

Interview with Uncle Billy McCrea, Jasper, Texas, 1940

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John A. Lomax: Miss Sarah, this is Uncle Billy.

Ruby T. Lomax: How ya doing Uncle Billy? How are you this evening?

Uncle Billy McCrea: I'm feeling very well ??? .

Ruby T. Lomax: Have a seat?

John A. Lomax: Uncle Billy, come sit right here and let's, oh, you want sit—

Ruby T. Lomax: I think maybe he—

John A. Lomax: ??? right over [over] there. Sit in that.

Uncle Billy McCrea: Yes, sir.

John A. Lomax: And I want sit over here by you and talk to you some. [*equipment set-up noise and pause*]

Uncle Billy McCrea: This ??? always ??? .

Ruby T. Lomax: Rest your hat down there. That right. Rest your hat down there.

Uncle Billy McCrea: I didn't want come, [*door slams*] my voice is not good. I can't, I'm afraid I can't do what I, talk like I wanna talk.

Ruby T. Lomax: Well, that'll be fine. We—

Uncle Billy McCrea: [*grunts*]

Ruby T. Lomax: —get along fine.

John A. Lomax: If you don't sing, Mr., please you tonight I'll, we'll bring you back in the daytime.

Uncle Billy McCrea: Sir?

John A. Lomax: If you're not satisfied with them tonight, well I'll bring you back in the daytime, when you're feeling better.

Uncle Billy McCrea: Yes, sir.

John A. Lomax: Now go head and, and ah sing one of those steamboat songs.

Uncle Billy McCrea: [*pause*] You want hear one of those steamboat songs?

John A. Lomax: Yep.

Uncle Billy McCrea: [I'm just steady now. I don't wanna start then (?)]. They want me to sing that song sort of like—

John A. Lomax: *Blow Cornie Blow.*

Uncle Billy McCrea: You want me sing that song like before they going to work.

John A. Lomax: Yeah.

Uncle Billy McCrea: Yeah. Well. I'll sing ??? going to work. I'll sing it for you.

John A. Lomax: Go head. Nothing here gonna hurt you, Uncle Billy. [*microphone noise before Uncle Billy sings*]

Blow Cornie Blow

I think I hear a the captain call me—blow cornie blow. I think I hear the captain calling—blow cornie blow.

A blow cornie blow. Blow cornie blow. A blew it cold, loud and mournful. Blow cornie blow.

I think I hear the captain [say (?)] ??? —blow cornie blow. They carried lo-o-o-o-ong onto bend. Blow cornie blow. They soon will be to the landing corner. Blow cornie blow. De captain hand me down my [salary (?)]. Blow cornie blow. Oh, blow boy and let them hear you. Blow cornie blow.

Oh, blow loud and ??? . Blow cornie blow. Oh, blow loud just so he can hear you. Blow cornie blow. I think I hear the captain call you. Blow cornie blow.

Uncle Billy McCrea: [*concludes song*] Yeah. That's the best I—

John A. Lomax. Now, what were the boys doing when they were singing that—

Uncle Billy McCrea: ??? . What you ??? doing?

John A. Lomax: Yeah.

Uncle Billy McCrea: Toting salt.

John A. Lomax: Toting salt?

Uncle Billy McCrea: Yes, sir.

John A. Lomax: Where from the boat to the bank?

Uncle Billy McCrea: From the boat goes back to the warehouse.

John A. Lomax: Where that salt come from?

Uncle Billy McCrea: I don't know where it come from. We used, we got, they got it for old master.

John A. Lomax: Yeah.

Uncle Billy McCrea: Old master just sit beside you know and they ah, when they land now, then you had to tote it up this bank and put it in the warehouse. And they would sing the while they's toting it.

John A. Lomax: Well [now (?)] they'd sing *Handy Gal* also, wouldn't they?

Uncle Billy McCrea: No. This here's another one.

John A. Lomax. All right.

Uncle Billy McCrea: Let's see here how's that go. [We used to just tear that up (?)]. Now I sung them you see—

John A. Lomax: *Oh, Sally, What Ya Gonna Have For Dinner?* was that one of them?

Uncle Billy McCrea: ??? that's one of them.

