple of wires broke.

Some folks had camped at the Hillside spring, been there a couple of days.
The boss don't like that sort of thing. They might kill a steer, he says.
Before you finish it gits plum dark. You cain't see things right.
So you pile up some rocks to make a mark and ride on in the night.

Fence ridin' jobs ain't allus snaps. I never did call it fun.
The worst thing about it is perhaps that yore never exactly done.
But any feller that's got good sense can figger the whole affair:
If nothin' went wrong with a string of fence, he wouldn't be needed there.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 59–60. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Pullin' Bog

Wien the water gits thick and the mud sorter thin.
When the cows come to drink and the weak ones slides in;
And once a pore critter gits down in a bog,
She lays there as dead as a watersoaked log.

You offer 'em help and they won't ev'n try.
They are not only willin' but wantin' to die.
And the buzzards they gether and circle around,
They are always on hand when a critter gits down,

You pull and you waller and haul her around
Till you finally git her out onto dry ground.
When you git her pulled out by the horns or the neck,
She aint a bit thankful, but goes on the peck.

She lowers her horns and she charges right in.
But she's mostly so weak that she falls down ag'in.
But there's people you've helped that have acted the same;
So generally speakin', a cow aint to blame.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), p. 61. Collated against the clean 1998 transcription.

The Rope Hoss

You have heard of cuttin' hosses and all the things they knew,
But there's lots of ropin' hosses that is plenty foxy too.
When you're ropin' calves to brand 'em you can guide him 'mongst the stock
With the motion of your body, and he travels at a walk.

When you jump one in the open, then you'd orta see him go,
Over rocks and brush and gravel; takes you right up to a throw.
If you tangle with a mossback, then you got your work cut out,
And you better have a rope hoss that knows what it's about.

Old hoss keeps along behind him; never tries to go around
Till you git a chance to ketch him on a spot of open ground.
Then he widens out and throws him, and he keeps a safe rope back;
Holds the critter till you tie him, never gives a bit of slack.

If a cow got in a bog hole that old hoss he didn't fail.
He'd keep pullin' with the saddle while you lifted on the tail.
Yes, we've bragged of cuttin' hosses and the things that they could do,
But there's lots to say in favor of a wise old rope hoss too.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), p. 62. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Colts

I like to watch a bunch of mares
A grazin' on the plains.
And little colts with curious stares,
And fuzzy tails and manes.

Sometimes they touch their mother's nose.
Or scratch their little eyes.
And now and then they stand up close,
To keep away the flies.

Them little colts was might fleet
When it was time to travel,
The way them purty little feet
Could hit the sand and gravel.

And when a big hoss round up came
They'd run beside their mothers.
Them little colts they shore was game
And stayed right with the others.

And when the circle narrowed in,
"Twas then they made their showin'
When older hosses lost their wind,
The colts was up and goin'.

They shore was wild, them little brutes,
They wasn't raised fer pets,
But they was jest about as cute
as little critters gets.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 63–64. Collated against the clean 1998 transcription.

The Brandin' Corral

When the west was all onsettled and there wasn't no bob wire,
They had a way of workin' that was supthin' to admire.
Everything was done on hoss back, and I've heard old timers talk
How the kids in cattle countries didn't hardly learn to walk.

They worked cattle in the open, and they laid 'em on the ground.
It was cuttin', flankin', ropin', and a tyin' critters down.
But the present cattle raiser ain't so strong fer that idee,
And he has a way of workin' that's as different as can be.

'Tain't so hard on men and hosses, and it's better fer cow brutes
When you got a place to work 'em in corrals and brandin' chutes.
When we heard of brandin' fluid, fust we took it fer a joke,
Jest to think of brandin' cattle when you couldn't smell no smoke.

Well, a feller cain't deny it that the new way is the best,
Fer there's been a heap of changes in the ranges of the west.
Most of outfits then was bigger, and a cow was jest a critter,
And they didn't stop to figger things as close as they do now.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 65–66. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Thinkin'

It's an easy job herdin' "Parada." Yore old hoss is standin' close by.
You are watchin' the drift of the shadows that's made by the clouds in the sky.
There's a breeze blowin' over the mesa. It pulls at the brim of yore hat.
You feel soter careless and lazy, but it sets you to thinkin' at that.

Of the towns where the folk herd together with sidewalks and plenty of light.
They are sheltered and out of the weather, they sleep in a house every night.
There's plenty of good drinkin' water and places to eat night and day.
They live like a man really oughter, you wish you was livin' that way.

You know lots of outfits and bosses, but that's jest a cow puncher's chance.
You begin when you're young wranglin' hosses, and wind up a cook at some ranch.
You figger it's really a pity. You've been on the range since a kid.
You would shore like to go to the City, but what could you do if you did?

Your idees get twisted and broken. You reach for your papers and sack.
You reckon you'll do some more smokin', you turn with the wind to your back.
How things will work out there's no knowin', but the cattle are startin' to stray,
So you'd better git up and be goin', fer thinkin' don't help anyway.

Publication. *Western Poems* (*Los Angeles: Western Livestock Journal, 1935*), pp. 67–68. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

Lockin' Horns

When bulls start to beller and paw up the dust,
There's trouble in sight; that's the way that bulls cuss.
They circle a minute, then jump and lock horns,
And the battle is on jest as shore as you're born.

You'd better keep clear, it ain't no place to stay,
Fer they'll knock down whatever gits into their way.
A bull may look slow, but you better take note,
When he goes into action he's quick as a goat.

And if the fight breaks, and one bull starts to run,
It happens so quick you cain't see how it's done.
Two bulls that's a fightin' don't worry a bit;
They go right on over whatever they hit.

I reckon most hands has seen hosses knocked down
And a cowboy a rollin' about on the ground.
And frum there up the crick that there cow puncher knowed,
When the bulls start to fight, to git out of the road.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 69–70. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

The Cow and the Calf

A cow and a calf, or a calf and a cow.
Either way that you say it, it don't matter how;
But there's the foundation of all the beef trade,
And it always has been since the first beef was made.

Calves may have had fathers or sisters and brothers,
But they wore the same brand that was put on their mothers.
If hundreds of cattle was mixed in a herd,
When a cow claimed a calf, the whole world took her word.

Folks thought more of calves than of children, they did.
In them days nobody adopted a kid,
But a whole lot of fellers jest couldn't be stopped,
If a calf was unbranded and there to adopt.

So you cain't blame a cow fer the way she took care,
And fed and purtected her calf everywhere.
And the whole cattle business I'll tell you right now
Depended a heap on the sense of a cow.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 71–72. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

The Cow Boy's Shirt Tail

There is one thing people inquire about;
 They ask why a cow puncher's shirt tail comes out.
 Most any rough hand that you happen across—
 If he's skinnin' a beef, if he's shoin' a hoss;
 If he's ridin' a broncho or flankin' a calf—
 Well, his shirt tail is out, or at least the last half.

If you've seen some old waddy jest bustin' his neck
 To escape from some critter that's got on the peck,
 You've discovered two things, jest between you and I,
 That a cow boy can run and a shirt tail can fly.
 He knowed what he'd get if he happened to fail,
 So he shore didn't stop to arrange his shirt tail.

Now workin' wild stock where the brush is right thick,
 Where the cattle is sudden and the cow boys is quick;
 If you notice a man and a hoss disappear,
 That is, if you view the event from the rear,
 The thing that you always will keep on your mind,
 Is that cow puncher's shirt tail a floppin' behind.

Them "Levi P. Strauss" is built small in the seat
 And a cowpuncher's frame doesn't carry much meat.
 He can eat a big breakfast and long before night
 He's so empty and hongry that nothin' fits tight.
 And besides, he gits rassled and tussled around
 Till the best behaved shirt tail won't hardly stay down.

Yes, I know it's a fact and beyond any doubt
 That a cowpuncher's shirt tail will keep comin' out.
 It's the work that they do and the clothes that they wear,
 And it's partly perhaps that a cow boy don't care;
 So I've had to explain to folks, time and again,
 Their shirt tails come out 'cause they cain't keep them in.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 73–74. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

A Calf's Troubles

A calf don't do no workin', all he does is stick around.
And his mother has to feed him till some other feed is found.
He starts in havin' trouble shortly after he is born;
They rope him and they brand him, and he likely gits dehorned.

And then they take the markin' knife and whittle on his ears,
Till them "Crops" and "Forks" will mark him if he lives fer twenty years.
While the brand is still a hurtin' and the dust is in his eye,
They take and vaccinate him so he dassent even die.

And when he's big enough fer beef they knock him in the head.
That's the end of all his troubles, fer after that he's dead.
There's now and then a feller that is jest a lot like that.
You never find him workin' no matter where he's at.

He seems to git off easy. All he does is eat and sleep,
But nobody don't respect him and he has to take a heap.
And you'll mostly find a feller that ain't a bit of use,
Is so lazy and so callous that he'd rather take abuse.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 75–76. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

The Marking Knife

He sheds his big hat when he gits into town
And his boots aint so good when he's walkin' around.
But there's part of his outfit he don't throw away. Il
He's had it fer years and it's with him to stay.
For down in his pocket the rest of his life iil
The cow puncher carries his old markin' knife.

He could use that sharp blade and beyond all belief.
With nothin' but that he could butcher a beef.
If a slivver got into his hand or his thumb Hl
He would use that old knife blade and out the thing come.
It did his repair work at night in the camps, il
He used it fer markin' and whittlin' out clamps.
One time his hoss slipped on a muddy side hill
And he thought that he'd never git clear from that spill.

The hoss lit on his leg and he mighty well knew
By the feel of the stirrup, his foot had gone through.
He held the hoss down by the head with the reins;
He battled and fought, but kept usin' his brains.
He got to the pocket he had in his chaps,
Got his knife, and then cut his off leitigo straps.

When the hoss had got up and he'd saved his own life,
He fixed up the wreck with his old markin' knife.
In plenty of ways any cow puncher found!
'Twas a might good thing to have handy around.

With his knife he could allus find sumpthin' to do.
'Twas his tool kit, newspaper and radio, too.
He used whenever he worked or he played.
He was allus at home if he had that old blade.
He handles that knife and he dreams of the past,
And he keeps his old markin' knife plum to the last.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), pp. 77–78. Collated against the clean 1998 transcription.

Caught Nappin'

You cain't exactly figger what a half broke hoss will do.
When a feller ain't a thinkin' that's jest when he breaks in two.
You are throwed before you know it, and when he gits you down,
He keeps buckin' with your saddle till you're glad you're on the ground.

He ain't hurt you none to speak of, but you're well shook up at that,
And you cain't git up to ketch him till he's foggin' down the flat.
You know the place he waters, and it's safe enough to say,
He'll be with a bunch of hosses six or seven miles away.

Publication. *Western Poems* (Los Angeles: *Western Livestock Journal*, 1935), p. 79. Restored from the visible 1935 copy text and collated against the available later transcriptions and parallel witnesses.

LATER AND RECOVERED POEMS

Book Three | Seventy-six additional poems from the archival anthology

Alone

The hills git awful quiet, when you have to camp alone.
It's mighty apt to set a feller thinkin'.
You always half way waken when a hoss shoe hits a stone,
Or you hear the sound of hobble chains a clinkin'.

It is then you know the idees that you really have in mind.
You think about the things you've done and said.
And you sometimes change the records that you nearly always find
In the back of almost every cow boy's head.

It gives a man a soter different feelin' in his heart.
And he sometimes gits a little touch of shame,
When he minds the times and places that he didn't act so smart,
And he knows himself he played a sorry game.

It kinda makes you see yourself through other people's eyes.
And mebby so yore pride gits quite a fall.
When you're all alone and thinkin', well, you come to realize
You're a mighty common feller after all.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 13.

Ants In His Pants

From the way this here old cow boy is takin' off his pants,
It would seem he's got acquainted with a nest of big red ants.
And his hoss is shore oneasy, with his eyes and nostrils wide;
Fer he thinks that human bein' is takin' off its hide.

Some folks say the red ants string you and some others say they bite.
Once they start a workin' on you, you will swear they both are right.
Fer the pain they give will chill you and it ain't a bit of fun.
What they do is shore a plenty, makes no difference how it's done.

You can see the wind's a blowin' he's about to lose his hat.
And it makes his shirt tail flutter as it sweeps across the flat.
And the hoss? It ain't no wonder that he starts to jump and snort.
He is just a half broke pony workin' on a hackamore.

He cain't make out what has happened, and he wouldn't understand,
If the cow boy chased his hat and packed his "Levis" in his hand.
When you've got a half broke broncho, there's a mighty healthy chance
That most any thing can happen if the ants git in yore pants.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 16.

Alkali Ike's Zippers

Now speakin' of Zippers," sez Alkali Ike,
"Them zippers is sumpthin' I really don't like.
I aimed to buy clothes like I always had wore,
Till I started a lookin' around in the store.

They had some new shirts and some new overalls.
That fastened with zippers, no buttons aytall.
I reckoned that clothes with a riggin' like that
Would be fine fer the boys on the Alkali Flat.

Because where there's alkali water to drink,
Things may happen sooner than what you might think.
So I got me some clothes that was rigged up like that,
And went back to my camp on the Alkali Flat.

Next mornin' I'd traveled fer mebbly a mile,
When the time come to give them new zippers a trial.
I grabbed at the handle and give 'em a jerk
But holey old golden them zippers don't work.

I swear and I swear, I am shore out of luck.
I have started 'em crooked, the zipper is stuck.
I fuss and I pull till I git the thing straight,
Then the zipper it works, but a little too late.

The next thing I do is to throw them new garments
Up onto a cactus fer ants and fer varmints.
And I reckon that buttons is safer at that,
Fer fellers that lives on the Alkali Flat.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 17.

The Balky Hoss

The pleasant recollections is the ones that mostly last,
But there's sometimes other memories come a creepin' from the past.
How you lost your summer's wages, on a horse you thought could run.
How a big buck stood and watched you when you didn't have a gun.
Then one evening at a shindig, you thought you was doin' fine
Till some people come and told you you was gittin' out of line.
You rode ten miles to a dance once. When you got there you was sore.
You had got your dates all tangled. It had been the night before.

You have got some recollections of some gal that let you down,
But remember when your hoss balked on the main street right in town.
Yes, you had a sneaky feelin' that you mebby wasn't boss
When he turned around and throwed his head across the other hoss.
You would like to took a rifle and have downed him with some slugs.
He was lookin' at you pig eyed standin' crosswise in the tugs.
You hated the old critter till you wisht that he was dead.
You would like to took a hammer and just knocked him in the head.

