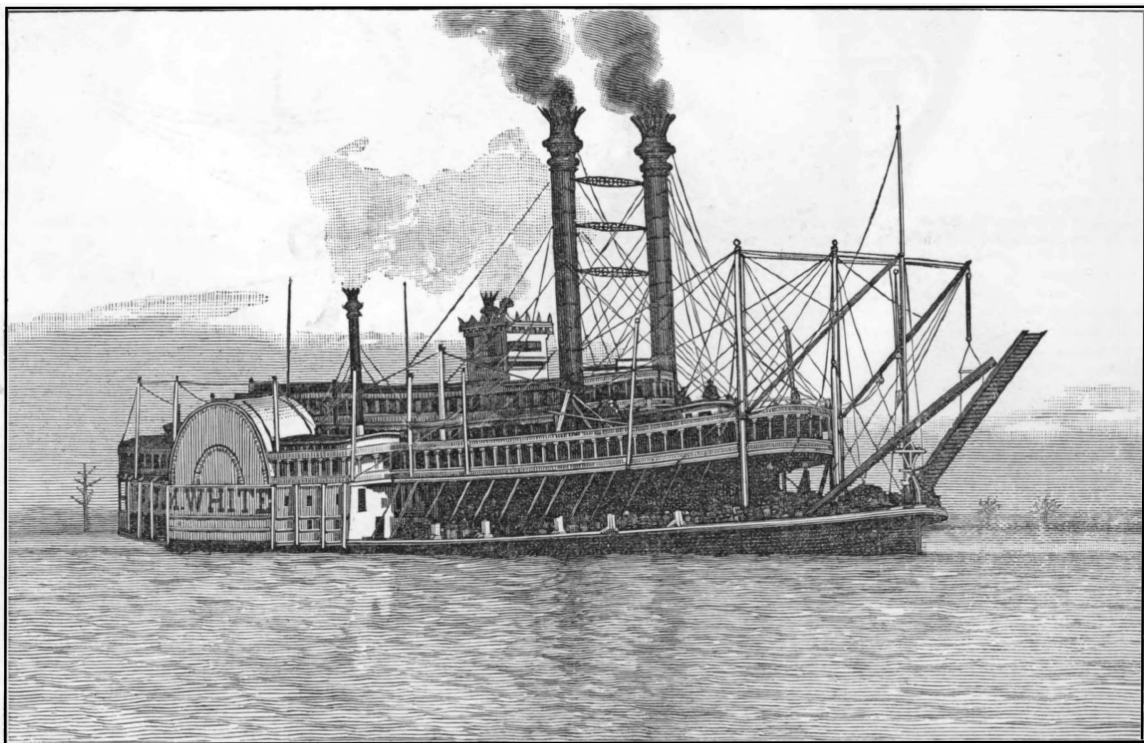


STEAMBOAT & ROUSTABOUT SONGS



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Roustabouts Singing, from **Roustabout Songs**, collected and edited by Mary Wheeler, published by Remick Music Corp., New York, ©1939, p. 1.

Steamboat & Roustabout Songs

Abstract

"Steamboat & Roustabout Songs" will focus on five songs that I have researched in detail. The songs include 19th century minstrel songs as well as traditional roustabout/stevedore songs primarily collected in the 1930s. The question I am exploring is the relationship, if any, between the traditional songs collected and the professionally composed minstrel songs. Such a relationship has been established between deep-sea work songs and popular entertainment songs ashore, and it seems possible that there would be a similar relationship between the Mississippi River and Gulf Port work songs and the very popular minstrel songs. This lecture will also include a Powerpoint presentation of vintage photographs of the steamboats and the landings along their runs. In addition I will be leading the songs as I've re-interpreted them. A written summary of the lecture with links to appropriate websites will be provided to those who are interested.

Resume

Charles Ipcar has a Ph.D. in Urban Geography from Michigan State University (1974). He is a founding member of *Roll & Go*, a sea music group that has been featured twice at the Mystic Sea Music Festival; he has also performed solo several times as a workshop leader or participant at the same Festival. Ipcar has composed and sung nautical songs for much of his life and has performed solo at festivals, folk clubs, coffee houses and house concerts from coast to coast in the States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. He has recorded seven CDs including his newly released CD **Steamboat Days**, published four songbooks, and is also co-editor of **The Complete Poetry of Cicely Fox Smith**, ©2012. Ipcar was born and raised on the Coast of Maine and currently resides there with his wife and cat.



Mississippi River steamboat *General John Newton*, photographed by Alfred Eisenstaedt, from **Life Magazine Archives**, circa 1930s.

Introduction

From the mid 19th to the early 20th century, steamboats were the preferred way for passengers and freight to travel from one town to another up and down the Mississippi River and her tributaries.



Ohio River Landscape with the steamboat *Washington* and The Kilgour Residence, circa 1820s, reproduced from **Folk Painters of America** (1979) by Robert Bishop.

The first Mississippi steamboats were similar to the Hudson River steamboats, with a conventional ship shape and with masts, sails and bowsprits. Beginning with the steamboat *New Orleans* in 1811, they gradually displaced the earlier flatboats and keelboats. By the 1840s most of these early steamboats had been replaced with a more shallow draft flat bottom design with two decks and a prominent pilot house, the type of design that most people now associate with the Mississippi steamboat. Both stern and side-wheel paddleboats were used from the early years and continued to be dominant on the rivers up until the 1920s. The steamboats were in turn displaced by a combination of rail service and propeller driven diesel or oil engined towboats, with barges.¹



Steamboats *Belle of Calhoun* and *Belle of the Bends*, Vicksburg & Greenville Packet Co., Memphis, TN, circa 1900, from Detroit Publishing Co., via Library of Congress.

