

With Pioneer Days around the corner, let's reminisce about Monticello's history. While researching, I came across a wonderful article written by Buckley Jensen that was posted in the San Juan Record called "San Juan's anthem: The Blue Mountain song." Have you ever wondered what the song is all about? I did, and this piece tells the story of the song and how it came to be. I hope you all enjoy the read as much as I did.

To find more hidden gems, here's a link to the San Juan Record.

<https://sjrnews.com>

San Juan's Anthem: The Blue Mountain Song

by Buckley Jensen

San Juan Record

Filed deep in the memory of almost anyone who grew up in San Juan County in the last 80 years are the melodic refrains of the Blue Mountain Song.

Written in the 1930's by a young attorney (Fred Keller) who had taken up residence in Monticello, with the assistance of his friend, Tom Evans, this song has morphed into the signature anthem of San Juan County over the intervening decades. Today, it is sung at gatherings of San Juaners as diverse as nursing home parties and 4th of July celebrations.

The thing that has endeared this ditty to natives is that it memorializes and commemorates San Juan County's early pioneer stock and preserves the forces that shaped our early history.

However, to many newcomers, and a few folks who have lived here their entire lives, many of the names, places, and incidents mentioned in the lyrics of the song mean nothing.

Yet, each played a significant role in life in San Juan during the first 50 years of its existence, and the song is more meaningful if one understands the words of the song.

Here are the lyrics of the six verses of Blue Mountain

Verse 1: My home it was in Texas.

My past you must not know.

I seek a refuge from the law, where the sage and pinion grow.

CHORUS: Blue Mountain, your azure deep.

Blue Mountain with sides so steep.

Blue Mountain with horse-head on your side.
You have won my love to keep.

Verse 2: For the brand "L.C.," I ride with the sleeper calves on the side.
I'll own the Hip Side and Shoulder when I grow older,
Zapitaro don't tan my hide.

Repeat Chorus

Verse 3: I chum with Latigo Gordon.
I drink at the Blue Goose Saloon.
I dance all night with the Mormon girls and ride home beneath the moon.

Repeat Chorus

Verse 4: I trade at Mon's Store with bullet holes in the door
His calico treasure, my horse can measure
When I'm drunk and feeling sore.

Repeat Chorus

Verse 5: Yarn Gallus with his long rope.
Doc "few clothes" without any soap.
In the little green valley have made their sally
and for "Slick" there's still some hope.

Repeat Chorus

Verse 6: In the summer time it's fine. In the winter the wind doth whine.
But say, dear brother, if you want a Mother,
There's Ev on the old Chuck Line.

Repeat Chorus

What follows is an explanation of the people, places, and history immortalized forever in the lyrics of this beloved song

In the first stanza (verse), the outlaw element that was so pervasive among the cowboys is mentioned.

Many of the cowhands of early San Juan were here mainly because San Juan was isolated and far from the places where they were wanted by the law.

The chorus deals with the "horsehead" on the mountain. Fred Keller said, "On a naked slope of Blue Mountain, spruce trees grow in the outline of a horse's head. The physical

feature is very distinct in winter, and at distances as great as 30 miles, one sees the head of a blazed face horse with an arched neck looking down over thousands of square miles on the mesa to the east.

From earliest times the cowboys have considered the “horsehead” a scenic wonder. Everyone who visits the region is shown the “horsehead”.

In the second stanza, the “LC” Ranch, headquartered on Recapture Creek, which flows off the south side of Blue Mountain, is one of the three large cattle companies that operated in San Juan County in the late 1800s.

The second of the large cattle companies was the “Hip-Side and Shoulder,” headquartered at Carlisle, about five miles north of Monticello on Spring Creek.

They were so named because they would brand their cattle with three swipes or bars: one on the hip, one on the side, and one on the shoulder of each cow.

Keller continues, “Many of the cowboys who did the punching for the Blue Mountain Cow outfits had ambitions of owning their own outfits some day. The easy way to get into the cattle business was by the process of what was known as ‘sleeping calves’...a refined type of larceny.

“Here is how it was done. A cowboy finds a calf with its mother in a place not often ridden. He catches the calf and, with his running iron, burns a line that may become part of the finished brand which the mother of the calf carries.