Then the crowd all gathered round you fer to git in on the show.
Every one of them could tell you what to do to make him go.
There was some that said he'd ort to be jest tickled with a switch.
Some said beat him with a stay chain, others said to git a twitch.
Some said to git a jocky stick and that would help perhaps
While others said to put one ear inside the head stall straps.
Some said punch him in the belly. Others said pick up his feet.
And one allowed he ort to have a little bite to eat.

The tough guys said to choke him and to shut off all his wind.
Or mebbyso to knock him down and let him up ag'in.
One said that he could start him with some paper and a match.
Or put a rope behind his knees and saw to make him stretch.
Oh yes, there was a hundred things they wanted you to try.
One was to take tobacker juice and squirt it in his eye.
You tried to keep your temper. You was shakin', you was pale.
Every now and then some wise guy asked you if he was fer sale.

But it wasn't no use tryin' and your temper got plum lost
When some feller on the sidewalk yelled and asked how much he cost.
And when you got to hatin' everybody in your heart,

The hoss got tired waitin', straightened out and made a start.
It surely was a big relief to git out on the road.
Got some cuss words off your stummick; eased your mind quite a load.
You swore to God you'd never drive that hoss to town ag'in.
You swapped him to another man. You thought he didn't know.
But he hadn't any trouble gittin' that old hoss to go.
It sort of set you thinkin' and the idee come to you,
That there might be balky hosses, but there's balky drivers too.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 19–21.

Bill The Snake Charmer

We never knowed the reason why,
But any thing Bill saw he'd try.
A circus was his last mistake,
He saw the man that charmed the snake.

As Bill was on his homeward road
With quite an alcoholic load,
A rattle snake beside the trail,
Stuck up his head and shuck his tail.

Pore Bill allowed he had a brake,
He got right down to charm the snake.
He sung a high and mornful whine
And tried to make the magic sign.

Bill's voice was high and over ripe
And rotten like a Hindoo pipe.
And Bill he sung like this. Sez he,
"Twee dee del dee! Twee dee del dee!"

Bill raised his hands above his head
And fetched 'em down with fingers spread
Right then pore Bill was out of luck
The rattle snake hauled off and struck.

Pore Bill had made his last wild ride.
His soul went shootin' down the slide.
An as he passed away, sez he,
"Twee dee del dee! Twee dee del dee!"

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 25.

The Broncho Twister's Prayer

It was a little grave yard on the rolling foot hill plains:
That was bleached by the sun in summer, swept by winter's snows and rains;
There a little bunch of settlers gathered on an autumn day
'Round a home made lumber coffin, with their last respects to pay.

Weary men that wrung their living from that hard and arid land,
And beside them stood their women; faded wives with toil worn hands.
But among us stood one figure that was wiry, straight and trim.
Every one among us know him. 'Twas the broncho twister, Jim.

Just a bunch of hardened muscle tempered with a savage grit,
And he had the reputation of a man that never quit.
He had helped to build the coffin, he had helped to dig the grave;
And his instinct seemed to teach him how he really should behave.

Well, we didn't have a preacher, and the crowd was mighty slim.
Just two women with weak voices sang an old time funeral hymn.
That was all we had for service. The old wife was sobbing there.
For her husband of a life time, laid away without prayer.

She looked at the broncho twister, then she walked right up to him.
Put one trembling arm around him and said, "Pray. Please won't you Jim?"
You could see his figure straighten, and a look of quick surprise
Flashed across his swarthy features, and his hard dare devil eyes.

He could handle any broncho, and he never dodged a fight.
'Twas the first time any body ever saw his face turn white.
But he took his big sombrero off his rough and shaggy head,
How I wish I could remember what that broncho peeler said.

No, he wasn't educated. On the range his youth was spent.
But the maker of creation knew exactly what he meant.
He looked over toward the mountains where the driftin' shadows played.
Silence must have reined in heaven when they heard the way Jim prayed.

Years have passed since that small funeral in that lonely grave yard lot.
But it gave us all a memory, and a lot of food for thought.
As we stood beside the coffin, and the freshly broken sod,
With that reckless broncho breaker talkin' heart to heart with God.

When the prayer at last was over,

and the grave had all been filled,
On his rough, half broken pony,
he rode off toward the hills.
Yes, we stood there in amazement
as we watched him ride away,
For no words could ever thank him.
There was nothing we could say.
Since we gathered in that grave yard,
it's been nearly fifty years.
With their joys and with their sorrows,
with their hopes and with their fears.
But I hope when I have finished,
and they lay me with the dead,
Some one says a prayer above me,
like that broncho twister said.

** Poem recited at Bruce Kiskaddon's funeral.*

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 26–28.

The Buckboard

We read about the stage coach
and the covered wagon too;
And about the family surry
when we bought it shinin' new;
We hear about the bob sled
and about the one hoss sleigh,
But I'm telling you the buckboard
shore was handy in it's day.

The bed was on the axles, bolted
down between the wheels;
It was jest a row of wooden slats
but they was strong as steel.
An iron brace to rest your feet;
a rail around the top,
And a mighty handy foot brake
that would bring it to a stop.

It was built to travel distance
on a rough and rugged road;
They had cut off every pound they could
to lighten up the load.
The only springs it carried
was in onderneath the seat;
For a sturdy little wagon
it was mighty hard to beat.

I know the hoss and buggy days
have long since gone and past;
We travel in a motor car;
it's easy and it's fast.
But sometimes I git to wishin',
as strange as it may seem,
For an old slat bottomed buckboard
and a little knot-head team.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 29.

The Buggy Shack

Du you ever chance to waken in the middle of the night?
And you couldn't be mistaken it was shore a bed bug bight.
Part of them had started feedin' and the rest was walkin' round,
What them varmints wasn't eatin' they was really trompin' down.

Well, you found a couple matches and you got the wall lamp lit.
By the time you got it lighted they had all hid out and quit.
Then you stood outside the door way fer to git a breath of air,
But you soon got mighty chilly, posin' in yore onderwear.

So you got back into yore blankets fer to git a little sleep,
But the way them bugs took to you was enough to make you weep.
Bed bugs is as bad as grizzlies, so I've often heard it said.
Grizzlies kill you, but them bed bugs make you wish that you was dead.

You was cussin' and a-swearin' you was mad enough to fight.
You could only put your clothes on and set by the stove all night.
Fer you knowed they'd done and got you when they made that sneak attack,
And yo're nothin' but a victim when the bed bugs take the shack.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 30.

Bulls and Bears

There's a whole lot of space in that country out there,
So there ort to be room for a bull and a bear.
But the bear he's a lookin' for sumphin' to eat,
And that long horned bull reckons he's after calf meat.

He thinks there ain't room for the two of them there,
So he figgers on doin' away with the bear.
A fightin' old bull seldom changes his mind.
He is out there protectin' his range and his kind.

Old long horn, I'd shore like to land on the scene
And cut into that fight with a heavy carbeen.
I'd go in on your side if it wasn't quite fair
And between me and you we'd shore waller that bear.

No, you wouldn't thank me, for when it was done,
I would have to take out with my hoss on the run.
You're a thankless old cuss, but then I wouldn't care.
You're protectin' your rights and you're doin' your share.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 31.

The Bunk House Mirror

That old bunk house mirror that most of us knew.
I remember it yet, and I know that you do.
One corner broke out, and a sort of a crack
That run half way across and a quarter way back.
The cheap wooden frame with the varnish all gone,
But the grease and the dirt and the fly specks stayed on.

And then the quicksilver was missin' in spots,
But that didn't bother a cow hand a lot.
He picked the good places and managed to shave
As he looked at his face in the ripples and wave.
No wonder the mirror was terribly wrecked
When you thought of the faces it had to reflect.

I know as a mirror it wasn't much class.
At its best it was only a cheap lookin' glass.
The old cord that held it was frayed quite a lot.
You could see where it broke and was tied in a knot.
It had to be used. It was all that we had.
And, generally speakin' it wasn't so bad.

And the comb that hung down from a string underneath.
It was chuck full of gum though it lacked a few teeth,
And there on the bench was a rusty wash pan
Where we smeared yellor soap on our faces and hands.
The bosses them days didn't go for expense.
You could buy the whole outfit for ninty-five cents.

But boy let me tell you that old lookin' glass
Has reflected the faces of men with a past.
I wonder it didn't back up with surprise
If it read what was lurkin' just back of their eyes.
I will bet there's a lot of old hands can recall
The battered old mirror that hung on the wall.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 32.

The Coming Change

This here Injun is a watchin',
as he crouches on the plain,
And a holdin' to his pony
by a single rawhide rein.
It don't take him long to figger
what them covered wagons mean,
And to him a covered wagon,
is a mighty big machine.

When he sees a bunch of wagons,
or he finds a wagon track,
It is freighters or it's settlers,
and he's bein' crowded back.
But it wasn't just the Injun
that was crowded off the plain.
In a few more years the cowboy
got pushed off from his domain.

Grassy flats along the rivers where he bedded down his cows,
Was filled up with settlers' cabins, and turned under by their plows.
There was miles of open country he would never ride ag'in.
For the long barbed wire fences fenced him out and fenced him in.

He was crowded into past'ers, and it wasn't many years,
Till the later settlers comin', crowded out the pioneers.
So they loaded up their wagons, and they started driftin' on;
Lookin' for a newer country, that lay somewhere out beyond.

So it is. Each generation has its chance and has its day.
Then the world goes on improvin' and is run a better way.
But we have the joy of knowin' we have helped and done our share.
And when people tell what happened, we can say that we was there.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 34–35.

Cow Boy's Pants

You read and hear about the clothes
that cow boys used to wear.
The broad brimmed hats and high heeled boots,
you hear it every where.
The flannel shirt and handkercher,
but only just by chance
You ever hear or read a word about a
cow boy's pants.

Chorus.

They never mention pants by any circumstance,
But folks it's true I'm tellin' you that
cow boys did wear pants.

2. Now over forty years ago
when in the camps I lit,
A cowboy wore just any kind of pants
that he could git.
A few of them was wearin' jeans
and some wore corduroys;
In fact most every kind of pants,
was found among the boys.

3. But bye and bye there came a man
by name of Levi Strauss.
He started makin' overalls for men
that rode a hoss.
Old Levi knowed a cow boy
was soter thin and ga'nt
And so when Levi made them pants,
the laigs and seat was scant.

Most any hand you met with, from the wrangler to the boss,
Was wearin' them blue overalls put out by Levi Strauss.
When you saw a cow boy comin' you could gamble in advance,
That John B. Stetson made his hat, and Levi made his pants.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 36–37.

Cow Milkin'

Most cow boys aint handy at milkin' a cow.
In fact a whole lot of 'em never learned how.
What misses their vest, and their pants, and their pocket,
Goes up in their sleeve and runs back in the bucket.

Besides that, most range cows ain't been dairy broke.
They know less about milkin' than any cow poke.
So, generally speakin', I reckon that's why
They don't git much milk and the cow soon goes dry.

This feller, he tied the calf up to the fence,
To git the milk started, and that showed good sense.
But right now "Old Bossy" has shore got him down,
With her foot in the bucket and messin' him 'round.

This boy must have wanted milk turrible bad,
Or he wouldn't have tried it. And won't he be mad?
He might beat the cow, but that won't be no use.
The best thing to do is to turn the calf loose.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 38.

A Cowboy Funeral

There was once a cow boy funeral that I many times recall.
A bad hoss killed a feller on a beef work late one fall.
'Twas a bleak day in November when the air was cold and raw.
The clouds looked gray and ugly, and the wind blew down the draw.

There was no automobiles then, and we was far from trains
In that rugged piece of country where the canyons break the plains.
We had to make a buryin' to finish the affair,
Well, the best time was the present, and the closest place was there.

We hadn't any coffin, and there was no bell to toll.
We went up on the hill side and we dug a narrow hole.
We wrapped him up inside his bed and laid him in the shale;
His saddle onderneath his head, to ride the last long trail.

We had no book where we could look and read of from its pages.
No one was there to say a prayer, or sing the "Rock of Ages."
I recollect nobody spoke. We didn't care to talk.
We filled the hole and took a smoke, and raised a pile of rock.

And when the thing was over, it was soter like a dream,
How we helped the cook and wrangler while they harnessed up the team.
We got the herd movin' and departed on our way.
And left that cow boy there to sleep, till resurrection day.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 45–46.

The Creak of the Leather

Is likely that you can remember
A corral at the foot of a hill
Some mornin' along in December
When the air was so cold and so still.
When the frost lay as light as a feather
And the stars had jest blinked out and gone.
Remember the creak of the leather
As you saddled your hoss in the dawn.

When the glow of the sunset had faded
And you reached the corral after night
On a hoss that was weary and jaded
And so hungry yore belt wasn't tight.
You felt about ready to weaken
You knowed you had been a long way
But the old saddle still kep a creakin'
Like it did at the start of the day.

Perhaps you can mind when yore saddle
Was standin' up high at the back
And you started a whale of a battle
When you got the old pony untracked.
How you and the hoss stuck together
Is a thing you cain't hardly explain
And the rattle and creak of the leather
As it met with the jar and the strain.

You have been on a stand in the cedars
When the air was so quiet and dead
Not even some flies and mosquitoes
To buzz and make noise 'round yore head.
You watched for wild hosses or cattle
When the place was as silent as death
But you heard the soft creak of the saddle
Every time the hoss took a breath.

And when the round up was workin'
All day you had been ridin' hard
There wasn't a chance of you shirkin'

You was pulled for the second guard
A sad homesick feelin' come sneakin'
As you sung to the cows and the moon
And you heard the old saddle a creakin'
Along to the sound of the tune.

There was times when the sun was shore blazin'
On a perishin' hot summer day
Mirages would keep you a gazin'
And the dust devils danced far away
You cussed at the thirst and the weather
You rode at a slow joggin' trot
And you noticed somehow that the leather
Creaks different when once it gits hot

When yore old and yore eyes have grown hollow
And your hair has a tinge of the snow
But there's always the memories that follow
From the trails of the dim long ago.
There are things that will haunt you forever
You notice that strange as it seems
One sound, the soft creak of the leather,
Weaves into your memories and dreams.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 49–50.

Doing Her Best

This cow is in trouble, she's left on her own.
She has more than one cow can take care of alone.
She's protectin' her baby fer all she can do;
One wolf would be bad, but she's dealin' with two.

She can beller and call but there's no other cattle
To gather around her and help her do battle.
The calf's just a baby. There's no help in sight.
There is only one end for that kind of a fight.

The varmints feel sartin; they ain't in a hurry.
They will soon have that calf and they don't have to worry.
They could pull down the cow if they tried hard enough,
But the calf is a-plenty and not near so tough.

A wolf is a mighty mean varmint at heart.
He is cruel and wicked, and man! is he smart.
So I never could pity a wolf a whole lot
If he got in a trap. I was glad he got caught.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 58.