John A. Lomax: Well, sing that one.

Uncle Billy McCrea: Let's see now how that [go (?)]. I got to study it a while. That's the reason why I didn't even, didn't want come cause I done have it preach now—see, I tell you how this. Let, I need talk a little bit. You see here? Why yes. See, I had to run here for two years, and, and not going, and you hurt me. It seem like it, aged my voice. But you don't hurt me on just this time. Well, now I see, let me see how that go?

John A. Lomax: How about the [*Jerah Rall* (?)] *Don't Come To My House*?

Uncle Billy McCrea: Yeah. That's a good one too.

John A. Lomax: Alright. Sing in that one.

Uncle Billy McCrea: [*sings*]

Ju Rawsy Row, Row, Don't Come To My House

Ju rawsy raw, raw, don't come to my house. Ju rawsy raw, raw, don't come to my house. Ju rawsy raw, raw, hoe ??? hoe. Ju rawsy raw, raw, hoe nigga hoe. Ju rawsy raw, raw, hoe nigga hoe. Ju rawsy raw, raw, a good dog. Ju rawsy raw, raw, ??? . Ju rawsy raw, raw, [old ties (?)] they frighten me. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [old ties could (?)] bake your bread. Ju rawsy raw, raw, ??? [old ties (?)] a good dog. Ju rawsy raw, raw, ??? [old ties (?)] a horse ??? . Ju rawsy raw, raw, tote boy. Tote boy. Ju rawsy raw, raw, ??? . Ju rawsy raw, raw, ju rawsy raw. Ju rawsy raw, raw, ??? [old ties (?)] a good dog. Ju rawsy raw, raw, ??? . Ju rawsy raw, raw, [s'ick them old ties up (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [take them old ties up (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, ??? [to go (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [old ties tend the crop (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [old ties tend the crop (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [old ties to bake your bread (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [old ties a good dog (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, ju rawsy raw, raw. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [s'ick them old ties up (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [cut them old ties up (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [cut them old ties up (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw. [*drumming*] Ju rawsy raw, raw. [*drumming*] Ju rawsy raw, raw, [old ties a biting dog (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [old ties will bite you (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [old ties will hurt you (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw [old ties a good dog (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [s'ick them old ties up (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [cut them old ties up (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw, [hold them ties up (?)]. Ju rawsy raw, raw.

Uncle Billy McCrea: —how you like that?

John A. Lomax: I'd say that's a good one.

Uncle Billy McCrea: [*laughs*]

John A. Lomax: Now, well now, hold up. Ah, go on. Let's finish with those, ah, how about that one *Walk Darley*. How did that one go?

Uncle Billy McCrea: Which?

John A. Lomax: *Walk Darley*, you said, or, *Dooley* or something like, or—

Uncle Billy McCrea: [*sings*] **Walk Dooley** .

Walk Dooley. Walk dooley. Dooley's a good. Do walk a dooley. Dooley's my honey [girl (?)]. Do raz ???
Walk dooley. Walking and a talking. Walk dooley. Walking and a talk. Walk dooley, dooley's a hand gal.
Dooley ???

Uncle Billy McCrea: Let me see. I got that wrong. That's why you don't want my mind don't process nothing. Let me see now. Let me see how I can get that started again. Nope. Cause ??? . That's it. Let's see, now. [*he attempts to sing and Ruby T. Lomax comments about something*] Ahha. I got it wrong. [*Uncle Billy McCrea, resumes song*]

Walk dooley. Walk, talk and dooley. Walk dooley. Walk, talk, dooley. Walk dooley. Dooley is a— Walk dooley. Oh, dooley. Do walk. Dooley. Oh, dooley. Walk dooley. Walk them and a talking. Walk dooley. Walk them and a talk.

Do raz. Araz-raz. ??? dooley. Walk dooley. ??? dooley. Do raz. Araz-raz, hoe nigga. Hoe man. Do raz. ???

Walk dooley, hoe down nigga. Walk dooley, I am a good man. Walk dooley, I can do ??? . Walk dooley, walk, talk dooley. Walk dooley, run along dooley. Walk dooley, talk long dooley. Walk dooley, stepping on dooley. Walk dooley, dooley is a good thing. Walk dooley, dooley let the hogs out. Walk dooley, hoe nigga hoe me. Walk dooley, hoe nigga hoe me.