The officers aboard the steamboats typically included the captain, two pilots, two mates, a shipping clerk, two engineers and chief steward. The deck crew was supervised by the mate/captain of the watch and was primarily responsible for stowing cargo, mooring and unmooring the steamboat. The firemen fueled the furnaces, and the other staff catered to any passengers. In addition there were roustabouts, some aboard for a particular run and some hired by the job at the landings, whose major responsibilities were loading and unloading cargo, and loading fuel (wood or coal) aboard for the steam engines. All of the roustabout labor was manually done, and often coordinated with songs or chants.²

According to Kentucky folk music collector Mary Wheeler, the roustabouts performed "coonjine," which was a combination of song and dance connected with freight handling on the steamboats:³

"The 'plank walk' springs under a heavy weight, or even under the lighter step of the rouster when he trots back again empty handed for more freight. To avoid jarring, the feet are dragged along the stage plank, accompanied by a song that takes its rhythm from the shuffling feet and swaying shoulders."

In the Gulf Ports the roustabouts/stevedores were responsible for unloading the river steamboats and re-loading the cargo onto ocean-going cargo ships. In addition there were specialized gangs who stored the cotton bales into the ship's hold.⁴



"Roustabouts," aboard the Mississippi steamboat *Natchez*, drawn by Alfred R. Waud, from **Harper's Monthly**, September 2, 1871.

The Work Songs

Some of the best known Mississippi River and Gulf Port work songs for today's nautical singers were collected by deep-sea sailors who adapted them for their work on international sailing ships. They include the cotton screwing songs *Fire Maringo* and *Stormalong*, and the roustabout songs *Roll the Cotton Down* and *Sugar in the Hold*.⁵

It would not be surprising if some of these roustabout work songs could also be traced back to African-American plantation field songs. But that is a subject for additional research.

Other than the songs collected by folklorists from deep-water sailors, most roustabout songs are less well known to contemporary singers. However, in 1939 Mary Wheeler published her collection **Roustabout Songs**, and greatly expanded her published collection in 1944 with **Steamboatin' Days**.



Mary Wheeler. Courtesy of Bertha Wheeler Wenzel

Mary Wheeler was born in Paducah, Kentucky, in 1892, and "...spent her professional life as a successful concert singer, music teacher, voice coach, choral conductor, and as a collector of the folksongs of Kentucky."⁶ Wheeler's interest in collecting folk songs was at least inspired by Cecil Sharp's work in Kentucky from 1915 to 1918. Wheeler, however, deserves special credit for her interest and collection of the traditional roustabout and other river songs; she also took extensive notes on the singers she collected the songs from.

Despite the title of the first book, not all of Wheeler's "roustabout songs" were in fact work songs; some, like deep-sea fo'c'sle songs, were purely for entertainment.⁷



Sidewheel steamboat *Kate Adams* in the fall of 1926 bearing her own name and the fictional name *La Belle Riviere* that she was given from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel **Uncle Tom's Cabin** when it was filmed on the Ouachita and Black rivers, from Dave Thomson Steamboat Museum.

The first song I'd like to focus on is from the Wheeler Collection and is definitely a roustabout work song, associated with the loading of bales of cotton or sacks of grain:

Traditional roustabout song as sung by Bertha Wenzel at the Four Rivers Folk Festival, Paducah, KY, 1990, as collected by Mary Wheeler in the 1930s.
Tune: variant of *Dance, Boatman, Dance*

Capt. Jim Rees and the *Katie*

Cap'n Jim Rees said when de *Katie* wuz made,
"Arkansas City gwine be her trade."
I lef my woman in de do'
Says "Wuk down de rivuh, an' honey, don't you go!"

Oh, Cap'n, will you be so good an' kind?
Take all de cotton, leave de seed behind.
Heap sees, an' a few knows,
Heap starts, an' a few goes.

I ain't gwine to tell nobody,
Whut dey done to me,
But if evuh I gits to de long plank walk,
I won't come heah no mo'!

Captain Jim Rees was the builder of the sidewheel steamboat *Kate Adams, III*, launched in Pittsburgh in 1898. She steamed down the Mississippi to Memphis where for years she made the run from Memphis, TN, to Arkansas City in the Arkansas Delta Region, about 115 miles southeast of Little Rock, AR. She was nicknamed "Lovin' Kate" by her crew and had a long commercial life extending into the 1920s. In 1926 she was rebuilt to be featured in the film *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In 1927 she was unfortunately destroyed by fire.

The second verse needs some explanation:

Oh, Cap'n, will you be so good an' kind,
Take all de cotton, leave de seed behind.

The roustabouts preferred loading bales of cotton; with a 3-man team they would roll an 500 hundred pound cotton bale (swathed in burlap) along the levee and up the "long plank" (stage boarding platform) to the steamboat. However, a 150 pound sack of "seed" (grain) would have to be carried over one's shoulder which was much harder work.

The tune for this song resembled that of the minstrel song *De Boatman Dance* by Daniel Decatur Emmett, ©1843.