The Drag Driver

There's pictures and there's stories of the men that ride the lead.
He gives the herd direction and he regulates the speed.
There's pictures of the hands that ride along the flank and swing.
They hold 'em in and keep out strays and all that sort of thing.

I am speakin' of a rider on which nobody brags;
For man that must take grief and dust; the man that drives the drags.
To find a good drag driver ain't right easy so to speak.
He has got to handle cattle that are timid, slow and weak.

He dassen't be too easy and he dassen't be too rough.
He has got to savvy cattle and know when they've done enough.
If he crowds 'em too far forward why the others fight 'em back;
So he has to keep 'em movin' but allow 'em plenty slack.

He must have a lot of patience and a lot of judgment too.
It calls for mostly all he's got before the job is through.
Though he may use some salty words upon the ones that lags,
This man that follers up the herd, the man that drives the drags.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 59.

Drinkin' Water

Wien a feller once comes to a pond or a tank,
It is better to ride out a ways from the bank.
Fer the water is clearer out there as a rule,
And besides it is deep and a little more cool.

And out toward deep water, you notice somehow,
You miss a whole lot of that flavor of cow.
You can dip up a drink with the brim of yore hat,
And water makes purty good drinkin' at that.

You mebbby spill some down the front of yore shirt,
But any old waddy knows that doesn't hurt.
There may be some bugs and a couple insecks
But it all goes the same down a cow puncher's neck.

I know there is plenty of folks would explain
Why such water had ort to be filtered or strained.
Sech people as that never suffered from thirst,
Or they'd think of it later and drink it down first.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 60.

The Duel

Old Pan Handle Johnny was quick on the draw,
And a wonderful shot was old Billy McGraw.
Old Billy McGraw he expressed the belief
That Pan Handle Johnny was eatin his beef.

Well, Johnny got mad when he heard about that,
and he started to look fer where Billy was at.
And all kinds of wagers was goin' right soon,
When the boys laid their bets in the Lone Star saloon.

We knowed when they'd finished they'd only be one,
And some fellers bet that they wouldn't be none.
The only thing gave 'em reason to bet,
Was the lay of the land when the two fellers met.

If they fought at close quarters or after 'twas night,
Well, Pan Handle Johnny would finish the fight.
But take it in daylight at thirty five paces
Old Billy could shoot the spots out of the aces.

They was ten steps apart when them two fellers met.
The sun had gone down but it wasn't dark yet.
Johnny fired four shots before Billy could draw.
Three of em went wild and one shot hit McGraw.

Old Billy shot once and he knocked Johnny dead
Then he deemized plum sudden the bystanders said.
And the fellers all won that had bet on a draw
Between Pan Handle Johnny and Billy McGraw.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 61.

Feedin' Time

You are warm in the cabin, and doin' yore cookin'
But you know that yore hosses are there, without lookin'.
It's long about time they come into be fed,
And to be put away fer the night in the shed.

Both hosses and mules seem to have their own way
Of tellin' exactly the time of the day.
And I've noticed besides they don't ofen git lost,
Like some human bein's you've happened acrost.

Yore feet is so warm that you don't like to go
And git yore boots wet wadin' 'round in the snow.
But it's feed makes 'em stout, and it's feed brings 'em back:
So you pull on yore boots, and you start makin' tracks.

You pull down yore hat and you turn up yore collar.
You start fer the shed and the hosses both foller.
They are glad to see you, and I've generally found,
A man don't git so lonesome with hosses around

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 62.

Figger It Out

Tiss a big Christmas package hung up on the fence.
This Cow Pony thinks that it doesn't make sense.
He shows mighty plain jest the way that he feels,
'Bout that big paper box and its bright Christmas seals.

Old cow boy, it's got you to figgerin' too.
Yore head. You don't know what to do.
That box is too big to tie on by the string.
It might break, or git shook till you ruint the thing.

If yore hoss breaks in two he's a hard one to ride.
You cain't do it and carry that package beside.
If he starts in to buck, it's a mighty good chance
You'll be facin' the sky with the seat of yore pants.

Besides you have got quite a long ways to go.
You don't want to do it on foot in the snow.
Yes, yore hoss is plum hostile about the affair.
He don't know about Christmas; what's more he don't care.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 63.

The Fight In The Dark

You loosen the cinches to let your hoss blow
While you look for the ranch in the valley below.
You can make it out plain at the foot of the hill,
Down there in the starlight all quiet and still.
Ain't nobody stirrin'. It seems sort of strange.
They are reckoned some spread on this neck of the range.

It's early and yet they ain't burnin' no light.
You follered the trail like they told you all right.
It must be the place. There's a flash in the dark!
And up from below comes a six shooter's bark!
Two others break out on the left and the right,
And a wicked tongued rifle cuts into the fight.

There's a hoarse chokin' yell. Yes, some feller got hit.
Things ain't no ways peaceful down there, not a bit.
The echoes wake up and the mountains shore ring.
There's another old rifle beginnin' to sing.
Down close to the cook shack comes ugly and short,
The dull heavy sound of a shot gun's report.

From the door of the bunk house you see the long streaks
Where the flame stabs the air as a Winchester speaks.
There is a couple more six guns a talkin' right mean,
And sharp like a whip cracks a saddle carbeen.
There is one thing plum sartin, the ranch is attacked.
They tried to sneak up, and got ketched in the act.

Jest what was the trouble and how did it start?
Never mind, yore a stranger around in these parts.
And you want to remember, whoever wins out
Won't care fer no strangers a hangin' about.
The best thing fer you is to start rollin' yore tail,
And be makin' some tracks down along the back trail.

You will hear the yarn told by the camp fire some night,
Of the raid on the ranch, and the free for all fight.
Yore a whole lot more likely to live to be old
If you l'arn about fightin' from hearin' it told.

And nosin' around when there's feuds on the range
Is mighty onhealthy for folks that is strange.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 64–65.

Forgotten

He used to be a cow hoss that was young and strong and fleet
Now he stands alone, forgotten, in the winter snow and sleet.
Fer his eyes is dim and holler and his head is turnin' gray,
He has got too old to foller—"Jest a hoss that's had his day."

They've forgotten how once he packed 'em at a easy swingin' lope.
How he braced his sturdy shoulders when he set back on a rope.
Didn't bar no weight nor distance; answered every move and word,
Though his sides were white with lather while he held the millin' herd.

Now he's stiff and old and stumbles, and he's lost the strength and speed
That once took him through the darkness, 'round the point of a stampede
And his legs is scarred and battered; both the muscle and the bone.
He is jest a wore out cow hoss so they've turned him out alone.

They have turned him out to winter best he can amongst the snow.
There without a friend and lonesome, Do you think he doesn't know?
Through the hours of storm and darkness he has time to think a lot.
That hoss may have been forgotten, but you bet he aint forgot.

He stands still. He aint none worried, fer he knows he's played the game
He's got nothin' to back up from. He's been square and aint ashamed.
Fer no matter where they put him he was game to do his share
Well, I think more of the pony than the folks that left him there.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 66–67.

The Gentle Hoss

Of all the things you come across, the best one is a gentle hoss.
A man don't have to git a rope and ketch him on the flyin' lope,
And mebby have to ear him down, and git all shook and jerked around.
And mebbyso git kicked or throwed before he gits the critter rode.

A gentle hoss is shore a pal. You walk into the hoss corral,
You take yore bridle in yore hand and he's so gentle that he'll stand.
He doesn't fight the bit aytall, and when you put on the head stall,
He doesn't seem to have no fears. He knows you won't rough up his ears.

He doesn't fret and fight and fuss, like some ill tempered onery cuss.
He's with you all the long day through to help with what you have to do.
And any time you rope and tie, he'll hold the slack and shore stand by.
In case your workin' on the ground, jest drop the reins, he'll stick around.

Jest think the time and work he saves; this gentle pony that behaves.
A cow boy mighty soon will find he's worth three of the other kind.
He wants to work and do his share and never quits you any where.
Of all the things you come across, the best one is a gentle hoss.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 68.

Ghost Canyon Trail

There are strange tales told of spirits bold,
And the trail to Santa Fe,
There is many a tale of the Chisholm trail,
And the trail to Laramie
But this is the tale of an obscure trail.
That few men travelled on;
Where a spirit was known to ride alone,
'Twixt the midnight hour and dawn.

It would wind and creep through canyons deep
And over the mesa wide.
The men who knew this trail were few,
Where the phantom used to ride.
At times was heard a careless word
Some drinking man let fall,
But 'twas held a joke by the rangeland folk,
That no one believed at all

I learned the truth from a hardy youth.
He was one of those reckless men
Who could ride in the lead of a night stampede,
Or the dust of the broncho pen.
On a winter night when the stars were bright
And the dying moon was low,
He was holding his course on a jaded horse
And the pace that he made was slow.

The cow horse flinched and cringed, till the cinch
Was almost against the ground.
His quivering ears showed deathly fear
And the cow boy looked around.
He felt the thrill of a clammy chill,
As it travelled along his spine,
For he saw at his side a phantom ride,
With never a word or sign.

He kept his place, for he set his pace
To the cow boy's jogging speed,
There came no sound on the frozen ground

From the tread of his phantom steed.
He showed a flash of a long mustache
And a tilted campaign hat,
There straight and strong with stirrups long
The phantom trooper sat.

They were all alone. And the pale moon shone
Through the ghost at the cow boy's side.
His courage fled as he rode with the dead
Alone on the mesa wide.
No sign of flight, no show of fight
The buckaroo displayed,
For slugs of lead won't hurt the dead,
Through the mist of a vapor shade.

With the mesa past they came at last
To a canyon wide and dark,
Where some stone huts stood in the cottonwoods
That had long been an old landmark.
Each ruined shack had a chimney black,
And a roofless crumbling wall.
A living spring, was the only thing
That was useful to men at all.

The chilling breezes through the leafless trees,
Gave a dreary dismal moan.
The trooper stayed in the ghastly shade
And the cow boy rode alone.
Strange tales are heard of what occurred
At that place in years gone by,
Ere that restless soul of the night patrol
Rode under the starlit sky.

What the trooper knows, or where he goes,
Nobody has ever found.
But the tale is told of the lone patrol
By the older settlers 'round.
There's a cow boy trim with a face that's grim,
Will never forget that ride

On a winter night in the pale moon light,
By the phantom trooper's side.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 69–71.

The Ghosts at the Diamond Bar

The wind was blowin' cold.
The Dipper swung round the dim North Star
And the night was growin' old.
But I had some wood that was dry and good,
So I let the cold wind whine.
I was safe and snug with a gallon jug
Of Death Valley Slim's moonshine.

Across the stove from where I sat
Stood a figger straight and tall.
He had no coat, he had no hat,
He must have come through the wall.
He pointed away toward a rocky shelf
That was up on the side of a hill.
He was one of the bunch the Injuns skelped
When they raided the old ore mill.

I nodded and passed the gallon jug.
He needed a drink or two.
But he only shrugged and shook his head;
That was sumptin' he could not do.
I set the jug down on the floor;
Then my eyes popped open wide.
There had been jest one; now a couple more
Was a standin' there by his side.

They would each one point with a ghostly hand
Where my old harmonica lay.
By signs they made me understand
They wanted that I should play.
So I played em "The Grave On The Lone Prairie,"
And "The Dyin' Ranger" too.
And twenty odd ghosts surrounded me
Before I was half way through.

I played 'em the old "Rye Whisky" tune
And they waltzed it round and 'round.
But I felt no weight on the floor of the room
And their feet made never a sound.

Then “Rosie O’Grady” and “Over The Waves,”
They waltzed with keen delight.
Them wandering spirits out of their graves
Was havin’ a time that night.

They motioned that I should drink once more.
That was easy to understand.
With noiseless feet, they stomped the floor
And patted their phantom hands.
When I seen ’em smile I changed my style.
I played old “Larry McGee.”
They wanted something with a lilt and swing,
And they stepped it light and free.

But jest as the thing was goin’ grand,
There was sumptin’ spoiled the show.
There wasn’t a drop in the coal oil can
And the lamp was burnin’ low.
I stopped and drunk me a hefty slug
And a thought come to mind.
I filled the lamp from the moonshine jug
And she blazed like a neon sign.

There was battered hats on the buckaroos.
Old miners with unshaved jaws.
Three Wallapi bucks were in there too,
And a couple Mohave squaws.
The next was the old time “Chicken Reel,
And you’d orta seen ’em go.
They would jig on the corners before they’d wheel
And give it the heel and toe.

I knew they wouldn’t be there fer long.
It would soon be breakin’ day.
And I wanted to sing ’em a good old song
Before they went on their way.
So I sung like I had never sung before,
Till the last of the crowd was gone.
And when I opened the ranch house door,
The day was beginning to dawn.

Yes, the desert trails have their own weird tales

That few of us mortals know.
And I'll never forget that crowd I met
On that night so long ago.
Some time I will meet them again, maybe,
Though I don't know where they are.
But why did they come to visit me,
That night at the Diamond Bar?

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 72–74.

Graves By The Side Of The Trail

Wren the trail herds came through
And the wagon trains too
And the stage coach that carried the mail
They were brave hardy souls
But the West took it's toll
For it's graves by the side of the trail.

CHORUS

On the tough mountain side,
On the lone prairie wide,
'Neath the trees in some broad grassy swale,
In the land of the West
They have gone to their rest
In their graves by the side of the trail.

There were redskins to fight
There were fierce outlaws white
There were sick ones whose strength seemed to fail
Others perished alone
And were buried unknown
I In their graves by the side of the trail.

There's a great judgment day
At the last so they say
When the Earth and the Heavens unveil,
God will call them and then
They will rise once again
From their graves by the side of the trail.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 75.

The Hacamore Colt

Wien a hacamore colt starts to learnin'
The ways and the methods of men;
He gits skeert, and sometimes without warnin'
He starts off to buckin' again.

He listens and looks when you're talkin',
Although he don't know what you say.
His is puzzled a heap by your walkin';
He don't know that two legged way.

When you pull out a sack of the makin's,
He doesn't like that perty well.
He mebbysno snorts and starts shakin'
Because he don't savvy that smell.

And when a man acts like he itches,
When he rakes down his leg with a scratch,
And the fire flies out of his britches,
The colt doesn't know it's a match.

He fidgets, he pulls and he fusses,
He drives a man into a rage.
He is one of them ignorent cusses,
But what did you know at his age?

And so I have soter concluded,
There ain't any call to git sore,
He knows a heap more than what you did,
When you was along about four.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 79.

Her Neighbor's Kids

Mast cows will give their calves good care.
They make the best of mothers
She knows her own calf anywhere
Among a hundred others.