Do raza I am ??? Do raza I could pull two men. Do raza I could handle three men.

Walk dooley, I could whoop five men. Walk dooley, dooley she's a good gal. Walk dooley, I could slap her husband. Walk I slap Julia. Walk sometime I slap Julia. Walk sometime I slap her jaw. Walk Julia is a good gal. Walk when I slap Julia on the jaw. Walk then she come to be a good girl. Walk Julie—

Uncle Billy McCrea: [*laugh*] I got, now, now let me see now. ???

John A. Lomax: *Handy Gal*.

Uncle Billy McCrea: *Handy Gal*. Let me see how it is. [*he attempts to sing*] **Handy Gal** . Handy gal. Handyeeee. Handy gal. Handyeeee. Let me see. Handy gal. Handy. Let me see. Handy gal. Let me see. Walk. Handy gal. Let's see. Handy gal. See, I've got to study it. You see. I've got to get to study it, before I could sing it.

John A. Lomax: That's all right. Ah, oh what about ta— [*recording glitch*]

Uncle Billy McCrea: Let me see how it is. How that, that song is. That's one of those songs on the boat I was just talking about.

John A. Lomax: Yeah.

Uncle Billy McCrea: I don't know what's going happen here.

John A. Lomax: Yeah.

Uncle Billy McCrea: Let's see. [*he sings one note—Oh.*] Let's see. How's that go. I had that down good today. Because I told them, I remember sort of leaving. See. [*sings—Ohhhh*] [*leave won't you ??? (?)*]. Told you I come around here and g-o-o-o-o. G-o-o-o-o, sunny your horse is gonna have a [*good stable (?)*]. Let's see. ??? carry on. ???

John A. Lomax: What did you do on the boats? Ah, ah Uncle Billy?

Uncle Billy McCrea: Cook. I cooked.

John A. Lomax: How long?

Uncle Billy McCrea: On the boat?

John A. Lomax: Yeah.

Uncle Billy McCrea: I cooked boats about six years.

John A. Lomax: And where did the boats run?

Uncle Billy McCrea: From Beaumont to Jasper here [Gulfport (?)].

John A. Lomax: How many miles was that?

Uncle Billy McCrea: N-unn, I think they taught us, fifty-miles, from Jasper to Beaumont. I cooked on. I cooked on about, cooked for about six years on steamboats.

John A. Lomax: And how old are you Uncle Billy?

Uncle Billy McCrea: Well I—

John A. Lomax: Sit over a little bit.

Uncle Billy McCrea: —could tell you my age. Now I, I don't rightly know my age. But I can tell you what I go for. The fifteenth of this, of October, I be eighty-nine. Eighty-nine-years-old. And on the second time, the way they've got my age fixed there on the fifteenth I will be a hundred-and-seventeen-years-old. But I register in the courthouse, of my age be ninety-eight, ah eight, no eighty-nine, this coming, the fifteenth of this month. Next Oc, October.

John A. Lomax: How many children have you, Uncle?

Uncle Billy McCrea: How many children? I have [*Ruby T. Lomax utters*—Two children.] I, how many children? Let's see. Thirty-six.

John A. Lomax: Thirty-six?

Uncle Billy McCrea: That's right.

John A. Lomax: How many boys?

Uncle Billy McCrea: How many boys? Eighteen boys.

John A. Lomax: And how many girls?

Uncle Billy McCrea: I don't know. Cain't [can't] rightly tell you how many girls. But the boys I got sixteen raised right here in Jasper County.

John A. Lomax: Sixteen boys?

Uncle Billy McCrea: Yes, sir. And them two boys you seen with ??? the other day?

John A. Lomax: Yeah.

Uncle Billy McCrea: Them my boys. Twin boys. You see another boy there?

John A. Lomax: Yeah.

That's my boy. And another boy come out there, and that's one of my boys raised right here. I have, I have one in, I have one in ah, in Beaumont. And I have one boy— [*recording ends*]

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