In adapting this song for contemporary entertainment I've added a chorus and changed some of the wording primarily to make more of a story:

Based on a traditional roustabout song as sung by Wheeler's niece Bertha Wheeler
Wenzel, Four Rivers Folk Festival, 1990
First collected by Mary Wheeler.
Tune: variant of *Dance, Boatman, Dance*
Adapted by Charlie Ipcar, 2016

Capt. Jim Rees and the *Katie*-2

C-----F-----C-----F
Now de Captain said when de *Katie*
----C
was made,
F-----C-----G---C
"Arkansas City gwine be her trade;"
F-----C-----F---C
She'd steam out from de O-hi-o;
F-----C-----G-----C
Down de Mis-sis-sip-pi she would roll!

Chorus:

C-----G-C
And it's roll, "*Ka-tie*," roll!
-----G-C
Roll, "*Ka-tie*," roll!
-----F-----C
Roll all night in de pale moon-light,
----F-----G-----C
Be home with de gals in de morning!
F-----G---F
Hey, ho, roll an' go!
C-----F-C
Rollin' down de river on de O-hi-o;
F-----G---F
Hey, ho, roll an' go!
C-----G---C
Rollin' down de river on de O-hi-o!

Now I met my woman by de do';
Cryin', "Honey, don't you go no mo'";
It grieved my heart to leave her so,
But there ain't no work on de sho.'(CHO)

It's down de River to Memphis Town
Sing an' dance de night aroun';
Load her down to de rails,
For Arkansas City we'll shake her tail.
(CHO)

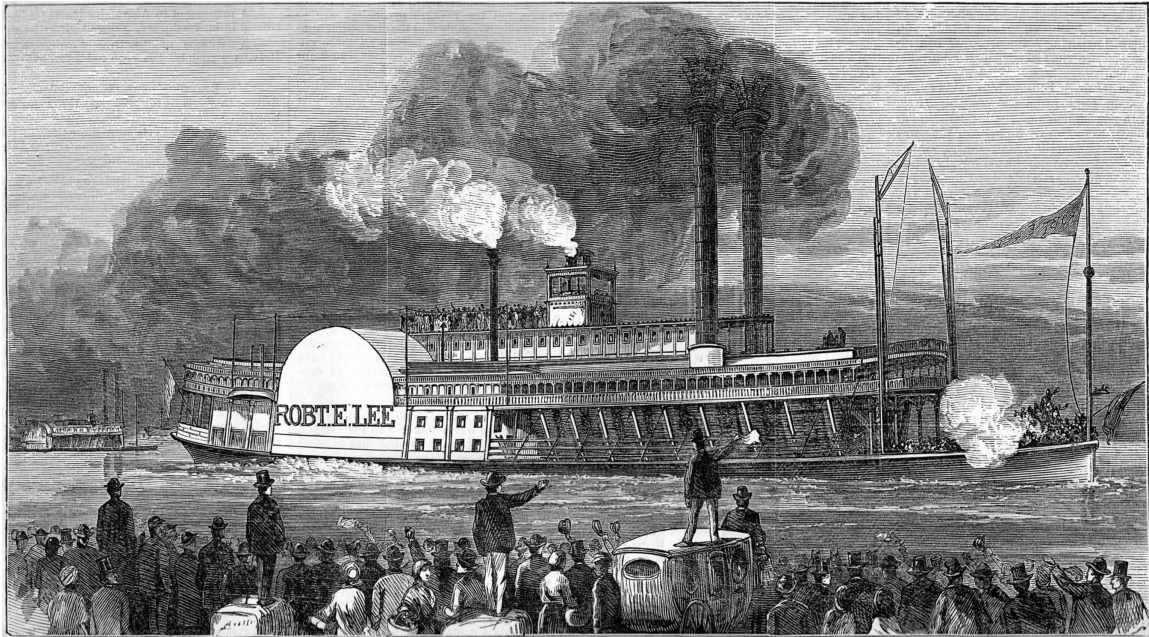
It's roll dem bales down de levee bank,
Heave dem up de long plank!
"Captain, oh Captain, would you be so kind,
Load all de cotton, leave de seed behind?"
(CHO)

Now I ain't gonna tell no one,
Wha' de captain of de watch has done,
But if I ever gets back to sho',
You won't see me here no mo.' (CHO)

Tagline:

Rollin' down de river on the O-hi-o!

Several of the 19th century minstrel songs were also associated with riverboats and roustabouts, and may in fact have been adapted from traditional songs. Or it may have been the reverse, that some minstrel songs were adapted by roustabouts for work songs. Certainly there is a record of how some deep-sea work songs were adapted from minstrel songs by the sailors; examples of this would include *Coal-Black Rose*, *Fire Down Below*, *Haul the Woodpile Down*, *Jim Along Josey*, and *Miss Lucy Long*. Typically the first verse and chorus of the chantey version would be similar to the original minstrel song and then the rest of the verses would vary depending on the whim of the song leader and the work to be performed.⁸



"Getting Under Way," the sidewheel steamboat *Robt. E. Lee*, drawn by Alfred R. Waud, from **Harper's Monthly**, September 2, 1871.