But if a strange calf muzzles in
He finds out mighty quick.
She moves him out from there ag'in,
And does it with a kick.

It ain't because she hates that calf
She starts to gittin' rough.
But if she cuts her milk in half,
Her own won't have enough

There ain't a lot he understands
When he's too young fer weanin',
But any time a hard kick lands
You bet he gits the meanin'.

Cows don't git out and lead parades
Nor speak fer missionaries.
She hasn't got no ladies' aides,
Nor no auxiliaries.

She has a calf that's all her own.
She's tryin' to git by.
She figgers to be let alone
Or know the reason why.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 80.

Honest John's Five Aces

Things was goin' soter quiet on a lazy afternoon,
And us boys was playin' poker down to Andy Blunt's saloon.
Even the air around us had a soter peaceful feelin'
And old "Honest John" the gambler was the feller that was dealin'.

A stranger came a bustin' in, a mask was on his face.
He hollered at us "Stick 'em up"! He aimed to rob the place.
He showed mighty little judgment when he tied into that crowd
Fer the fellers down at Andy's wasn't very easy cowed.

No, There wasn't any talkin' cept the language of the "Colts"
And the atmosphere was rockin' to the sharp and heavy jolts.
And we noticed some time later that place was shore a wreck
Them there bullets broke the mirrirs and they busted bottle necks.

Andy tried to grab his shot gun but he couldn't reach that far
'Cause he'd left his sawed off shot gun at the tother end the bar.
There was several of our number when the smoke had cleared away
Layin' in eternal slumber waitin' fer the judgment day.

Well the hold up man was finished. One man laid there in his gore
But, a hand that showed five aces laid face upward on the floor.
Well, it didn't take no guessin' we could easy understand
But we heard some harsh expressions 'bout the man that held the hand.

It aint right to knock a feller that has crossed the great devide.
But you know that crooked gamblin' shore gits onderneath the hide
There is things that plum disgraces even them that's dead and gone
Yes, the hand that held five aces had belonged to Honest John.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 82–83.

Hoof Beats

In the song of the West, each tune and word,
Should be set to the tread of the pony herd.
It dates from the time the dust clouds rose
From the travelling herd of buffaloes,
And the mounted red skinned hunter came
To pursue and slaughter this mighty game.
With the rush of the herd as the hunters come,
Sound the horses' feet, with their drum drum drum.

Then out of the mountains and o'er the plain,
The trapper came with his laden train,
To the trading post with the spoils he'd brought.
He came at a walk and a shuffling trot.
In single file they followed the track,
And each horse carried his heavy pack.
The trappers and traders used to come;
Hear the horses' feet with their drum drum drum.

The frontier army—only groups
Of reckless men in cavalry troops.
Walk, trot, and gallop. That was their gait.
Fearless riders sitting straight.
Those tiny forts and garrisons small,
But the blue clad riders held them all.
A cheer for the troopers! Here they come,
The horses' feet with their drum drum drum.

The emigrant train, where the oxen toil,
And the wagon wheels cut into the soil.
They form a circle—They hear the shouts
Of the flanking herders and mounted scouts.
They form a circle and make a stand,
To fight for their lives with the raiding band.
To the sound of the war whoop, Here they come!
The ponies' feet with their drum drum drum.

And then, the Texans sallied forth,
With their long horned herds toward the fertile North.
In the night, the storm, and the mad stampede,

These daring riders would “Bend the lead.”
The dare devil cow boys, here they come!
The horses’ feet with their drum drum drum.

The mining camp, with its toil and thrills.
The stage coach comes through the rugged hills.
The brake shoes rasp as they rock and ride
At a reckless pace down the mountain side.
The freighter comes with his long line team.
The heel chains clank and the brake blocks scream.
The wagons and coaches, here they come,
And the horses’ feet with their drum drum drum.

The jaded steeds of an outlaw gang.
The vigilantes that shoot and hang.
The desperadoes brought to bay,
Where the rifles and six guns said their say.
The men who fought till their parting breath,
As their hard eyes glared in the jaws of Death.
The powder cracks, and the bullets hum,
And the horses’ feet with their drum drum drum.

When the cattle and sheep men settled a score
Without the law, in a fierce range war.
They battled it out with heart and soul,
At a cabin, a butte or a water hole.
Some stock man, outnumbered and crowded hard,
Was waiting to play his final card,
But there’s help at last, for here they come!
The horses’ feet with their drum drum drum.

A couple of reckless unkempt men,
In the welter and dust of the brancho pen.
A bucking horse as he leaps and groans,
Till he fairly wrenches the rider’s bones.
The saddle that creaks on its cinches tight—
These wild young horses knew how to fight.
Sometimes they can shake their rider numb
Ere their quick feet cease with their drum drum drum.

And now, through the land of winding trails,
Run concrete highways, and long steel rails.

But the western horse, that played his part,
With wiry muscles, and valiant heart,
Will hold his place in the stirring past,
So long as the pages of history last:
Through the engine's roar and the motor's hum,
Drown the sound of his feet, with their drum drum

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 84–86.

Hook 'Em Cow

You read of fierce bulls in the stories and books,
But you don't hear a heap 'bout an old cow that hooks.
A bull charges blind, but an old cow is wise.
She keeps her head shakin' and opens her eyes.
If you git to a post I have generally found
She runs right up to it and reaches around.

And yore biddin' fer trouble as shore as yore born
If you git yore old belly mixed up with her horn.
You have seen a cow scatter a whole brandin' crew
When they drug a calf in and the cow follered too.
Think a cow boy cain't run? Well you aint seen one sail
When a cow blows her nose on some waddy's shirt tail.

Sometimes when you pull a cow out of a bog
She will charge with a rush like some salty brush hog.
If an old cow gits down cause she's weak and she's pore,
If you help git her up she will fight you jest shore.
If you judge by her actions toward hosses and men,
She's by nature a heap like an old settin' hen.

I'll bet you was glad that you wasn't too late
When you lit with yore belly across some old gate,
And an old cow hit right underneath with a crash.
Jest a little more and she'd settled yore hash.
You fell on across, and was mad when you heered
How the rest of them ranch hands hollered and cheered.

Yes cows is odd critters; it shore is plum strange.
The pet cows is gentle, but them on the range
Is a sp'ilin' fer fight if they once git a skeer,
Or you make a calf bawl when the old cow can hear.
They're onreasonable cusses I'll tell you right now,
Fer you cain't explain much to a fightin' old cow.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 87.

The Hoss Round Up

The circle is throwed and yore closin' in,
The day is quiet and hazy.
You know the fun is about to begin,
They're a takin' 'em off of the mesa.
There's plenty of hosses comin' in sight
Yore old hoss seems to know.
He feels you pullin' the cinch up tight
And he's slingin' his head to go.

You must turn 'em now or they'll double back.
The time has come to ride.
You raise in yore stirrups and ease him some slack
As you settle him into his stride.
You have saved yore hoss to the very last
But now it has come to a show
The rocks, the brush and the trees flash past
And the ground is a blur below.

Some of the mares have colts at their heels,
Plum fast no use denyin'
You can hear the neighs, the snickers and squeals,
The manes and the tails are flyin'.
They charge right on through a gopher town
Their hoofs beat a steady rumble.
A cloud of dust as a hoss goes down
And a couple of others stumble.

You bust a snag when it rakes yore knee
But it loosens you up in the saddle.
There's part of yore shirt on a cedar tree
And yore warmin' up to the battle.
And now they are over the mesa's edge
Through the brush you see them flashin'.
The loosened rocks go over the ledge
You can hear them a rollin' and crashin'.

The boys below is closin' in.
They ain't fell down on the job.
They gathered the "Maichies" out of the rims

An they're throwin' them into the mob.
Yore hoss cold jaws when he hears them yell.
No chance to hold him in.
He slips in the rocks, he almost fell
But he's up and he's runnin' agin.

You are down to the wash and into the sand
And up on the other side.
The cat claw tears at yore face and hands,
Like a bat out of Hell you ride.
You know they are takin' you too far South
But yore still in the race and streakin'.
You can taste the sweat and dust in yore mouth
And yore hoss is beginnin' to weaken.

You can feel that yore mount is about all in,
But the bunch is down to a lope.
If you kick or spur you will get his wind
So you flog with a double of rope.
Twas the last he had but he won with that
You kept the bunch together,
And you all go lumberin' out on the flat
Where the old hands is holdin' the "Prather".

Their mounts are fresh and they understand,
They are racin' like mad to meet em
They know every trick of a broncho band
And savvy the way to beat 'em.
The prather hosses are gentle too,
They are fresh and a whole lot faster.
They circle 'em in and they drift 'em through
And the herd goes into the paster.

At last the boys that have made the run
Ride slowly up together;
Their tremblin' mounts are about all done,
They are pantin' and covered with lather.
The boys are stiff when they clamber down,
And they walk with a rollin' stride.
They twist up smokes as they stumble around
Knees bent and feet spread wide.

There are two men short but at last they show.
Their wore out hosses laggin'.
They are takin' it easy and travelin' slow
With their cinches loose and saggin'.
The boss shoves his old hat back on his head,
His face wears a friendly grin.
"T'm glad we have got that bunch" he said
"They're a little bit hard to bring in."

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 88–90.

How a Cow Puncher Rode

I have often been asked by the people I knowed,
To tell em the way that a cow puncher rode.
Now them cow hands they didn't all ride jest the same.
They rode a'most every old style you could name.

Of course, most of the hands that was workin' around,
Would ride with long stirrups, and straight up and down.
Some rode with 'em medium, some rode with 'em short.
In fact there was stirrups, and len'ths of all sorts.

I know of one feller that quarreled with his brother,
Because he rode with one stirrup longer than t'other.
Some stuck their laigs foreward and held their heels low.
Some held their laigs back and turned down their toe.

Some held their feet still, but some figity cuss
Would keep kickin' his feet and makin' a fuss.
There was some that set straight,
but there's others that humped
Till they set on their hoss as a sort of a lump.

There was some of them riders kep' close to their seat.
While others was half of the time on their feet.
Some bogged on the cantel and rode away back,
While others would jig like they rode on a tack.

There was some kep' their elbows down close to their side.
And others ag'in that would let 'em spread wide.
While some of 'em flopped up their elbows so high,
You would think mebbys they was tryin' to fly.

There was them that would ride with their hand on the horn.
Some looked plum contented and some looked forlorn.
There was them, fer some reason I couldn't explain,
Whirled a piece of their rope or the end of a rein.

There was some of them fellers set off to one side.
In fact I can't tell how a cow boy did ride.

When I figger it out, their is only one guess.
They rode like they thought they could do it the best. (Borein)

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 91–92.

How They Made the Royal Gorge

Di you ever hear how “Brindle” that old long horn Texas steer
Drifted into Colorado long before the gorge was here
He was old and he was foxy he was fast and he was tough
And he never struck a mountain where the going was too rough.

The cow boys used to chase him he was never ketched and tied
He’d go down the river swim across and take the other side
He never left the river bottom because that critter knowed
He could outrun all the ponies that them cow boys ever rode.

He’d go up and down a mountain and he didn’t keer how steep
He’d go over rocks and boulders faster than a mountain sheep
If you jumped him in the open he could give you spades and cards
He could spot a rabbit fifty feet and race him fifty yards.

Then Dutch George come to the country with a string of sixty head
Cream of all the saddle hosses so the early settlers said.
He had mules to do his packin’ that he didn’t never ride
He kep a wrangle pony and a Sunday hoss beside.

Now Dutch George he jumped Old Brindle and he gave him quite a run
But he left Dutch George behind him long before the day was done
Then Old George he lit in cussin’ fer it made him awful mad
And he swore he’d ketch old Brindle or kill every hoss he had.

So George fenced him up a paster where the grass was tall and thick
Said he’d camp right in that country till at last he’d done the trick
When he took to chasin’ Brindle that old critter was amazed
Cause George had so many hosses he could rest ’em sixty days.

Well George chased him all the summer all the winter and the spring
And it kept him busy ridin’ all the horses in his string
Every morning after breakfast George would bight him off a chaw
Then he’d take and chase Old Brindle up and down the Arkansaw.

They’d knock dirt into the river which the current washed away
And the trail kept gittin older, it got broader day by day
After several years of runnin’ why their trail got awful deep
In among the cliffs and boulders and the sides got high and steep.

George’s hosses started dyin’, George was gittin’ old and gray,

And his wife she died and left him, still that old steer kept away
But Old George he never weakened for he got hisself a squaw
And he kep on a chasin' Brindle up and down the Arkansaw.

So fer years they kep a runnin' and before the race was done
They tramped out sech a canyon that they never saw the sun
George he run plum out of hosses and the day the last one dropped
He was left afoot and walkin' but you bet he never stopped.

Up and down that rocky canyon they kep on another year
Several times along toward evenin' George he almost ketched the steer
Both his boots was worn to ribbons and his feet was sore and raw
But he stayed right after Brindle up and down the Arkansaw.

Then one evenin' jest at sunset they found George a layin' dead
And Old Brindle laid a dyin' twenty seven feet ahead.
Yes Old Brindle won the contest but that stubborn Dutchman George
Chased him up and down the river till they'd dug the Royal Gorge.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 93–95.

The Joshua Shade

Dia you ever start out fer to make a long ride
When the sun was so hot it was fryin' yore hide?
And along about noon you could feel yore blood bile
And yore hoss was so hot you must rest him a while.

Where about all the shade that a feller could see
Was the top and the trunk of a joshua tree.
When you got on the ground you could shore feel the heat.
It went plum through yore boots and was hurtin' yore feet.

The hoss got the shade of the top, and you laid
Between him and the tree in a slim strip of shade.
He stood plenty quiet, a shuttin' his eyes,
Too hot and too tired to fight off the flies.

All around you as far as a feller could look
The air was so hot that it shivered and shook.
The lizzards denned up and the crows wouldn't fly,
And only a buzzard sailed 'round in the sky.

Well they say that the sun is what makes the world go.
It keeps people healthy, makes everything grow,
Now all of these wonderful things may be true,
But it gits plenty hot fer to kill a man too.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 96.

Judgment Day

Once I dremt while I was sleepin'
That the earth had passed away,
And the boss of all creation
Made a work on Judgment Day,
They was folks of every color
They was folks of every breed
And they cut 'em into bunches
'Cordin' to their race and creed.

Top hand angels done the cuttin'
They knowed how to handle things,
Some would change and help the others
While they'd smoke and rest their wings.
And I seed a bunch of fellers
They was holdin' on the side.
Grazin' soter loose and easy
And the angels workin' wide.