“The calf is released, and the cowboy hopes it will not be discovered by the owner of the cow. He returns when the calf has grown to be a weaner, and if the owner has not completed the branding of the calf, the cowboy completes what he began with his own brand and the calf (in the eyes of the law) belongs to him. During the time the calf was first caught and the completion of the branding, the calf was referred to as a ‘sleeper’.”

The term “Zapatero” in the second stanza comes from the name the cowboys gave Nephi Bailey, who was the Justice of the Peace in Monticello. He also repaired the cowboy’s boots. The term means “shoemaker” in Spanish

The third verse talks about Latigo Gordon. Nicknames were commonplace among the cowboys. Bill Gordon was the foreman of the “Hip-Side and Shoulder” outfit at Carlisle and was called “Latigo”.

The Blue Goose Saloon was built and owned by Gordon on Monticello’s Main Street. It was a popular rendezvous spot for the cowboys.

Cowboys longed for female companionship, and many would sober up, shave, and occasionally bathe and come to community dances in hopes of snagging a pretty Mormon girl for a few dances.

Mons Peterson, a Mormon, built a general store on Main Street in a log cabin with a dirt roof. The business became known far and wide on the frontier as “Mon’s Store.”

Keller continues, “Staple merchandise consisted of calico, gingham, sugar, coffee, Bull Durham, Horse Shoe Chewing Tobacco, whiskey and the other necessities of life of Mormon and non-Mormon alike.

“The front door of Mon’s Store was punctured by many bullet holes fired from the guns of celebrating cowboys. One day, a cowboy rode his horse through the door of the store, took hold of the end of a bolt of calico, tied it to his saddle horn and rode down the street at full gallop, unwrapping the bolt as he sped away. Some Ute Squaws were in town that day and I have it on good authority that they ran the cowboy’s horse down and each cut off a dress pattern.”

Yarn Gallus in verse five was a well-known cowboy. “Each Christmas his mother in Missouri sent him a present of knitted galluses. (suspenders)”

Doc Few Clothes arrived by his nick-name because some said he had a scanty wardrobe and was not over scrupulous in the matter of sanitation or personal hygiene.

The “Little Green Valley” in verse five was the one in which the tiny town of Moab sat 55 miles north of Monticello. It had lush green meadows in the spring and sunshine throughout most of the year. More than one cowboy dreamed of assembling a herd of Sleepers, finding a pretty school teacher and settling down in the Little Green Valley.

“Slick was a cowboy who neither gambled nor drank hard liquor. He saved his money, married a good-looking grass widow that wandered onto the frontier. She lived with him just long enough to get hold of his bankroll and then left for parts unknown. The efforts of Slick to catch up with the widow were matters of great jest around the Blue Goose Saloon and Mon’s Store. Slick was slow to realize that she was gone forever, but lived on through the years with the hope that she would one day return,” wrote Keller”

Mr. Keller, who later in life became a district judge, explains his sixth verse thusly: “The cattle of the large cow outfits with headquarters around the Blue Mountain were upon the open range throughout the entire year.

“In the spring they drifted to the higher elevations and, in the fall, they drifted back again to the shelter and warmth of the canyons that run down to the banks of the Colorado and San Juan Rivers.

“During the spring, summer and fall, the larger cow outfits required a considerable number of cowboys to brand the calves and gather the beef. In the winter there was very little that could be done for cattle and all except the top hands were laid off until spring. Many of them existed through out the winter wholly by riding the “Chuck Line.”

Riding the “Chuck Line” consisted of riding from one ranch to another with no other object than to obtain sustenance by partaking of the hospitality of the ranchers.

Among the Mormon settlers was a very talented, charming and hospitable woman by the name of Evelyn Adams. She and her husband, George, founded a ranch on Verdure Creek six miles south of Monticello. They also among the first settlers of Monticello and also owned a large brick home in Monticello.

“Evelyn Adams was known to all the cowboys as ‘Ev.’ She fed them when they were hungry, nursed them when they were ill and most of them looked upon her as a foster mother. Her cabin at the ranch or her palatial home in Monticello was the most popular spots on the ‘Chuck Line.’ ‘Ev’ is the sweetheart or the heroine of my song. I think of her very tenderly,” concluded Judge Keller.

Composed by F. W. Keller

BLUE MOUNTAIN

This photo was taken from the book Anchored Lariats on the San Juan Frontier by Norma Perkins Young