The best example of a minstrel song that I've found which may have been adapted from a roustabout worksong is *De Bad Bob Lee* with its distinctive internal verse chorus:

Copyright claimed in 1876 by J. L. Peters; ©1877 by Oliver Ditson & Co.
(Fang mo-rang o-hay.) Song and Chorus by William Shakespeare Hays
Boston: Oliver Ditson & Co., 451 Washington St.,
Source: 1877-10152@LoC

De Bad Bob Lee

De *Bob Lee* am a bully boat,
Fang mo-rang o-hay!
De fastest one dat ever float,
Fang mo-rang o-hay!
When you see her climb dat stream,
Fang mo-rang o-hay!
Look out den she's usin' steam,
Fang mo-rang o-hay!

Chorus:

Den fare ye well,
An' don't you look for me,
We gwine up to de bends an' back
On de bully boat Bob Lee!

Shove dem chunks in de fire door,
Fang morang ohay!
Send de big waves all ashore,
Fang morang ohay!
Slow boats gwine to let her be,
Fang morang ohay!
Got no use for de *Bad Bob Lee*,
Fang morang ohay! (CHO)

De Captain's up on de biler deck,
Fang morang ohay!
Lookin' our for a boat I spec',
Fang morang ohay!
Dar ain't no boat dat he kin see,
Fang morang ohay!
Dat git away wid de ole *Bob Lee*.
Fang morang ohay! (CHO)

I hear dem wheels go 'round an' 'round,
Fang morang ohay!
Dat makes dis boat run like a hound,
Fang morang ohay!
De white folks shout on shore wid glee,
Fang morang ohay!
"Just lookee yonder at dat *Lee!*"
Fang morang ohay! (CHO)

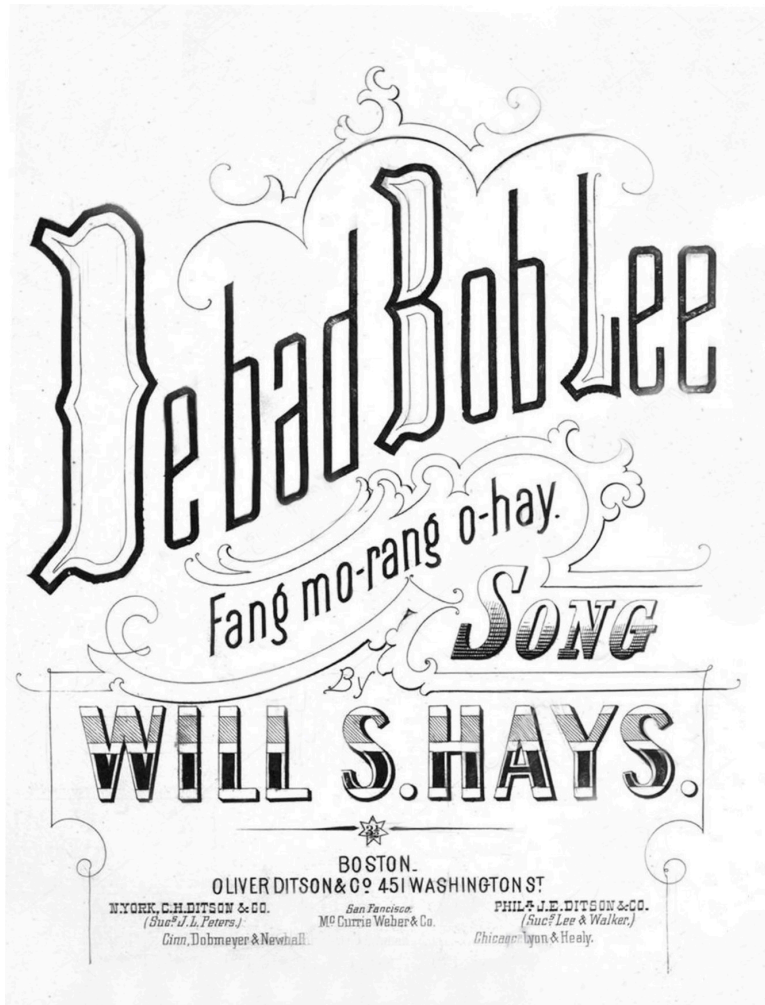
Ole Captain Cannon he's about,
Fang morang ohay,
An' tole Mass Perkins let her out,
Fang morang ohay!
To see how fast dat boat can be,
Fang morang ohay!
And dey gib dem horns to de *Bad Bob Lee*.
Fang morang ohay! (CHO)

The "*Bad Bob Lee*" is, of course, the nickname of the steamboat *Robert E. Lee*, one of the fastest steamboats on the Mississippi. Captain Cannon was in fact the long time captain of the *Robert E. Lee*. "Fang morang ohay" is not explained anywhere I can find but it may be a relic of a traditional African work chant. In the last line "And dey gib dem horns to de *Bad Bob Lee*," the horns were generally a set of antlers that the fastest boat on the river would be awarded after a race and which would be mounted on her pilot house.



Truly Yours
Wm S. Hays

The composer William Shakespeare Hays (1837-1907) was a White minstrel singer who was exceedingly prolific, composing over 350 songs and selling as many as 20 million sheet music copies of his work. However, I've only found three songs in his vast inventory that have to do with steamboats and other river folk.



Sheet music cover image for *De Bad Bob Lee Fang Mo-rang O-Hay Song*, with original authorship notes reading "By Will S. Hays," United States, ©1876, published by "Oliver Ditson and Co., 451 Washington St., Boston, MA," from Library of Congress.