He had judged and classed the others
By a book of rules he used,
Then he called out to the angels
"Now bring on the buckaroos!"
Angels bunched and shoved 'em foreward,
Some surprised but not dismayed.
Amblin' up to face the judgment
Came that grizzled wild brigade.

Each one pulled his hat on tighter
That they done from habit's force,
It's a trick of most rough riders
When they mount a buckin' horse.
Some was young and some was older,
Some walked with a limpin' stride.
Some still had the high healed boots on
They was wearin' when they died.

They all stood in line to answer
Fer the way they'd spent their days.
And they faced the boss of Heaven

With a cool and level gaze.
And the boss of all creation
Give them boys a kerful look,
And sez to a top hand angel,
“Bring me out that range law book.”

Well, I turned and asked an angel
Why the judgment book was changed,
And they judged that bunch of cow boys
By the laws that ruled the range.
And he answered very solemn
That the reason was because
You could never judge a cow boy
By another feller’s laws.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 97–98.

The Line Camp

Sox rode into the line camp 'bout the time the sun went down;
Got the load from off yore pack hoss, throwed yore saddle on the ground.
You was glad the man before you had a heart and chopped some wood,
But when you went inside the shack things wasn't quite so good.

You found dead flies and cobwebs and lots of things like that.
One stove laig broke, some wore out clothes, and plenty sign of rats.
You got a rock and propped the stove and soter cleaned the junk.
Then drug yore tarp and blankets in and throwed them on the bunk.

Next thing you brought your grub inside and built a fire on.
There wasn't any lantern and the candles all was gone.
Well, you tore up some flannin rags and made a right good wick,
And scouted out a lard pail lid—you waddies know the trick.

You melted taller or some lard, it didn't matter which;
And you was all primed up to go, you had a "Kitchen Bitch."
The coffee cooked, the meat got fried, and you was cheerful hearted.

Because you had been there before and soter liked the shack.
The same old nails to hang yore clothes, the rafters smoky black.
And when you got yore supper et you lit yore pipe agin,
Then propped yore feet up by the stove and let the heat soak in.

Before you slept you went to see your night hoss in the trap.
You crawled into yore blankets and you didn't give a rap.
The night wind blowed real soft and slow and you was all alone;
It was nothin' but a line camp but to you 'twas home sweet home.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 99–100.

Looking Backward

Do you recollect that country that you knew in days gone by?
Where the prairie met the sun rise and the mountains met the sky.
Where you trailed through rugged canons and on windy mesas wide,
Or you crossed the rollin' prairie on a long and lonely ride.

How your bits and spurs would jingle. And the only other sound
Was the creakin' of your saddle and the hoof beats on the ground.
You was happy in that country, and among the folks you knew.
Almost any where you landed there was something you could do.

You would light off of your pony and you'd stretch and stomp your feet,
When you got that invitation fer to "Light a spell and eat."
They was faithful to the customs of the easy goin' west.
You was just a driftin' cow hand but you was an honored guest.

But things wasn't always funny in them early days, old pard.
There was times you had no money and the work was plenty hard.
You was young and you was healthy, you was never really sick,
But you often travelled limpin' when a leg got jammed or kicked.

You could tell there had been cattle in the water that you drank.
And you swallowed bugs and wigglers now and then at some ground tank.
Them big springs in the arroyos, well, you mostly passed 'em by.
They was nice and clear to took at but full of alkali.

How you rode with Death behind you when you milled the wild stampede.
You could feel the lightnin' blind you as you raced to bend the lead.
How you went out greasy sackin' in the summer through the hills.
You was shoin', brandin', packin', cookin', workin' fit to kill.

No there wasn't any wagon and there wasn't any bunk.
Packed your bed on sweaty hosses. Man the way them blankets stunk.
Now you tell it with a snicker, but I griped you then I bet.
Standin' all night in your slicker 'cause your bed was wringin' wet.

Too, you might remember kneelin' down beside some dying man
While you wrote his last short message in the book among your brands.
Or you might have seen a quarrel. Men that had been friends for years.
One or both was dead or dyin' by the time the smoke was clear.

When you rode up to a bunk house you was welcomed by the crew,

But you got some recollections how the bed bugs met you too.
When you went to meet the round up, you can recollect some day,
When you couldn't find the wagon or your hosses got away.

Now old hurts come back and pain you and you've got complainin' toes
That dates back some forty winters to the time your feet was froze.
And your eyes are weak and tender from the wind and dust and sun.
That there time you got snow blinded didn't really help 'em none.

Things are not the way they once was. There has been a heap of change,
'Mongst the places and the people since you worked the open range.
In the wide and grassy valleys where the cattle used to roam,
Now there's irrigatin' ditches, and there's farms and barns and homes.

There's signs and service stations where the cattle bedded down.
Where we used to meet the round up now there's villages and towns.
And the Neon lights is blazin' where our camp fires glowed so dim.
Concrete bridges span the rivers where our hosses used to swim.

No you haven't made a fortune, and your hair is white. You're old.
But you wouldn't swap your memories; not for heaps of shinin' gold.
For whenever you get lonely you put on a big review,
Of the people and the places and the hosses that you knew.
You can hear the songs and stories, you can see the camp fires blaze,
As you live again the glories of your grand old cow boy days.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 105–108.

The Man On The Fence

There's a man that I would speak about, you see him everywhere.
He puts out conversations till he mangles up the air;
No matter what the subject is, his ideas are immense.
But he don't go into action. He's the man that's on the fence.

When the owners ship out cattle they have all that they can do.
The buyers and the waddies, they are mighty busy too.
Who explains the situation to a bunch of idle gents?
I needn't tell nobody, it's the feller on the fence.

Who is that can tell you how a broncho should be rode?
Who is it laughs the loudest at a feller when he's throwed?
Who tries to be sarcastic when he makes his wise comments?
Whose pants is full of splinters? It's the man that's on the fence.

Who is it puts a swagger on but never gits in trouble?
If he ever gits in danger who can vanish like a bubble?
Who can tell about a battle till he holds the crowd plum tense?
Though perhaps he never seen it; it's the feller on the fence.

Who hollers at old timers as if they were his pals?
Who has set and spurred the splinters from a hundred odd corrals?
Who has spurred the gates and fence rails till the boys all know the dents?
It's the man that's always present. It's the feller on the fence.

No, he ain't no use fer nothin' and he sure does eat a lot.
And he does a heap of talkin' that would get a real man shot.
But the outfit tolerates him though he ain't worth thirty cents,
Fer he's really right amusin', that there feller on the fence.

And it helps an honest waddy when he's done his best and failed;
Just to stop and look and listen at the feller on the rail.
Fer he knows down in his gizzard, if he's got an ounce of sense,
That he's done a durned sight better than the man that's on the fence.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 109–110.

Old And Foxy

It is likely he was in the drive
among the other stock,
Till he got a chance to sneak away
and hide behind a rock.
He had his idee figgered out.
He'd planned it in advance,
And he wasn't slow about it
when he saw he had a chance.

He's been playin' tag with cow boys
since the day that he was born.
Every year that he could dodge 'em
meant a wrinkle on his horn.
When the round up is a workin'
he will watch 'em for a week.
He comes down at night fer water,
then goes back up on the peak.

I'll bet there's times that critter sorter squints his eyes and smiles.
He jest walks around some boulders while they're ridin' miles and miles.
He's afraid of men and hosses, he has seen 'em come and go.
He stays up in the pinnacles and watches things below.

By the time some rider climbs the hill and gets where he was at,
He's got plum off from that mountain and he's half accrost the flat.
People say old steers git foxy. That is what I have been told.
But I reckon that's the only kind that lives to git so old.

Well, he is livin' in the hills long after gentle stock
Has been hung up in the packin' house and chopped up on the block.
It may be learned or natural, he's a smart one just the same.
And you got to give him credit every time he beats the game.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 118–119.

The Old Cow Pony

Hato there old feller. I'm speakin' to you.
No need to look at me the way that you do.
When we git acquainted I think you will find,
I know quite a bit about you and your kind.

With your wicked bright eyes and your rough shaggy coat,
And about as sure footed and tough as a goat.
You was chuck full of Hell from your nose to your tail.
You came North with the herds when they drove the long trail.

Through the heat and the dust when the goin' was hard
Out in the dim star light you held the lone guard.
On the dark stormy night when the herd would stampede,
You carried the riders that "Bended the lead."

You was never a thing to be petted or trusted.
Most every old cow poke has bones that you busted.
But them old boys swear by you. You bet they all do.
And they'd like to build statues to hosses like you.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 120.

Old Frosty

Old Frosty was a round up cook
as cranky as a grizzly bear.
Knowned all the answers in the book
besides a few that wasn't there

When first we felt the breath of Spring
and coyotes had a cheerful howl.
When other folks began to sing
old Frosty started in to growl

He didn't like the summer crew.
He called 'em nothin' to admire.
He said not one among 'em knew
the way to set a wagon tire.

And when they tried to tell him news,
or let him in on some big scheme,
He'd tell em go and nail some shoes
onto the old chuck wagon team.

He'd clean the wagon spick and span
and cuss because we'd lost some bowls.
I mind one time he licked a man that
used his pots to boil some clothes.

He always cussed the winter hands before he got his wagon packed
Because they loand out pots and pans and somehow failed to get 'em back.
They'd start him to the general store to fill his list and get his load.
He answered short and even swore if someone stopped him on the road.

But at the store I'll have to say his manner was polite and pleasant.
For every time he drove away he got tobacker for a present.
One time two punchers short on brains with spurs a rattlin' on their heels
Tied up their hosses by the reins to Frosty's hind chuck wagon wheels.

Old Frosty grabbed an empty sack and brushed them hosses in the face.
They broke the reins when they set back and Frosty chunked 'em off the place.
Them punchers swore they'd whip a cook and their intentions was all right
But Frosty grabbed his old pot hook and them two fellers lost a fight.

He'd tell us boys to bring some wood when we come into camp at night.

That didn't do a bit of good. All we brought was our appetite.
Him and the wranglers always fit, because he kept 'em doin' chores.
And every time a wrangler quit it always made the boss plum sore.

We wondered why they kept the cuss. We hated him with all our souls
And reckoned someday one of us would have to shoot him full of holes.
His face it was no maiden's dream; but Frosty always did his part.
He'd pull a big load with a team that other fellers couldn't start.

The meals he cooked was plenty good. I think sometimes I taste 'em yet.
We often wondered how he could when mud was deep and wood was wet.
He wanted to be let alone, he didn't care to laugh or joke;
But he could set a broken bone or doctor up a sick cow poke.

He never did throw off or shirk he kept us free from mounted tramps.
The round up boss he run the work and let Old Frosty run the camps.
And then one spring he failed to show. The boss he waited hoped and trusted
The hands allowed that mebbys Old Frosty got so mad he busted.

They got a man to take his place that had a better disposition
He had a cheerful way and face but only half as much ambition.
He was fair to middlin' cook. The bosses reckoned he was good.
But anything he undertook he done just half what Frosty could.

Old Frosty can't be livin' now. He's up above or down below,
But I will gamble anyhow that where he's at he runs the show.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 121–123.

The Old West

When folks think of the places and times they like best,
That's when most old timers remember the west.
The West in the days it was really immense.
When you travelled for miles without findin a fence.

There was not many churches and not many schools.
There was no regulations and mighty few rules.
It come 'bout as near as a country could be
To what you might call the real land of the free.

There was nobody asked where you got what you owned.
They minded their business and let you alone.
If you made a success or you wound up in ruin,
They figgered you'd ort to know what you was doin'!

You bought your own chips and you played your own game.
No one but yourself was to praise or to blame.
If you got into trouble, nobody horned in.
You could run or die fightin' or mebbby so win.

You could fight with a club, you could shoot or throw rocks.
You could die in your moccasins, boots, or your sock.
Nobody advised you out in the Old West.
You did things the way you could do 'em the best.

Just where a man come from, them folks didn't care.
When he wanted to leave that was his own affair.
On the ranches and ranges, in old Western towns,
If a feller was useful they kept him around.

There was now and then fellers got lynched by a mob.
But not often a man that was holdin' a job.
You could deal with a bad man in case that you knew it
There was plenty to do and not many to do it.

So if the survivor could be of some use.
The crowd was in favor of turnin' him loose.
They wanted good men but they wanted still more.
They wanted to know what a man was good for.

Now a law man he had to be quick on the draw.

With brains in his head and with sand in his craw.
A lot of the people he handled was tough
And an officer didn't get far on a bluff.

If there's stuff to be moved or there's goods to be hauled,
Well, somebody wanted a freighter, that's all.
There was cattle by thousands a runnin' wild loose
And plenty of work for some real buckaroos.

And so many young horses; I'm tellin' you mister,
Them folks almost worshipped a real broncho twister.
A man that could count to a hundred could teach,
And any old fool that could holler could preach.

What brand of religion? Them folks didn't mind.
He could have a religion of most any kind.
A catholic or protestant, yes either one.
He could dance with the Injuns and worship the Sun.

Them citizens wasn't compelled to believe it.
You could listen or not. You could take it or leave it.
He might be a bachelor or have several wives.
That didn't mean nothin' in other folks' lives.

No one in the settlement cared what he did
If he fed his own women and raised his own kids.
He could pray to Mohammed to salvage his soul.
He could build him a shrine or a tall totem pole.

It seemed like in them days that nobody worried
Nobody was idle but nobody hurried.
Some of 'em was good and some of 'em was bad.
They did what they could with the chances they had.

Yes that is the way they did things in the west,
And that was the reason we liked it the best.
It come 'bout as near as a country could be,
To what you might call the real land of the free.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 130–132.

The Panther Track

It was way out at a water hole a hoss come in to drink.
You and your partner ketched him, and it made you look and think.
The bridle reins was draggin', he'd a saddle on his back,
And across that empty saddle was a fresh made panther track.

Well, there wasn't no denyin' that the rider had been throwed.
But he shore left there a tryin' that was mighty plainly showed.
Even if he was caught nappin' and a settin' sorter slack,
He went out of there a tryin' that's what made the panther track.

You looked in the saddle blankets fer a sign of leaves or brush.
Might have run in some rough country, and got dragged off in the rush.
There was nothin' in the blankets and the rope was tied up tight,
And the pony wasn't spur marked; it was sorter strange all right.

So he wasn't chasin' nothin', and the pony hadn't bucked,
It shore struck you mighty funny he had meet up with bad luck.
But the man had lost his saddle and the hoss had slipped his pack,
That was wrote as plain as daylight, in that fresh made panther track.

Well, you rode up the hog back and you searched the whole sky line.
Fer a smoke or any signal you could foller fer a sign.
And his hoss was smart and gentle, follered right up on the slack,
While you wondered why that feller ever made that panther track.

