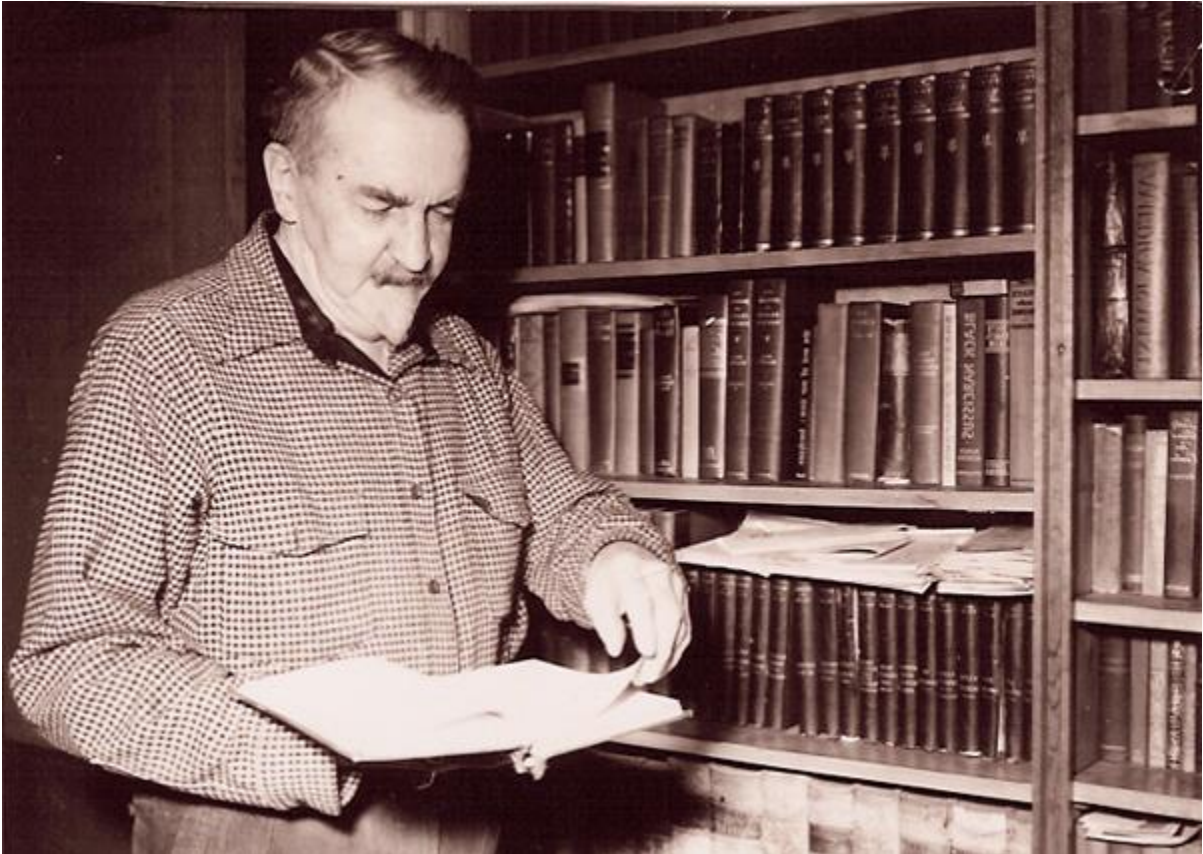


## A COWBOY POET AND A SONG ODYSSEY

Stewart Hendrickson

September 27, 2020, Seattle



Charles Badger Clark

### **Roundup Lullaby, Badger Clark, Clifton Barnes, and the Pomona College Men's Glee Club**

I first learned the song, *Roundup Lullaby (Desert Silvery Blue)*, as a freshman student in the Pomona College Men's Glee Club in 1955; it was sung as an encore at most of our concerts. It was based on a poem by Badger Clark, set to music by Clifton Barnes, and arranged by Prof. Ralph Lyman for the Pomona College Men's Glee Club in 1938. This song has stuck with me for some sixty years and is still a favorite.

[Roundup Lullaby, sung by the Glee Club on "Pomona College Songs" in 1967.](#)

This story begins when Charles Badger Clark, Jr. (1883-1957), the son of a Methodist minister, was born in Albia, Iowa, on January 1, 1883. That same year his family moved to the Dakota Territory where his father preached in Huron, Mitchell, Deadwood, and Hot Springs. A restless youth, he eventually left the Dakotas for better health in Arizona where he fell in love with ranching, cow-

punching, and the lure of the open range. Refusing to "become a slave to whistle, clock or bell," he craved the freedom of the open skies. To support this lifestyle he began to write verse and later accepted speaking engagements after he moved back to South Dakota due to his father's ill health. After several books of poetry, a novel, and numerous articles and pamphlets, he became the first Poet Laureate (some say *lariat* ) of South Dakota.