According to a short biography published by Western Kentucky University, Hays was in fact very familiar with riverboats and those who worked on the river:⁹

"Hays always had a love for the river, and his newspaper columns were based on river happenings and occurrences. During the Civil War, he commanded a river transport on the Mississippi, between Vicksburg and New Orleans. He continued to work on riverboats periodically during the (eighteen) sixties and the early (eighteen) seventies."

In adapting this song for contemporary entertainment I've extended the grand chorus and changed some of the wording to make it more understandable. There is a tune referenced but I found it too complex to match with the lyrics. So I picked what I thought was an appropriate tune composed by Hays's contemporary Stephen Foster, *When the "Glendy Burk" Comes Down*, published in James Bukley's *New Banjo Book*, ©1860:

Copyright claimed in 1876 by J. L. Peters; © 1877 by Oliver Ditson & Co.
(Fang mo-rang o-hay.) Song and Chorus by William Shakespeare Hays (1837-1907)
Adapted by Charlie Ipcar, 9/6/2016

"De Bad Bob Lee-2"

C-----G-----C---F
De *Bob Lee* she's a bully boat,
C-----G-----C
Fang mo-rang o-hay!
-----G-----C---F
De fastest boat dat ever float,
C-----G-----C
Fang mo-rang o-hay!
F-----C
When you see her climb dat stream,
-----G
Fang mo-rang o-hay!
C-----G-----C-----F
She's belching smoke an' spewing steam,
C-----G-----C
Fang mo-rang o-hay!

Chorus:

C---F-----C
So fare ye well, my Creole belle,
-----F---C-----G
An' don't you look for me;
---C-----G-----C---F
I's gwine up to de bends an' back ag'in
-----C-----G-----C
On de steamboat *Bad Bob Lee!*

Shove dem chunks in de fire box door,
Fang morang ohay!
Send dem big waves all ashore,
Fang morang ohay!

Slow boats gwine to let her be,
Fang morang ohay!
Got no use for de *Bad Bob Lee*,
Fang morang ohay! (CHO)
De Captain's on de biler deck,
Fang morang ohay!
Lookin' out for a boat, I spec',
Fang morang ohay!
Dar ain't no boat dat he kin see,
Fang morang ohay!
Can shake her tail at de *Bad Bob Lee*.
Fang morang ohay! (CHO)
See dem wheels spin round an' round,
Fang morang ohay!
Makes dis boat run like a hound,
Fang morang ohay!
De white folks shout on shore wid glee,
Fang morang ohay!
"Just lookee yonder at de *Bad Bob Lee!*"
Fang morang ohay! (CHO)
Oh, Captain Cannon, he's about,
Fang morang ohay!
Hear 'im shout, "Let her out!"
Fang morang ohay!
Now she's flyin', you kin see,
Fang morang ohay!
And dey gib dem horns to de *Bad Bob Lee*.
Fang morang ohay! (CHO)(2X)



Rolling bales of cotton ashore off the long plank and along the levee from sternwheel steamboat *City of St. Joseph* at Memphis, TN, circa 1905, from Detroit Publishing Co., via Library of Congress.

Another fine song by William Shakesphere Hays is *Roll Out, Heave Dat Cotton*. It is at least inspired by roustabout work songs and describes the work in some detail:

By William Shakespeare Hays, ©1877

Roll Out! Heave Dat Cotton

I hear dat bell a ringin',
I see de Captain stand,
Boat done blowed her whistle,
I know she's gwine to land;
I hear de mate a callin'
"Go git out de plank,
Rush out wid de head line,
And tie her to de bank."

Chorus:

*Roll out! Heave dat cotton,
Roll out! heave dat cotton,
Roll out! heave dat cotton,
Aint got long to stay.*

Its early in de mornin'
Before we see de sun,
"Roll aboard dat cotton,
An' git back in a run,"
De Captain's in a hurry,
I know what he means,
Wants to beat de *Sherlock*,
Down to New Orleans. (CHO)

I hear dat mate a-shoutin',
An' see him on de shore,
Hurry, boys! Be lively,
Ain't but fifty more;
We ain't got time to tarry
Here at dis cotton pile,
We gwine to git another,
Below here forty mile. (CHO)

We done took on de cotton,
Shove out from de shore,
Sailing down de river,
We gwine to land for more,
When you hear de whistle,
An' de big bell ring,
We gwine to land for cotton,
Roll out, boys, an' sing. (CHO)

In the first verse "Go git out de plank" is again a reference to the stage gangway that was lowered from the bow of the riverboat to the landing; it is often referred to as the "long plank." The *Sherlock* was an actual steamboat that was based in New Orleans and ran up and down the Mississippi River.

In adapting this song for a contemporary audience I have done a minimum of wording changes. The tune referenced was much too fast for this type of song in my opinion so I choose the traditional *Waterbound, I Can't Get Home* as a base:

By William Shakespeare Hays, ©1877
Slightly adapted by Charlie Ipcar, 5/21/2016
Tune: Traditional after *Waterbound*

Roll Out! Heave Dat Cotton-2

C-----G---C--G---C---F---C
Now, I hear dat big bell ring-in',
--G-----C-----G----C
See de Captain wave his hand;

Boat done blowed her whistle,
--G-----C
I know she's gwine to land;
-----G--C--G--C-----
Now I hear dat Mate a-callin'
G-----C
"Git out de long plank,

Run out wid de head-line,
G-----C
Tie her to de bank."