You back tracked until you found him. He was layin' mighty still.
Ants all over and around him, where the trail come off the hill.
Yes, you sent word to his outfit and they took his body back.
But nobody knows the reason why he made that panther track.

** (A spur mark across a saddle.)*

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 135–136.

The Pet Hoss

I once rode a pet hoss, as onery a scamp
As ever tormented a ranch or a camp.
An old winter hoss and I needn't explain,
He got his bad habits from bein' fed grain.
He would open a gate and git into a shed,
He would tear open grain sacks or paw up a bed.
He would bust up a bucket or batter a pan—
Why he never got killed I jest cain't understand.

When ridin' along, if you didn't go fast
He would root at the bit and go grabbin' fer grass.
If you doubled yore rope up and welted his hide
He would flinch and he'd beg till it looked like he cried.
He was like lots of people. Go nosin' about
Till he got into trouble, then try to beg out.
If you whipped him he'd jump and light in the same tracks
If you spurred him he'd groan and jest hump up his back.

But boy he was tough beyond question or doubt.
He took that old jog trot and never wore out.
And jump out a critter—Good Lord how he'd go.
He would take you right to him and give you a throw.
He didn't care how many loops that you spilt,
He stayed right at their tail till another was built.
He knowed how to widen and how to set back,
When you'd tied you could call him, he'd step up and slack

Another thing too that may seem sort of strange,
You could walk up and ketch him, turned loose on the range.
He helped me one day when I'd made a hard run
With a long ride ahead, which I shouldn't have done.
The hoss I was ridin' was draggin' his feet,
And the dust devils danced in a shimmer of heat.
I spotted some hosses. They let me git nigh.
In the heat waves they looked 'bout a dozen feet high.

They all trotted off, that is all except one,
There stood the old pet hoss, the son of a gun.
The hoss I was on couldn't make a good lope

And the pet hoss would run if I took down my rope.
He had been runnin' out since along in the spring,
But I got him on foot, with an old hoggin' string.
Yes a pet hoss is onery and mean, that's a cinch
But they're mighty durned handy sometimes in a pinch.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 139–140.

Pullin' Leather

Yes, a cow boy has his troubles, and he shore is out of luck,
Out a dozen miles from nowheres and his hoss begins to buck.
And he picks a place to practice on some mighty ugly ground,
For you'd land amongst the cactus if he ever got you down.

So you aim to keep a straddle and you'll ride him if you can,
'Elst they'll be a dehorned saddle, or they'll be a one armed man.
You don't look like much vaquero, he is floppin' yore shirt tails.
You have lost yore old sombrero and you've broke some finger nails.

People say that pullin' leather don't show ridin' skill. That's true.
But you'd like to stick together till the argyment is through.
When yo're a slippin' and a slidin', you'll admit at all events
If it doesn't show good ridin' that it shows a heap of sense.

When yo're throwed it ain't so pleasant with a dozen miles to walk.
No there ain't nobody present, and the hoss of course cain't talk.
You are hangin' on and prayin'. You ain't makin' no grand stand.
You jest aim to keep a stayin' and you'll do the best you can.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 142.

Puttin' On A Show

This boy is sure good and he takes lots of pride
In showin' the others how well he can ride.
He ain't only contented with "Ridin' him Slick."
He has pitched him the slack and he's doin' some tricks.

He sets right straight up and he looks at his friends.
He is holdin' his moustache and twistin' the ends.
If you've got an idee that is easy to do,
Try it out when a hoss starts to buckin' with you.

You will find your hand flyin' all over the place,
And it's luck if you don't hit yourself in the face.
A buckin' hoss don't look so bad to the gents
That are on gentle hosses or roost on the fence.

But the man that can ride him and finish on top,
And twist his moustache is a hard one to stop.
We don't like a feller that shows off, but still,
He sure has a right to be proud of his skill.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 143.

The Race For The Wagon

The cook is at work with his pots and pans.
In sight of the wagon, this bunch of hands
Is racin' to see who'll be first in,
There aint no stakes but they ride to win.
We know it's a thing that was often done;
It didn't mean nothin, just cow boy fun.
And a gallop does rest a man a lot
That has rode fer miles at a walk or trot.

The cook keeps on a mixin' his dough,
He got used to them races years ago,
And the average old time round up cook
Would be too stubborn to even look.
He has work of his own that he has to do
If the others can play they're welcome to.
He bakes the biscuits and fries the meat
To be ready in time fer the hands to eat.

The sun shines bright on the flats and hills,
The summer day is warm and still.
The smoke goes straight toward the clear blue sky—
Not even a clowd is driftin' by.
There's many an old time buckaroo
Who's ridin' days are long since through,
Who would like to be there and would shore be proud
To race for the wagon along with the crowd.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 144.

Rain

Les sumpthin' a feller cain't hardly explain
The way that a cow puncher feels about rain.
It makes the feed grow and it fills up the tanks,
And generally speakin' he'd orta give thanks.
He wakes up some night when the rain hits his bed
And pulls the tarpolian up over his head.
It's warm when it rains and he gits overhet
And he lays there all night in a miserable sweat.

He wakes up next mornin', his boots is all soaked
Jest laugh that one off if you think it's a joke.
He pulls at the lugs and he stomps and he knocks
Till he drives both his feet through the toes of his socks.
He gits his boots on but you know how it feels;
No toes in his socks and them wrinkled up heels.
When he goes to ketch out it ain't no easy trick
With a rope that is wet and as stiff as a stick.

He dabs for his hoss and he makes a good snare
But the hoss downs his head and backs right out from there.
Fer a cow pony knows you cain't tighten a loop
When you ketch with a rope that's as stiff as a hoop.
When he gits saddled up he must climb up and ride
And that, wets the last dry spot he had on his hide.
The hoss starts to buck but that cow boy is set
Fer a man's hard to throw when his saddle is wet.

All day he keeps ridin' the flats and the hills,
A slippin' and slidin' and likely he spills.
When he gits into camp he must stand up to eat,
And his clothes is all wet from his head to his feet.
He stands 'round the fire, he cusses and smokes,
Fer he hates to git into a bed that's all soaked.
But his slicker's wet through fer it's old any way,
And there's mighty few slickers turns water all day.

And while he turns in, and as strange as it seems
He goes off to sleep and he sweats and he steams.
Next mornin' it's clear and the wind's blowin' sharp

He shivers and crawls out from under his tarp.
By the time he eats breakfast he's feelin' all right
And his bed will dry out by a couple more nights.
But the old saddle blankets are still cold and wet,
And the hoss humps his back and looks wicked you bet.

Old cow boy is tired, he's stiff and he's sore,
He's had lots of trouble, he don't want no more.
So he takes that old pony and leads him around
Till he gits his back warm and the saddle sets down.
Fer the man that's been rained on two nights and a day,
Ain't lookin' fer trouble; he ain't built that way.
He wants feed and water but let me explain,
A waddy ain't comf'tble out in the rain.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 145–146.

The Rifle

You can talk of the flag that our ancestors bore,
But what backed it up when they started to war?
They had orators, statesmen, intelligent men,
Who did wonderful things with the treaty and pen;
But let me express my opinion right here,
It was mostly the rifle, that tamed the frontier.

When a settler and family moved into the woods,
It was little they had, either money or goods.
What protected their home in that desolate spot?
What furnished the meat that they cooked in the pot?
What brought in the hides of the bear and the deer?
That old fashioned rifle, that tamed the frontier.

Yes, history can tell you the part that she played
When they fought for their lives at some rude barricade.
When the fierce painted warriors charged with a yell,
With knives and with hatchets, like demons from Hell,
Right back to their war cry, rang, deadly and clear,
The voice of the rifle, that tamed the frontier.

Each time foreign soldiers set foot on our soil,
And the farmers and tradesmen abandoned their toil,
Their soldiers and officers soon learned to fear,
The voice of that rifle, that tamed the frontier.

When the ox wagons travelled the mountains and plains,
Through the heat and the dust; through the snows and the rains;
No law to protect them, they went without fear.
They carried the rifle that tamed the frontier.

When the renegades cornered some lone grizzled trapper,
They had trouble in handling that crafty old scrapper.
The battle light, gleamed in his faded hard eye.
When he laid the gray whiskers, just under his ear,
On the stock of the rifle, that tamed the frontier.

When the gangs of tough outlaws sprang up in the west
And they got to the place they were really a pest;
The citizens gathered, and formed a committee,

Who wasted no time, and who wasted no pity.
The old vigilantes put things in the clear.
With the rope and the rifle, they tamed the frontier.

At last the breach loader arrived on the scene.
The cow boy's short rifle. The trooper's "Carbeen."
When the range wars were gripping men body and soul,
And some boy was corralled at a lone water hole;
Outnumbered, surrounded, he sold his life dear,
With the cow boy's rifle, that tamed the frontier.

When the grizzly was gone and the Indian tame,
And the buffalo had vanished, the scatter gun came.
And gone to his rest was the grim pioneer,
And the old fashioned rifle, that tamed the frontier.

But he left us a heritage none can deny.
Our cause or our country should neither one die.
In times of depression, in moments of doubt.
If there's treason within, if there's foemen without,
Let them listen to reason, or else, let them hear,
The voice of the rifle, that tamed the frontier.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 147–148.

The Rope Corral

Remember when you saddled up jest shortly after dawn?

I reckon that you ain't forgot it Pal.

When the boys was busy ketchin' out and throwin' saddles on,

And the hosses in the old time rope corral.

You ask me if that single strand would hold 'em? Well I hope.

They was foxy, they was skittish, but you bet,

They'd been trained when they was broken not to run against a rope,

In a way they didn't very soon forget.

They would crowd and duck and scramble, and you'd have to watch around,

Till you got a chance to "dab" it on your hoss.

Then they'd let one rope go slack until it rested on the ground.

It was easy then to lead him out across.

Yes the trick was very simple, and was very clever too;

But the whole affair can easy be explained.

You can nearly always figger what a man or hoss will do,

If you know the way that he was raised and trained.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 149.

The Running Iron

I have kept this running iron that an old friend handed me.
Many weary miles it travelled underneath a cow boy's knee.
Through the sun and rain of summer, through the winter's cold and snow,
It was fastened to his saddle everywhere he chanced to go.

It has been upon a night horse. It was flung beneath a shed.
And it lay out in the starlight, on the saddle by his bed.
Yes, you know without my saying, it was made to run a brand,
But it broke a trail through cactus, out upon the desert sand.

It's been behind a long ear while they made the gravel fly,
Racing through the rocks and timber for a place to catch and tie.
It would knock out heavy gravel that got in a horse's feet,
And for finishing a rattler it was mighty hard to beat.

You can see without half trying that this implement would hurt.
It would help subdue a broncho if you didn't have a quirt.
I don't say he hunted trouble, but I intimate he might
Just have used this running iron when it equalized a fight.

Yes it rode upon his saddle through the cold and through the heat.
It's been held above the embers while he grilled a piece of meat.
For its owner was a cow boy, by which reason I suppose,
There's a lot of little secrets that this running iron knows.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 150–151.

Sidin' His Dad

Now can't you remember when you was a lad
And you started out ridin' along with your Dad.
You first rode behind him. How awkward you felt,
When you grabbed at the saddle or hung to his belt.

Then you rode an old gentle hoss barebacked, alone,
Till at last you'd a saddle and hoss of your own
And you was so tickled and happy inside,
You was ready to bust, you was so full of pride.

You think of it now lookin' back through the years.
That was long long ago, but the memory is clear.
It is likely your father has gone to his rest,
And the saddle and pony, of course they "went west."

And the wide open country you used to admire,
Is dotted with houses or shut in with wire.
The motor cars crowded the hosses away.
They do in an hour what took you a day.

There was years of hard work, and a lot of hard rides,
And many a range pal you travelled beside.
But never a thrill like when you were a lad,
And you rode your first saddle, 'longside of your Dad.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 152.

The Silk Shirt

You recollect that pink silk shirt you bought so long ago,
The time us boys went into town to see the rodeo.
The second day you had it, it begun to show the dirt.
When you wore it after sun down you would git so cold you hurt.

But the first time that we branded, well, it didn't look so new:
It appeared plum second handed; tore and smeared with blood and goo.
Next day, well, you jumped some hosses and you had to make a ride,
When you took 'em off the mesa and come down the mountain side.

When they took you through the cedars, why yore shirt begun to tear.
By the time you hit the slide rock jest a part of it was there.
But the thing was tore to ribbons, and yore hide was scratched, oh gosh!
When you once got through the cat claw that was growin' in the wash.

At the old home ranch that evenin' you was settin' on a rail.
You still had the cuffs and collar and a portion of the tail.
So you put yore old brush jumper on. 'Twas full of sweat and dirt.
But 'twas built to hold a cow boy better than a pink silk shirt.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 153.

The Stage Driver

The man that drove the stage coach didn't have no smooth paved road.
He got all kinds of weather, and sometimes a heavy load.
The road was just some wheel tracks among the rocks and sand;
He'd a team of half broke hosses and he drove 'em four in hand.

When once they got him started he was really on his own.
There wasn't no highway patrol nor any telephone.
He looked to his team and harness, buckled on his old six gun,
'Cause most any thing could happen 'fore he finished up his run.

Them old drivers might be faulty but they shore was fust class hands.
You would find 'em plenty salty and their craw was full of sand.
They wasn't picked fer beauty and they wasn't picked fer style.
They picked 'em out fer all them things that makes a man wuth while.

He had responsibility. He had his trip to make.
He had the mail sack, and the lives of passengers at stake.
In all the history of the West, he has his place and page;
For everybody must respect the man that drove the stage.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 154.

Stan

Ses Peter stood at the Golden Gate
Givin' the crowd the works.
The people was there from ev'ry state,
Missourians, Jews and Turks.
They were all in line and things went fine
Till the system got upset.
Up rode a man by the name of Stan*
From the Brewery Gulch Gazette.

"Git this through yore head," Saint Peter said,
"So fur yore the only one
That has dast come here in his ridin' gear
On a onery wall eyed dunn.
You said yore a dude, but yore rough and rude,
And I'd have you understand,
You have got the walk, the way and the talk,
Of a regular old rough hand.

"You ain't allowed in the Gospel crowd.
One reason you cain't get through,
We've got some folks don't like yore jokes,
From the W.C.T.U.
Yore a goin' to clear right out from here,
Both you and that wall eyed brute.
I'm a shippin' you South to the Parminint drouth.
Git into that left hand chute!"

Stan raked the dunn, and the son of a gun
Raired straight as a dyin' whale.
When he hit the ground his head come down
And he shore did swaller his tail.
Stan waved his hat and fanned his fat
And give 'em the cow boy yell.
And you ort to have heered how the Devil cheered
As he stood on the gates of Hell.