Clark's book, [\*Sun and Saddle Leather\*](#) (first edition, 1917) contains most of his poems. Three of his well-known poems are [\*A Cowboy's Prayer\*](#), written for his mother; [\*A Border Affair \(Spanish is the Lovin' Tongue\)\*](#); and [\*Roundup Lullaby\*](#). [Other poems are here](#). The original words to the *Lullaby* are:

Desert blue and silver in the still moonshine,  
Coyote yappin' lazy on the hill,  
Sleepy winks of lightnin' down the far sky line,  
Time for millin' cattle to be still.  
So—o, now, the lightnin's far away,  
The coyote's nothing skeery;  
He's singin' to his dearie—  
Hee—ya, tammalallday!  
Settle down, you cattle, till the mornin'.

Nothin' out on the hazy range that you folks need,  
Nothin' we can see to take your eye.  
Yet we got to watch you or you'd all stampede,  
Plungin' down some royo bank to die.  
So—o, now, for still the shadows stay;  
The moon is slow and steady;  
The sun comes when he's ready.  
Hee—ya, tammalallday!  
No use runnin' out to meet the mornin'.

Cows and men are foolish when the light grows dim,  
Dreamin' of a land too far to see.  
There, you dream, is wavin' grass and streams that brim  
And it often seems that way to me.  
So—o, now, for dreams they never pay.  
The dust it keeps you blinkin'.  
We're seven miles from drinkin'.  
Hee—ya, tammalallday!  
But we got to stand it till the mornin'.

Mostly it's a moonlight world our trail winds through.  
Kain't see much beyond our saddle horns.  
Always far away is misty silver-blue;  
Always underfoot it's rocks and thorns.  
So—o, now. It must be this away—

The lonesome owl a-callin',  
The mournful coyote squallin'.  
Hee—ya, tammalallday!  
Mocking-birds don't sing until the mornin'.

Always seein' 'wayoff dreams of silver-blue  
Always feelin' thorns that stab and sting  
Yet stampedin' never made a dream come true,  
So I ride around myself and sing,  
So — o, now, a man has got to stay,  
A-likin' or a-hatin',  
But workin' on and waitin'  
Hee — ya, tammalallday!  
All of us are waitin' for the mornin'.

Since its original publication, the song lyrics have been shortened, revised, re-named, and otherwise messed with by many who couldn't recall the lyrics, misheard them, or just wanted to change them. Some six musical settings by different composers had appeared by 1952. The one by Clifton Barnes (1938) and arranged for the Pomona College Men's Glee Club by Ralph Lyman (see the recording at the top) is the most widely-sung version. This song has been sung by folks including Katie Lee, Don Edwards, Bing Crosby, Sue Harris, and others — it has also been called "*Cowboy Lullaby*" and "*Desert Silvery Blue*." An extensive discussion of the song is on [the Mudcat Forum](#).

In the early 1960s, a little boy growing up in Brooklyn, New York, used to fall asleep listening to his mother sing this song. Much later he researched and produced a beautiful video *Song Odyssey* (38 min) about his search to find out about the song he so loved as a kid. That kid is now called "[Chef Juke](#)" and lives in Eugene, Oregon.



<https://youtu.be/Tc4NtGm6WGw>

## Thoughts on “A COWBOY POET AND A SONG ODYSSEY, by Stewart Hendrickson”

**Meryle A. Korn** says:

September 28, 2018, at 11:07 pm

Delightful article and film! I've been singing the first 2 verses of “Cowboy's Lullaby”/”Roundup Lullaby” since first learning it at Camp Namanu, a Camp Fire Girls camp near Sandy, OR that I attended annually from 2nd grade thru 8th grade, returning as a Counselor in Training (CIT) in my senior year of high school and as a counselor for real in the summer after my freshman year at Portland State (1962). Years later, a music partner and I sang it frequently in concert. At one point an audience member handed me a third verse she'd written out on a piece of paper. My version is pretty close but not exactly the same as the ones sung here, and I do a little yodel on the chorus. STILL love this song!

**Abel Constance** says:

December 5, 2019, at 3:35 am

Honestly, I guess such posts must be published more and more because of the present situation and contemporary needs of their Millenials. I eagerly read these to get some fresh info that will correspond to my needs.

**Shelly Barnes** says:

May 7, 2020, at 12:10 am

Hello and thank you so much for the research and the historical journey of this lovely song. My grandfather is Clifton Barnes, he used to sing this song along with his son, my stepfather Wayne Barnes, to us and we knew it as cowboy lullaby. I grew up on a cattle ranch In California, and I am now in Arizona part time in Colorado part time. I was thinking of he and this song Have you seen a very amazing full moon rising over Four Peaks through a huge Saguaro cactus. I took a chance to see if I could find the lyrics online and I stumbled upon your link and incredible historical research on the song, amazing! Thank you so much for all the work you did on that and for enjoying the poem, the song, and what it was like as a cowboy on the range.

**James R. McFadden** says:

September 20, 2020 at 4:21 pm

My parents both graduated from Pomona College in the early 1950's and frequently sang “Roundup Lullaby” at home or in the car. I grew up on an orange orchard in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains where I roamed far and wide through the oaks and sage. Now I live in the hills

down in San Diego County where we photograph mountain lions and bighorn sheep. When I listen to “Roundup Lullaby” it goes straight to my heart and soul. It is a reminder of another time and place, of a hard but simpler life, of living closer to the land. Thank you so much for providing the recording.

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