Chorus:

C---G--C---G---C-----F--C
It's roll out, boys! Heave dat cot-ton!
G-----C
Roll out, boys! Heave dat cotton!

Roll out, boys! Heave dat cotton!
G-----G7----C
Ain't got long to stay.

It's earl-ie in de mornin'
'Fore we see de sun,
"Roll aboard dat cotton, boys,
Git back on de run!"
De Captain's in a hurry;
Know jus'what he means;
Wants to beat de *Sherlock*,
Down to New Orleans. (CHO)

I hear dat Mate a-shoutin',
Shoutin' from de shore,
"Roll aboard dat cotton, boys,
Ain't but fifty more!"
Now we ain't got time to tarry
At dis cotton pile;
Gwine to git another,
Below here forty miles." (CHO)

We done took on cotton,
Shoved out from de shore,
Rollin' down de riber,
Gwine to land for more;
When you hear dat whistle,
An' de big bell ring,
Gwine to land for cotton,
Roll out, boys, an' sing. (CHO)(2X)

The fourth song I've found is another minstrel song which features a character who definitely made the transition from the river landings and the Gulf ports to the deep sea, Old Stormy:

As sung by John Smith of White's Serenaders at the Melodeon, New York City, from **White's New Ethiopian Song Book**, published by T. B. Peterson & Bros., Philadelphia, PA, ©1854, p. 71.

Storm Along Stormy

O I wish I was in Mobile bay,
Storm along, Stormy!
Screwing cotton all de day,
Storm along, Stormy!
O you rollers storm along,
Storm along, Stormy!
Hoist away an' sing dis song,
Storm along, Stormy!

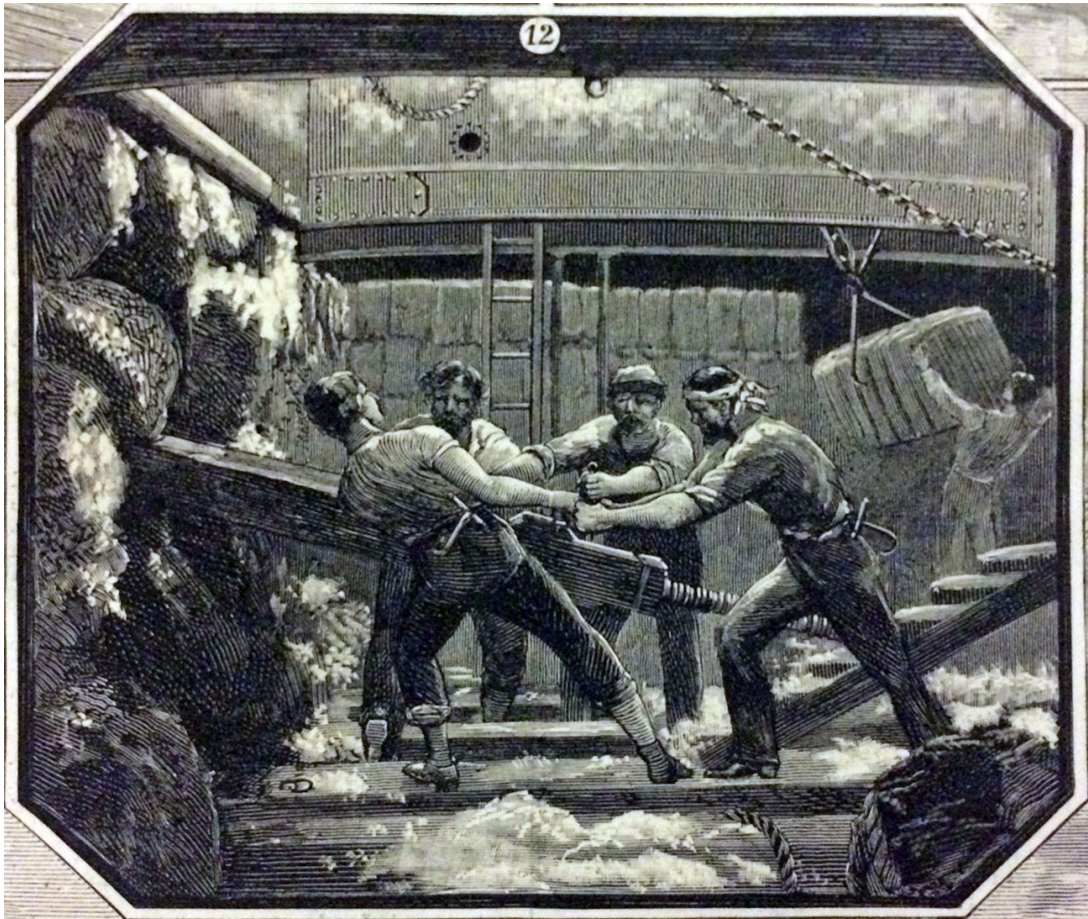
I wish I was in New Orleans,
Storm along, Stormy!
Eating up dem pork an' beans,
Storm along, Stormy!
Roll away in spite ob wedder,
Storm along, Stormy!
Come, lads, push all togedder,
Storm along, Stormy!