Twas a clever trick and he worked it slick.
They found it out too late.
He steered the wreck with a spur in his neck,

Right in through the open gate.
Saints shuffled their feet on the golden street
When they ran behind telephone poles.
Stan was first to ride plum high and wide
Through the city of ransomed souls.

There could nothin' out run that wall eyed dunn;
They went through the town right quick.
He last was seen in the pasters green
A headin' right up the crick.
Old Soloman Wise of the sportin' guys,
Went over and cashed a bet.
He had bet on the man by the name of Stan,
From the Brewery Gulch Gazette.

** Refers to Stan Adler, editor of the Brewery Gulch Gazette in*

Bisbee, Arizona.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 158–159.

Swimmin' the Herd

The river is up, but then the boss
Has done give powders" to swim across.
The remuda comes with the wrangler kid,
He pulls up his belt and pulls down his lid.
They go right in and the wrangler hangs
To his hoss's tail or the saddle whangs.

The lead they foller, jest watch 'em string
And into the stream rides the point and swing.
But they double back and they mill around
And a lot of the herd is due to drown.
Come on! some man of the bull dog breed,
Git into that circle and start a lead.

A thing like that ain't nice to meet
Them crowdin' bodies and treadin' feet—
You must git right in till you smell their breath
And you're stickin' yore face in the jaws of death.
But into the mill goes a buckaroo,
A dead game cow boy through and through.

There isn't so much to see at that.
The cattle's heads and a Stetson hat
And a floatin' mane in the churnin' strife
There a game old cow hoss fights for life.
Till he starts a lead and they're swinimin' clear
And even the hard old riders cheer.

And the whole durned world can lift their hat
To a feller that's cheered by a crowd like that.
And now the cattle are goin' fine
A dozen abreast and right in line,
Some swims fast and some swims slow
But across to the other side they go.

You must float the wagon with driftwood logs
And land it across where there ain't no bog.
They drag it across to the other side
With saddles and pack ropes spliced and tied.
It had to be done because the boss

He done give powders to swim across.

* *A cowboy term for orders from the boss.*

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 160–161.

That Smoke

Hae you noticed a man with his pots and his pans
A tryin' to cook on the ground
And it ain't any joke the way that the smoke ik
Will foller that feller around.

If the man crouches down it goes close to the ground
And he can't see the stuff in his pan!
If he raises up high it goes right in his eye
And mighty near blinds the pore man.

He gits his pot hook fer to take a good look
At the biscuits he's tryin' to bake.
But right then he can't see where the lid ort to be
And he dassen't to make a mistake.

Yes down through the years comes the memory of tears
And of grub that was scorched or half raw
How the camp fire smoked and you blinded and choked
Just to get a few bites in your craw.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 165.

Them Store Clothes

Do you remember the clothes that you wore?
Them you got at the old general merchandise store.
You had sent off fer boots and you had a good hat.
But yore tailor made outfit was finished with that.

Them cheap onder drawers. Even now you must laff
How you wropped 'em around with a once and a half.
You was jest a slim kid, but you belted 'em in,
With a piece of stick whittled sharp fer a pin.

Them cheap heavy socks. No they cain't be forgotten.
Three sizes too big. Some was wool, some was cotton.
Another fine thing was that long ondershirt.
When you set in the saddle it nacherly hurt.

Fer ease and fer comfort there wasn't much chance,
With the tail wadded up in the seat of yore pants.
But the warm flannel shirt, either gray or dark blue,
Was a comfort at least, give the Devil his due.

I guess almost every old cow boy recalls
Our friend Levi P. Strauss, and his blue overalls
A new pair onderneath and an old pair on top.
So dirty they'd stand up alone and not drop.

The old duckin' coats with the corderoy collars,
And the cheap blanket linin', cost three or four dollars.
A cotton bandanna tied loose 'round yore neck,
Seemed to soter belong, and completed the wreck.

Yes, the ways and the times and the people is changed.
Now the folks and their clothin' are better arranged.
But I bet you remember the clothes that you wore.
Them you got at the old general merchandise store.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 166.

They Can Take It

Yes, it's just a bunch of hosses standin' out there in the rain.
The reason they are doin' it is easy to explain.
There is no shelter handy, so to travel ain't no good.
And they wouldn't go into a barn, not even if they could.

It is just a little weather, and they're plenty used to that.
Like a cow boy in the open, livin' onderneath his hat.
All the hosses and the people that has lived their life outside,
Seems to have a constitution that can take it on the hide.

Without a bit of thinkin' I could tell you right from here,
Of hosses livin' on the range as long as thirty year. i)
While the hosses that's in stables, and was always roofed and fed;
Lots of them before they're twenty, has been hauled off plenty dead.

So it seems the way with people, and it seems the way with stock,
And the cedar grows the toughest when it's right amongst the rocks.
That's why hosses, men and women, if they're made of proper stuff,
Gits along a whole lot better if they're raised a little rough.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 167.

To Those Who Have Gone Before

They were comrades in hours of gladness,
They were friends in the hours of need.
They were close at our side in the blizzard,
They have battled the mad stampede.

No monument tells their story.
No word from a poet's pen.
But they carved the scrolls to their memory,
In the hearts and the lives of men.

Their faces gleam in the embers,
As we rest in some far out camp;
Alone with the voices of the night wind,
And the picketed horse's tramp.

We thank the All Wise Creator
That we met with them here on Earth.
Those characters bold and daring,
But strong in their sterling worth.

For regardless of Fame or Fortune,
We know when our lives are through;
We will meet with the God who made us,
And the souls of the friends we knew.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 171.

The Troop Hoss

No more does the cavalry form in its ranks
With its stompin' and shakin' of manes.
They ride in the "Jeeps" and they charge with the tanks
And they do all their scoutin' with planes.

The day of the cavalry hosses is done.
No longer the people will see 'em.
Like the cap and ball rifle and buffalo gun.
They are headed toward the museum.

I reckon most any old trooper enjoys
To think of the comrades he knowed,
But any old time that he thinks of the boys,
He remembers the hosses he rode.

Old cavalry hosses was smart and that's shore.
They went at their work with a will.
They knew where they belonged in the line and the "Four"
And even a rookie could drill.

He stood on his rights in formation or group.
He's a troop hoss and that's how he deals.
He claims his "Four feet from the nose to the croup";
If you crowd him look out for his heels.

How well I remember that troop hoss of mine,
A squealin' and shakin' his head,
And pawin' the dirt on the old picket line
When he knowed it was time to be fed.

Yes the troopers were tough and the hosses was rough.
Neither one educated or "Super."
But there never were friends among hosses and men,
Like the cavalry hoss and the trooper.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 172.

The Veiled Rider

I was down at the home ranch, a bunch of cow pokes
Got on an old hoss that was only half broke.
They saddled him up and they hazed him around,
But none of them rode him. They stayed on the ground.

The cook he laffed at 'em and laffed mighty hard.
Then the boys they allowed that the cook wasn't barred.
But it shore did amaze 'em to see the cook crawl
Right up in the saddle, yes apron and all.

The hoss took to buckin' all over the place.
The cook's apron flew up and covered his face.
His stirrups was long and he had to pull leather
But the cook was on top when they finished together.

One waddy he grins and remarked to the boss,
"Seems they blindfold the rider now, 'stead of the hoss."
The cook looked at the boss sorter mournful and said;
"His whole crew aint wuth seven dollars a head.

I buried my face in my apron allright,
But I done it to shut out the pitiful sight.
Like a bunch of fresh toad frogs that been rained down.
Them pore rannies hoppin' and yappin' around.

I will own up right now, I'm a cranky old cook,
But there's sights where really upsets me to look.
That had been out and cooked for a bunch of real hands.
And an outfit like that would disgust any man."

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 173.

Warmin' One Side

It is nice for to set in a room with steam heat,
Or a stove with a fender to cock up yore feet.
With sumptin' to read, and a plenty of light,
A man feels so good he could set there all night.

But take it in winter, a ridin' the range,
A small open fire feels good for a change.
When yore tired and cold and yore hoss needs a rest
And the wind cuts right in through yore old leather vest.

It ain't like a home, but you shore do admire
To git down on the ground by a little wood fire.
Of course you can only git warm on one side.
You are freezin' yore face while you git yore leigs fried.

But a man has one chance, for however he stands,
He can still git the warmth on his feet and his hands.
And by turnin' and twistin' and changin' about,
He shore can come mighty near gittin' thawed out.

When you git yore hoss rested and git soter warm,
You must finish yore ride in the cold and the storm.
And a feller shore savvys without bein' told,
When he sets on his saddle he'll find it right cold.

So he takes him a final good warmin' perhaps,
On the place where there ain't any seat in his chaps,
And while there's still heat in the cloth and the hide,
He is up in the saddle and ready to ride.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 174.

Was It Scare?

I have heered fellers say that they never was skeered.
Well, things might have been different from what they appeared.
Now take it fer instance, some braggin' cow poke
Has to git onto a hoss that ain't broke.
His knees gits to shakin', his voice it pitched high,
And he sounds like his throat was all dusty and dry.
And he chokes at the horn till his knuckles turns white,
He is jest energetic; it couldn't be fright.

Or mebby some night when the cattle stampede
He is caught in a place where he could bend the lead,
He pulls out and widens and lets the herd go.
He didn't quit tryin', his hoss was too slow.
If yore swinimin' a herd and they start millin' 'round,
And there's plenty of chance fer a feller to drown.
He makes the excuse that he jest couldn't stay
On account of a current that washed him away.

If he happens to git in a quarrel with some one
That has three or four notches cut onto his gun,
It ain't 'cause he's skeered that he runs out of town.
He jest makes him so mad that he cain't stay around.
If he gits in a fight where he hasn't a chance
And gits knocked fer a loop on the seat of his pants;
He don't jump up and run on account of a scare.
He jest took a notion to start fer some where.

I reckon the most of you know how it feels
When a rattle snake whizzes right close to yore heels.
You know mighty well that it isn't a scare
That sends you a bouncin' ten feet in the air
It's jest the idee you might make a mistake
While yore trompin' around there and hurt the pore snake.

Some times when a married man takes a few drinks
And his woman starts tellin' him all that she thinks.
It ain't cause he's skeert that he makes fer the door.
He's afraid she'll git hoarse if she talks anymore.
So be keerful in judgin' the way a man acts

Don't say he was skeered till you know all the facts.
And a feller jest might be misjudgin' some one
'Cause he hollered fer help and lit out on the run.

But with me, when my heart started beatin' too quick.
When I felt my knees shake and my stummick turn sick,
And my skelp started raisin' the roots of my hair,
I knowed rightaway what it was, It was scare.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 175–176.

When A Pony Slips His Pack

Wren you hear a feller braggin' that he never has been throwed,
Well, there ain't been many hosses that the feller ever rode.
If he ever was a cowboy, it's plum safe to bet your stack,
That he was sometimes the victim when a pony slipped his pack.

He's been throwed right at the wagon while the whole crew laughed and smiled.
He's been dumped out in some canon and he walked fer several miles.
He's been throwed by tricky hosses when they ketched him settin' slack,
Yes, a hoss can really do it if he wants to slip his pack.

There was times that it was funny and it didn't even hurt.
He jest sort of lit a-rollin' when he landed in the dirt.
There was times again he thought he felt his spinal colyum crack,
Fer he landed hard and solid when the pony slipped his pack.

He's been bucked out of his saddle and from onderneath his hat.
He's been throwed by vicious hosses that has kicked him in the slats.
He's been careless with his saddle cinch and let it git too slack.
When he felt the saddle slippin', well, the pony shed his pack.

So, a man develops sumpthin' with the passin' of the years.
You could mebbby call it caution or it might be jest plain skeer.
Fer he thinks back how he suffered in some bunk house or shack,
Gittin' over things that happened when a pony shed his pack.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 178–179.

When Connors Rode Rep For The Lord

One time they was givin' a big work fer souls,
They was plum over stocked so they say.
The owners all over that section was told
To come and help take 'em away.

The Devil he come and brought with him three hands
That was nearly as smart as their boss.
They was there representin' the old Pitch Fork brand
Buck Connors was there fer The Cross.

All three of them hands and the Devil was wise,
They thought they was runnin' things, but,
Buck Connors he pulled his hat down to his eyes
And rode in and started the cut.

All four of them fellers sez never a word,
They figgered they might git a break.
They watch everything that come out of the herd,
But Buck never made a mistake.

When he finished his cut he rode up to the boss
And he sez, "Well I reckon I'm through.
I got everything that belong to the Cross
And I'm turnin' it over to you."

So the throw back went home to the ranch in the sky
And the Devil he never once scored.
Not even Old Satan hisself could git by
When Buck Connors rode rep fer the Lord.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 180.

When He Cold Jaws

Wren yore set in the saddle and up on a hoss,
You git the idee that yore mebbysso boss.
Yore feet in the stirrups, yore hands on the rein
You feel like the Lord of the mountains and plain.
Like you run the whole country and made all the laws.
But the difference it makes when yore pony cold jaws.

You jump a few wild ones and start to turn 'em.
They try to break past and you reckon you'll learn 'em.
You raise in yore stirrups and lift fer a run,
But you haven't gone far till you see what you've done.
They race down a hill and make fer a draw,
Then yore hoss slings his head and you feel him cold jaw.

His head in the crown piece, he shore does know how.
He is after his head and he's got it right now.
You use all the stren'th in yore arms and yore shoulders.
He knocks the sparks out of the slide rocks and boulders.
A mighty sick feelin' comes into yore craw,
Fer you never did think that this hoss would cold jaw.

It ain't no use to pull. The reins tear through your grip.
He crashes through brush and you feel yore clothes rip.
About all you can do is to hang on and ride.
You feel the cold sweat breakin' out on yore hide
You had run past yore cattle the last that you saw
And yore hoss races on with an iron cold jaw.

At last he gits winded. You bend the old brute.
One sole is tore loose from the toe of yore boot.
The stock you was after, you nere will know
Which way or direction they happened to go.
You have left half yore shirt on a bunch of cat claw,
Fer it shore wrecks a hand when his hosses cold jaw.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 181.

When You Buried Your Face In The Alkali Drink

This mornin' at breakfast you raised a big fuss
When you found in yore glass jest a small bit of dust
You did so much whinin', before you was through,
I had to look twicet to make shore it was you.
Come on my old pardner, remember and think
When you buried yore face in the alkali drink.

When you galloped to git there ahead of the herd
And fill yoreself up 'fore the water was stirred
You got down on all fours on yore knees and yore fists i
And the mud and the slime come up over yore wrists.

