

Was *Home On The Range* really written by Colorado gold miners?

During the bleak winter of 1884-1885 in the boomtown of Leadville, Colorado, few diversions were at hand to occupy the evenings of those lonely prospectors who preferred to avoid the saloons, gambling halls, and scarlet ladies. But for Crawford O. "Bob" Swartz and his friends, there was music to make.

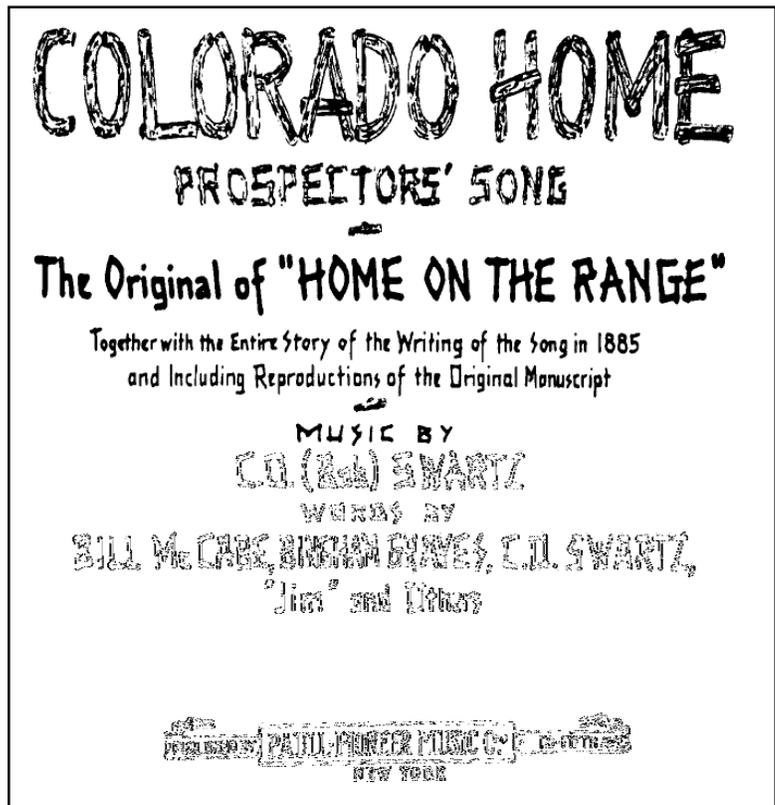
Bob and Bill McCabe and Bingham Graves and "Jim" (surname probably Fouts) had a fiddle, harmonica, and banjo band, and they would lounge about their shanty, which they called the "Junk Lane Hotel," and play and sing. "I can still see," Bob wistfully wrote years later, and these are his spellings, "the whole gang setting around on soap boxes & on the bed, all trying to make the lines rhyme so they sounded like poetry. Then when they got a verse so it sounded good, I would play the tune & Bill McCabe with the banjo & his nice tenor voice would lead in singing. I can see them all yet."

One of the tunes Bob and friends wrote was titled "Colorado Home," and the first verse began "Oh! Give me a home/ Where the buffalo roam/ And the deer and the antelope play."

Bob jotted the words in the musical notebook he always carried, and in a letter to his parents dated February 15, 1885, he described the writing of the song: "We have originated a new song, music and all, & it's creating quite a stir among the boys all around. I got up the tune and Bill most of the words, but we all had a hand in it. As the cabin was full that night & every body help make it up, if it keeps on going it will become a popular western song."

Soon the Junk Lane Gang broke up and scattered in all directions, Swartz returning to his home in Pennsylvania.

Many years passed, and radio was invented, and from these electronic loudspeakers wafted a hit song titled "Home on the Range." Imagine the surprise of Swartz to hear "his" song on the radio—even though some of the verses were different: What, for instance, had been:



*Oh, give me a hill
And the ring of the drill,
In the rich silver ore in the ground. . . .*
was now:

*How often at night,
When the heavens are bright
With the light of the glittering stars. . . .*

Swartz died on March 12, 1932, convinced that his, and not the other, was the original of "Home on the Range." Concerned that her brother may have written an American classic for which he received neither recognition nor recompense, Swartz's sister, Laura M. Anderson of Parkland, Pennsylvania, wrote to the Paull-Pioneer Music Corporation, publisher of "Home on the Range," inquiring of the song's origin. She included a copy of the 1885 letter written by her brother, citing the lyrics to "Colorado Home."

