

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Deep Elem Blues

Deep Elem Blues

If you go down to Deep Elem
Just to have a little fun,
You'd better have your fifteen dollars
When the policeman come.

Oh, sweet mama, daddy's got the Deep Elem Blues;
Oh, sweer mama, daddy's got the Deep Elem Blues.

If you go down to Deep Elem,
Keep your money in your shoes;
The women in Deep Elem
Got those Deep Elem blues.

If you go down to Deep Elem,
Take your money in your pants;
The women in Deep Elem
Never give the men a chance.

Now I once knew a preacher,
Preached the Bible through and through,
He went down into Deep Elem,
Now his preaching days are through.

Now I once had a sweet gal,
Lord, she meant the world to me;
She went down into Deep Elem;
She ain't what she used to be.

Her papa's a policeman
And her mama walks the street;
Her papa met her mama
When they both were on the beat.

Another set of lyrics, this time from Uncle Willie and the
Brandy Snifters:

If you go down in Black Bottom,
Put your money in your shoes,
The women in Black Bottom
Got them Black Bottom Blues.

Oh, good mama, your daddy's got them black bottom blues.

If you go down in Black Bottom
Just to have a little fun,
Have your sixteen dollars ready
When that police wagon comes.

Well, I had a good little woman
And I taken her to the fair,
She would have won the premium
But she had bad hair.

Well, I went down to Black Bottom
Just to get a little booze,
And now I'm on the chain gang
Wearing them brogan shoes.

If you've got a good little woman,
Better keep her by your side,
That old (band member name)
Take your baby and ride.

Here's what I know. First, the title: Deep Elem refers to Elm Street, the Colored Red Light District in (Dallas, I think -- I'd have to refer to the liner notes on Michael's album). I have no information on the meaning of "Black Bottom."

The oldest recording I know of is by the Cofer Brothers, under the title "The Georgia Black Bottom," Okeh 45111. The Brandy Snifters version above is directly derived from the Cofer recording.

I haven't been able to locate a single printed copy of the song, and Lyle Lofgren of the Brandy Snifters doesn't know of any either. Can anyone tell me anything else about the song beyond what I've said above? RBW

The song under the title "Deep Elem Blues" owes its popularity originally to the Attlesey Brothers, who recorded it ("Deep Elm Blues") in 1933 for RCA Victor under the pseudonym of Lone Star Cowboys. That version was not very influential. Later they changed their last name and became the Shelton Brothers, and as such recorded the song for the Decca label as "Deep Elem Blues" in 1935, followed by "... No. 2" and then "...No. 3." The brothers grew up in Hopkins County, Texas; if they had access to any antecedents for the song about Dallas's old red light district, it hasn't been reported. The "Georgia Black Bottom" song, practically the same tune, was recorded by the Georgia Crackers, a group including the Cofer Brothers, in 1927. I've read that "Black Bottom" referred to

the black district (i.e., African-American) of many cities, in particular, Nashville. It was also a dance (popular among African-Americans) in the 1920s. There was a "Black Bottom Blues" recorded by
Because the black bottom women gal ain't going to do nothing but take it away from you...."
and Black Bottom McPhail, in 1932, recorded the same title, beginning,
"Now down in black bottom that is so they say,
They drink good moonshine and stay drunk all day..."
I trust I have muddied the waters sufficiently. NC

RBW
APR99