Them cute little bugs so alert and alive
That come up with a shrug and went back with a dive.
You didn't care much if you swallered a few.
It would shore kill the bugs and it never hurt you.
Come on my old pardner, remember and think
When you buried yore face in the alkali drink.
It was thicker than water and thinner than pulp,

But you and the old hoss you drunk gulp for gulp.
Right up on yore cheek come the froth frum the bit.
The cattle was comin', 'twas no time to quit.
Come on my old pardner, remember and think
When you buried yore face in the alkali drink.

This mornin' you set there, so pudgy and pink,
And whined like a baby. Folks never would think
You had once been a man with a chest and a jaw,
A grin on his face and some sand in his craw.
Come on my old pardner, remember and think
When you buried yore face in the alkali drink.

What wouldn't I give jest to see you once more,
Leanin' up ginst the side of the old bunk house door.
In some battered up boots and some torn dirty clothes,
And a blowin' some cigarette smoke through yore nose.
You have been on the level, old pardner of mine.

All down through the years you have treated me fine.
I like you today, but I like best to think
Of the days when you raced with the herd for a drink.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 185–186.

Winter Work

Toyin to git the cattle in. Movin' mighty slow.
Out there in the winter wind, wadin' through the snow.
Frost nips at his ears and nose. See the way he slumps.
You can tell he's 'bout half froze by the way he humps.

Winter cows don't jump and run, so you needn't worry.
Aint no use to crowd 'em none. They won't try to hurry.
Them old cows aint none too strong, got to use some reason.
Keep 'm movin', poke along, cussin' and a freezin'.

They will make it there, you hope. Take 'em quite a bit.
You can swear, don't use yore rope. If you do they'll quit.
Grouch has got old cowboy now, 'bout to git him down.
Wisht he'd never seen a cow. Wisht he was in town.

But when he gits a chance to eat, he'll begin to thaw.
Warmin' up his hands and feet, supper in his craw.
He will think the world's all right. Go to bed, and then,
He'll be up before daylight, startin' out again.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 193.

Workin' It Over

It don't matter much what a cow boy may own,
You never can git him to leave it alone.
He always has some fool idee in his head,
'Bout his saddle or pack outfit, even his bed.

Supposin' his saddle is made with square skirts,
It worries that waddy ontill his soul hurts.
He gits out his knife and he cuts the skirts round;
Then he stitches the edges, or laces 'em down.

Then, mebbly he'll cut the chafes off from his cinches,
He will splice out some straps or cut off a few inches.
He will cut at his pack outfit and rip out the stitchin'
While he changes the breast rig or mebbly the britchin'

He will whittle his bridle, and 'fore he gits through
He has got both his spur straps cut half way in two.
When his outfit's plum ruint he goes to the store;
He buys some new stuff and starts whittlin' once more.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 194.

The Wreck

Vaa was chasin' that steer. He was mad, he was hot.
You built up a big loop, and you throwed and you caught.
You aimed to go past him and finish the trick,
But you made a mistake and things happened too quick.

He quit runnin' straight and dodged off to the right,
Before you could foller he had the rope tight.
He went to the end and he tore your hoss down,
But it upset the steer, they was both on the ground,

Just how you got clear you could never quite tell.
You started to jump and you reckon you fell.
But you got that tail holt and you finished the thing.
For you wrapped his toes up in yore old hoggin' string.

The hoss he was strugglin' and workin' for slack.
It might ruin that hoss if yore saddle slipped back,
You run jumped on his head and you held him down too.
And you oncinched the saddle before you were through.

You was feared he'd pull loose when he started to rise,
So you tied your neck handkercher over his eyes.
Yes, old boy, you won out by a mighty long chance.
You used most of yore outfit, 'cept mebbby your pants.

You was pantin' and shakin' and all overhet.
You could taste all the bacon and coffee you'd et.
Man! you shore got a jerkin' and maulin' around,
For things gits mighty rough, when your hoss is tore down.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggins (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), p. 195.

You Never Tell That

Yun are jest an old waddy that's been everywhere.
You've about held your own and done more than your share.
You wind some big windies you like mighty well,
But there's now and then things that you never do tell.

You tell of the days when you was a top hand
And you rode that wild outlaw that bucked off the brand.
But the mornin' that old wrangle mule got you down,
And he laid you out cold when you lit on the ground,
And he drove your head out through the top of your hat;
Well, somehow or other, you never tell that.

You tell of the time when you went to a dance,
And none of the other boys there had a chance.
How you wore your new clothes, and you outshined 'em all.
And you rode away home with the belle of the ball.

But the time when you travelled for over ten mile
Jest to set there and talk to some gal fer a while;
And you looked in the winder and happened to see
She was settin' in there on another boy's knee,
And you sulked and you pouted fer weeks like a brat;
You remember all right, but you never tell that.

You can tell how you won in a fist and skull fight,
But you started a scrap in a bar room one night,
and some banty weight runt knocked you blind as a bat.
Now somehow or other, you never tell that.

You can tell about gamblin'. It shore was a shame
How you pulled a fast trick and broke up a slick game.
Perhaps you remember one evenin' old pard.
You was watchin' a feller that marked the third card;
And you fell fer the trick and they busted you flat.
When you talk about gamblin', you never tell that.

Another big windy you shore like to tell.
How you got drunk in town and would holler and yell.
How you took down the street with your hoss on the run
And the people all ducked when you rolled your six gun.

But the time the town marshall, that quiet old man,
Grabbed the back of your neck and you went to the can;
And he throwed you in jail and went south with your gat,
Well somehow or other, you never tell that.

And all of them women that follered you 'round.
They jest wouldn't keep off when you once turned 'em down.
Do you ever remember one gal that you met?
You was drinkin' I know, and a little upset.

And when you got sober, you found out next day,
She had gone out of town with your whole summer's pay.
And you never discovered jest where she was at.
No, you haven't forgot, but you never tell that.

Then there was that time when a warnin' came through,
That the sheriff was out with a warrant fer you.
You went out from there jest a foggin' your tail,
And thanked God fer the snow storm that covered your trail
And you changed hosses twice 'fore you took off your hat.
And you never went back, and you never tell that.

Never mind my old pardner, in times long ago,
We all did a few things we don't want folk to know.
Most people we knowed in the days that's gone by
Acted foolish some times, so did you, so did I.

If you know some old feller that made a mistake;
Say nothin' about it and give him a break.
If you know sumpthin' bad, keep it under your hat.
Tell the best that you know, but don't ever tell that.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes* by Bruce Kiskaddon, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 196–197.

Your First Saddle

You never remember the school days you missed
You perhaps have forgotten the first girl you kissed
Or even forgot the first dollar you loaned,
But you'll never forget the first saddle you owned.

What matter if some one had thrown it away
How well you remember that wonderful day,
When you carefully scanned while trying to find
A few patches of wool where the skirts had been lined.

That battered old hull was the pride of your life.
How you patiently toiled with a nail and a knife.
You cut your whangs out of old bridles and chaps,
Robbed harness and saddles for leitigo straps.

And the bare iron horn; even now you must laugh
How you covered it up with a portion of calf.
Those gunny sack cinches you carefully stitched
Till they held that old hull on a pony that pitched.

There were marks where big spurs had raked over the seat.
The last desperate grabs of some punchers spurred feet,
Who attempted in vain to ride unruly brutes
And the critters had sunned both his britches and boots.

As you toiled in the dust in the shade of the shed
What wonderful visions would pass through your head.
How you'd ride that old saddle in many a land.
Tie steers and twist bronchos and be a top hand.

But you heartlessly threw that old saddle away,
Out beside the corral at headquarters, one day.
You were then drawing pay and were almost a man,
And a saddle like that wasn't fit for a hand.

But I bet it was pounced on by some other kid,
Who worked it all over the same as you did.

And you would have smiled if you only had known
How he proudly bestrode the first saddle he owned.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 198–199.

Your First Trip

Remember that first time you shipped
And went with cattle on the trip?
You asked the boss if you could go.
He said he reckoned mebbysso.

You'd been around corrals and barns
And knowed a couple dirty yarns.
You figgered out down in yore heart
That you was tough and plenty smart.

You thought that you was gone to stay
And tried to draw out all yore pay.
The boss he had you plum outsmarted
Before he even got you started

He said he thought it would be best
To give you some and hold the rest.
He 'lowed the balance could be sent
To you, most any where you went.

Boy, when that train went down the track
You shore did rair yore hat brim back.
You felt like you could buy the Earth,
No matter what they thought 'twas worth.

Of course the train crew tried to borrry.
You told 'em "No, that you was sorry."
About as near as you recall,
They stoled yore gloves, and that was all.

But once you got turned loose in town
You throwed a couple whiskies down.
Then went outside and chanced to hear
A lowd voiced pawn shop auctioneer.

I'll bet till now you ain't forgot
About that auction watch you bought.
And that there big brass ring you seen
That made yore finger all turn green.

And then you got a suit of clothes

Like they wore in minstrel shows.
With stripes as big as hitchin' straps,
And one of them there dinky caps.

And dancin' pumps with paper soles.
A neck tie like a barber pole.
And that cheap suit case made of paper,
'Twas imitation alligator.

And then you went to shootin' pool
With some pore silly talkin' fool.
You played him fer two bits a game
The way you beat him was a shame.

But he was willin' after all,
To shoot fer fifty cents a ball.
And when you got the fourth game through
He shore had put the hooks to you.

Next mornin' found you on the train
And headed back fer home again.
Where you was ridin' in the smoker,
They had a little game of poker.

You thought that you might have some luck.
That's how you lost yore last two bucks.
Back in the wash room on the train,
You put yore work clothes on again.

Yore cap and suit, and every thing,
And even to yore watch and ring,
You put in that pasteboard suit case.
You didn't want to be disgraced.

You raised the smoker winder high
And bid the whole durned works goodbye.
You throwed it out and let it lay
Somewhere along the right of way.

Fer sometime after you got back,
The boss he made a few wise cracks,
About yore suit and cap and things,
But mostly 'bout the watch and ring.

It kep you soter at a loss
To find out who had told the boss.
But now there ain't a bit of doubt.
You got the whole thing figgered out.

The boss he once made his first trip,
And, you can gamble when he shipped,
He done the same things that you did
When he was nothin' but a kid.
So that's how come the boss to know.
He done the same thing years ago.

Publication. *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon*, comp. Mason and Janice Coggin (Cowboy Miner Productions, 1998), pp. 200–202.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Copy-texts, completeness, lineation, and historical language

The principal copy-texts are the project's complete scans of *Rhymes of the Ranges* (1924) and *Western Poems* (1935). A later archival anthology, *Cowboy Poetry: Classic Rhymes by Bruce Kiskaddon* (1998), supplies seventy-six poems not already represented in those books and clean parallel readings for several damaged pages. *Shorty's Yarns* (2004) provides additional documentary checks. OCR was used only as a transcription aid; headers, folios, scanning marks, and recognition debris are not part of the reset text.

The bound 1935 scan loses letters in its inner gutter on alternating pages. Where another witness survives, the reading has been collated directly. Where no complete parallel text is present in the project archive, missing letters and words have been restored from the visible remainder, rhyme, syntax, and Kiskaddon's established phrasing. Those interventions are described in the production corpus. This policy yields a readable edition while keeping the damaged scan and all intermediate evidence in the archive.

The 147 poems form a substantial project collection, not the complete known Kiskaddon canon. No complete local copy of *Just as Is* (1928) or the 159-poem 1947 book was available for this reset. Bill Siems's limited *Open Range* (2006) reportedly contains 481 poems, many from periodicals, calendars, and advertisements. Poems should be added to a future revision only from inspectable witnesses, not copied silently from this edition's earlier PDFs.

Narrow source columns frequently break one poetic line into a hanging typographic continuation. Those wraps are joined; genuine stanza spaces, refrains, sequence numbers, and meaningful indents are retained. Decorative capital openings are normalized to ordinary sentence capitalization. Kiskaddon's dialect spellings remain. The poems also preserve period racial language and assumptions about Indigenous people, ethnicity, gender, and western settlement; historical fidelity does not make those usages neutral or harmless.

The 1924 book is in the public domain in the United States. The 1935 book and later source editions require separate copyright and renewal review. This research edition does not assert that every later text is free of rights restrictions.

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Works by and about Bruce Kiskaddon

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COLOPHON

Production record

This critical reader's edition was prepared for *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. It is set in EB Garamond at six by nine inches, with mirrored margins and the Green/Extremes palette. Every poem begins on a new page. The cover uses unlettered artwork created by Brian Kim Stefans, carefully center-cropped for the standard cover panel; all lettering is live in the edition.

Original scans, visible-page OCR, collation files, archival crops, fresh research, source manifests, and rebuilding code are preserved in the poet's production archive.

HISTORICAL FRONT MATTER

Bruce Kiskaddon - Collected Poems

Publisher's Preface to Western Poems

Foreword to Western Poems

Restored from the original source scans

PUBLISHER'S PREFACE TO WESTERN POEMS

Nelson R. Crow, Western Livestock Journal, 1935

I have been asked to publish a selection of poems by Bruce Kiskaddon, acknowledged by cattle folk themselves as their own 'poet laureate' of the cow camps. Wheaton Hale Brewer of San Francisco pays tribute to Bruce Kiskaddon in his preface to 'Western Poems.' It is a real privilege to make possible the publication of these poems with the hope they may be enjoyed as much as I have enjoyed them.

*Nelson R. Crow
Publisher
Western Livestock Journal*

FOREWORD TO WESTERN POEMS

Wheaton Hale Brewer, 1935

To know and love the ranges of the west—their people and their story and their songs—has been the privilege of many a man. But to recapture and give voice to the simple poetry of the cow country is indeed a gift that is beyond purchase, and is a rare and lovely thing. That gift has been given to Bruce Kiskaddon. And his cowboy songs are as authentic and real as the scent of sage, or the jingle of spurs on a frosty morning.

The true poet is he whose poetry rings true—as Bruce's poems ring true. He has lived the life of which he writes—a life which rapidly is vanishing, its people already taking to themselves the qualities of legend and of high romance.

But every hardy soul who ever followed a herd through the night, or drank his steaming coffee at the tail gate of a chuck-wagon, or forked a bronc to haze a bunch of wild ones out of a canyon, will read these singing rhymes and live again the olden days.

As the years roll on and history appreciates the folk-lore of the plains and ranges, these poems by a real cowboy will take on deeper significance and mightier stature. When Bruce turns his pony into the Last Corral—long years from now, we all hope—he need feel no surprise if he hears his songs sung by the celestial cowboys as their tireless ponies thunder over the heavenly ranges, bringing in the dogies for branding at the Eternal Corrals. For poetry will never die.

Wheaton Hale Brewer