I wish I was in Baltimore,
Storm along, Stormy!
Dancing on dat Yankee shore,
Storm along, Stormy!
One bale more, den we'be done,
Storm along, Stormy!
De sun's gwan down, an' we'll go home.
Storm along, Stormy!

This minstrel song certainly seems to fit in with the cotton screwing family of work songs. These "cotton screwers" were organized as a 4-person team with a foreman who led the work chants; the team used a jack-screw to store the bales more compactly into the hold. Each team would heave and haul the jack-screw handles in place to a chant or work song led by the foreman. The song leader could be expected to extend this song by making rhymes with other port cities and characters until the work was done. The song is also one of the first references to "Stormy" in the music literature, Stormy being a common character in many deep-sea work songs.

Folklorist Gibb Schreffler comments in his **Stormalong, Lads, Stormy** blog #25, November 13, 2011, on this particular minstrel song in the context of discussing other Stormalong work songs:

"The minstrel song has an unmistakable chanty form, inclusive of cotton-stowing chants, and its mention of Mobile Bay and work references confirm it. The 'hoist' lyric suggests it might even have been a shipboard chanty borrowed from cotton-screwing by that time. While it is known that many minstrel songs contributed to chanties, this is powerful evidence that some work songs were adopted as material for minstrel songs, too. An open question: How did White's lot, in New York, come across this work song?"



Screwing cotton bales in the hold of a ship, **Harper's Weekly**, July 14, 1883, p. 440.

I would add, with regard to what Schreffler says above about the "hoist" lyric, that hoisting was an essential part of the job after the roustabouts had delivered the cotton bales to the deck of a ship. They were then hoisted up with tackle and lowered into the hold where the cotton screwers moved them with their bale hooks to where they wanted to stow them. Therefore, the reference to "hoist" may not have been added when the cotton screwing work song was adapted for use on a deep-sea sailing ship or steamer. Otherwise I am in total agreement with Schreffler.

The stevedores hired to stow bales of wool into ocean-going ships in Australia had a similar work gang as the Gulf Coast cotton screwers, and there is a literature of their work songs that also remains to be explored.



View of cargo hold in the 4-masted steel sailing barque *Magdalene Vinnen* with crew men screwing in wool bales, Woolloomooloo, Sydney, Australia, March, 1933; this photo is part of the Australian National Maritime Museum's Samuel J. Hood Studio Collection.

In adapting this song for a contemporary audience I have done a minimum of wording changes but I did add a couple of verses and a grand chorus based on the first verse. There was no reference tune in the songbook, so I used the traditional *Sail Away, Ladies, Sail Away* as a base:

Based on a song by John Smith of White's Serenaders at the Melodeon, New York City,
from **White's New Ethiopian Song Book**, published by T. B. Peterson & Bros.,
Philadelphia, PA, ©1854, p. 71.
Adapted by Charles Ipcar 3/29/10
Tune: after *Sail Away, Ladies, Sail Away*

Storm Along Stormy-2

C-----G-----C
Now I wish I was in Mobile Bay,
-----F---C
Storm along, Stor-my, storm along!
-----G-C
Screwin' cotton all de day,
-----F---C
Storm along, Stor-my, storm along!

Chorus:

-----F
Oh, you rollers, storm along,
-----C
Oh, you rollers, storm along,
F-----C-----G
Hoist that bale an' sing dis song --
-----F---C
Storm along, Stor-my, storm along!

I wish I was in New Orleans,
Storm along, Stormy, storm along!
Dancin' with dem Cajun queens,
Storm along, Stormy, storm along!
(CHO)

I wish I was on de Midway Plaisance,
Storm along, Stormy, storm along!
Watchin' Lil' Egypt do de Hoochi
Coochie Dance,
Storm along, Stormy, storm along!
(CHO)

Now I thought I heard our Captain say,
Storm along, Stormy, storm along!
"Sun's gwine down, go get your pay!"
Storm along, Stormy, storm along!
(CHO)

Drop your hook an' give a holler,
Drop your hook an' give a holler,
We's ashore for de Yankee dollar --
Storm along, Stormy, storm along!

The last song I'm focusing on is another traditional one, this time collected by Charles Nordhoff in the 1840s from the cotton screwers working in Mobile Bay, Alabama. The song again mentions "Old Stormy" and some version of this song will certainly be familiar with contemporary chantey singers as *Stormalong John/General Taylor*. According to Nordhoff's notes:¹⁰

"The chants, as may be supposed, have more of rhyme than reason in them. The tunes are generally plaintive and monotonous, as are most of the capstan tunes of sailors, but resounding over the still waters of the Bay, they had a fine effect. There was one, in which figured that mythical personage 'Old Stormy,' the rising and falling cadences of which, as they swept over the Bay on the breeze, I was never tired of listening to. It may amuse some of my readers to give here a few stanzas of this and some other of these chants. 'Stormy' is supposed to have died, and the first song begins":



"Aloft in a Gale," drawn by Sol Eytinge, Jr., *Harper's Weekly*, December 20, 1873, p. 1137.

From Charles Nordhoff, *The Merchant Vessel: A Sailor Boy's Voyages to See the World*, published by Moore, Wiltach, Keys & Co., Cincinnati, OH, ©1856, pp. 40-41.

Old Stormy

"Old Stormy, he is dead and gone,
Carry him along, boys, carry him along,
Oh! carry him to his long home,
Carry him to the burying-ground.

