

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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St. James Hospital

St. James Hospital

ST. JAMES HOSPITAL

It was early one morning I passed St. James Hospital,
It was early one mornin', mornin' month of May,
I looked in the window and I spied a dear cowboy--
Wrapped up in white linen, well, he was cold as the clay.

Sayin', "Come, dear mother, come an' seat yourself nigh me,
Come, dear father, come and sing me one song,
For my knee-bones are achin' and my poor heart is breakin',
I know I'm a poor cowboy, and I know I done wrong.

I want sixteen young gamblers, papa, to carry my coffin,
I want sixteen young whore gals for to sing me my song,
Tell them bring 'long a bunch of those sweet-smellin' roses,
So they can't smell me as they drive me on.

'Twas once in the saddle, papa, I used to go dashing,
Father, in my young days when I used to be gay,
Down roun' that old church-house, with them handsome young ladies,
Them girls oughta carry me, follow me to my grave.

It was early one mornin' I passed St. James Hospital,
Lord, it was early one mornin', mornin' month of May,
I looked in the window and I spied a dear cowboy--
And he was wrapped in white linen, he was colder than clay.

(Sung by Alan Lomax)

This Negro version from Texas is ostensibly a cowboy ballad, but it should properly be considered a unique form of the 'Rake' ballad, separate and distinct from the "Streets of Laredo" variants. An examination of the text reveals traces of earlier forms of the ballad not usually found in the more common cowboy versions. The setting is the St. James Hospital of British broadside texts (or, perhaps that of the popular Jazz version, Gambler's Blues; the dying man calls for his parents to sit with him, and complains of various aches and a broken heart, elements found most frequently in versions of "The Bad Girl's Lament."

John and Alan Lomax collected this version from James (Iron-Head) Baker in 1934 at the Central State Farm, Sugarland, Texas.

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