Kenneth S. Clark of the Paull organization, who had supervised Paull's publishing of "Home on the Range," responded:

[Writing of "Colorado Home"] was as close to general public recognition as Mr. Swartz came during his lifetime, for he died . . . without having received

credit before the world for the part played by himself and his comrades in the creating of what is now the favorite song of many Americans, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The story may therefore make us reflect meditatively that there must have been many other anonymous authors of our songs of the Far West who passed to the Great Round-Up, as did Mr. Swartz, without receiving the least public recognition of their contributions to our folk literature.

To assuage whatever wrongs may have been perpetrated against Bob Swartz and his friends, Paull-Pioneer in 1933 published sheet music of "Colorado Home," with lyrics as written in Leadville. The sheet also included the original jottings from Bob's notebook, a copy of the letter to his parents, an affidavit from his sister, a photo of Swartz and of Leadville including the

Junk Lane Hotel, and, most importantly, the assertion in bold print that "Colorado Home" was: "The Original of 'Home on the Range' Together with the Entire Story of the Writing of the Song in 1885." Added was a sympathetic explanation of the whole affair by Mr. Clark of the Paull organization:

[The] spread of the song in the Far West was typical of what are commonly known as folk songs—songs of no known authorship which have become songs of the people. . . . It is probable that the [Junk Lane crowd] performed it for their friends and associates, and thus it came to be generally sung without anyone's knowing who had written it. That is the case with many of most folk songs. . .

Thus it was recognized by the publisher of "Home on the Range" that the Junk Lane musicians were essentially the song's composers.

COLORADO HOME

Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam,
And the deer and the antelope play;
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the sky is not cloudy all day.

Oh, give me the hill and the ring of the drill,
In the rich silver ore in the ground;
And give me the gulch, where the miners can sluice,
And the bright yellow gold can be found.

Oh give me the gleam of the swift mountain stream,
And the place where no hurricanes blow;
And give me the park with the prairie dog bark,
And the mountains all covered with snow.

PROSPECTORS' SONG The Origin of "Home on the Range"

Oh, give me the mines where the prospector finds,
The gold in its own native land;
With the hot springs below, where the sick people go,
And camp on the banks of the Grand.

Oh, show me the camp where the prospectors tramp,
And business is always alive;
Where dance halls come first and fare banks burst,
And every saloon is a dive.

Chorus

A home, a home, Where the deer and the antelope play;
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the sky is not cloudy all day.

And there the matter rested until 1935, when New York attorney Samuel Moanfeldt was retained to investigate the origins of "Home on the Range" in conjunction with a \$500,000 copyright infringement lawsuit brought by William and Mary Goodwin of Tempe, Arizona. They contended that their "An Arizona Home" was the parent song of "Home on the Range."

Moanfeldt performed a thorough investigation which took him to several states and cities, including Leadville and other Colorado points, interviewing survivors and acquaintances of Swartz, Graves, Fouts, and McCabe. Moanfeldt's conclusions were (a) that the Goodwins had no case; (b) that the growing number of persons asserting authorship of "Home on the Range" was remarkable; (c) that the original song was probably much older than 1885 when Swartz claimed to have written it; (d) that the Junk Lane Hotel boys may indeed

have written five stanzas not in the original but instead which suited their own prospecting circumstances and their Colorado environment.

Moanfeldt and subsequent sources ascribe "Home on the Range" not to Leadville, Colorado, but instead to Smith Center, Kansas (indeed, in 1947 it became the Kansas state song). The melody is thought to have been written by carpenter and musician Daniel E. Kelly, and the words by itinerant alcoholic physician Brewster M. Higley, and first published in a December 1873 issue of the *Smith County Pioneer* under the title "Oh, Give Me a Home Where the Buffalo Roam."

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