Grand Chorus:

Way-oh-way-oh-way—storm along,
Way—you rolling crew, storm along, stormy.

Oh! ye who dig Old Stormy's grave,
Carry him along, boys, carry him along,
Dig it deep and bury him safe,
Carry him to the burying-ground. (CHO)

Lower him down with a golden chain,
Carry him along, boys, carry him along,
Then he'll never rise again,
Carry him to the burying-ground. (CHO)

And so on *ad infinitum*, or more properly speaking, till the (jack-) screw is run out."

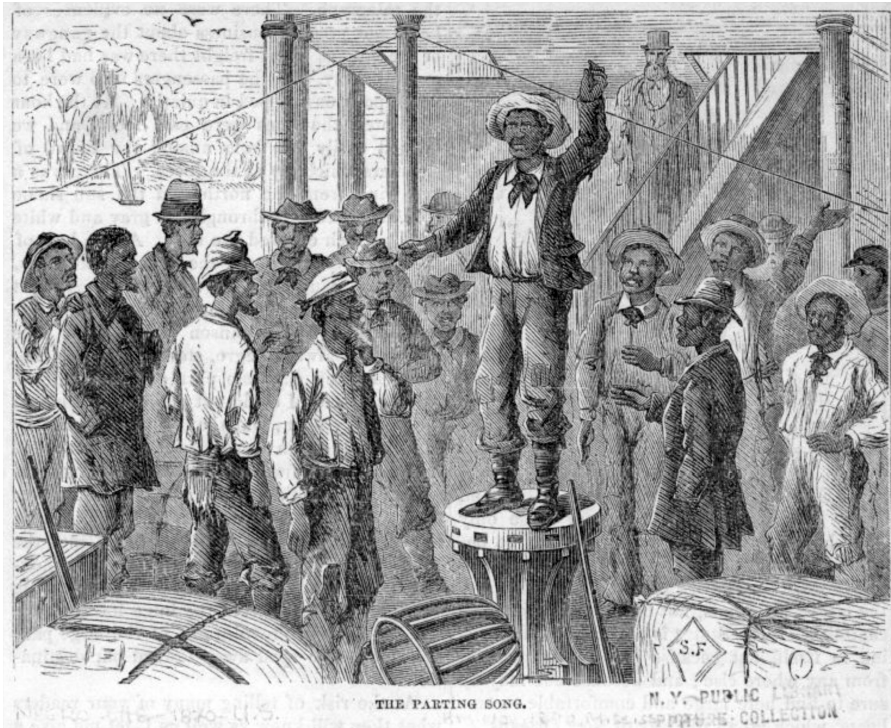


Sternwheel steamboat *Natchez* steaming up the Mississippi River, New Orleans, LA,
October 4, 2014, photographed by Charlie Ipcar.

Conclusion

With the exception of a small fleet of operational tourist steamboats boats like the *Natchez* in New Orleans and the little *Sabino* at the Mystic Seaport Museum, the steamboats are no more. The steamboat songs and the roustabout work songs are largely forgotten by the general public. However, more and more such songs are being revived and adapted by contemporary traditional style singers. And the songs are great fun to sing.

The relationship between minstrel songs and roustabout songs still remains largely unexplored but I would hope that my research would encourage others to dig deeper for more songs in the libraries and search the on-line websites, and subject them to more rigorous analysis. I believe that it will be rewarding research and look forward to seeing and hearing the results.



"The Parting Song" as described in "Down the Mississippi" by George Ward Nichols, drawn by Alfred R. Waud, **Harper's New Monthly Magazine**, Vol. 41, November, 1870, p. 836, via New York Public Library Digital Archives.

As sung by Moses on the steamboat *Robt. E. Lee* just before starting out
Collected by Mary Wheeler of Paducah, KY, in the 1930s.¹¹

Let Me in the Lifeboat

Come, brother sailor, and don't fall asleep,
Pray both night and day, or you'll sink in the deep;
Hope is the anchor, this you must keep,
If you want to sit with Jesus in the lifeboat.

Chorus:

*Let me in the life boat, let me in the lifeboat,
She will bear my spirit home;
Let me in the life boat, let me in the lifeboat,
She will bear my spirit home.*

Some at the hellum; some down below,
Ship is a-dashin' and her decks overflow;
Mothers and fathers cryin' so loud,
"Oh, Jesus, will you take me in the lifeboat?" (CHO)

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¹ Fred Erving Dayton, **Steamboat Days**, pp. 331-359

² John G. Lepley, *Packets to Paradise: Steamboating to Fort Benton*, River & Plains Society, ©2001, p. 80

³ Mary Wheeler, **Steamboatin' Days**, p. 92

⁴ Charles Nordhoff, **The Merchant Vessel**, pp. 40-41

⁵ Stan Hugill, **Shanties of the Seven Seas**, pp. 300-301

⁶ Bonnie Cave Bradley, *Mary Wheeler: Collector of Kentucky Folksongs*, p. 55

⁷ Mary Wheeler, **Roustabout Songs**, p. 4

⁸ Gibb Schreffler, **Boxing the Compass**, p. 9

⁹ **Manuscripts & Folklife Archives**, *Hays, William Shakespeare*

¹⁰ Charles Nordhoff, op. cit., pp. 40-41

¹¹ Notes by Mary Wheeler given to Capt. Don Sanders