

## *Music in the Westward Expansion: Songs of Heart and Place on the American Frontier*

### WSMTA 2024 Conference

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This 2024 WSMATA conference presentation is inspired by my book of the same name, *Music in the Westward Expansion: Songs of Heart and Place on the American Frontier* (McFarland 2022).

At the core of the Westward Expansion lies some 400,000 people who uprooted their lives in pursuit of the dream for a better life in the American West. Taking only the essentials that would fit into a simple wagon, the pioneers made room for musical instruments right alongside their guns, ammunition, food, and tools. On any given wagon train, travelers might bring along an eclectic collection of portable instruments – from fiddles to flutes and banjos to bugles. The songs of the trail included the sweet melodies of Stephen Foster, romantic ballads, patriotic tunes, and traditional hymns. As pioneers settled into their new lives on homesteads and in early frontier communities, they wasted no time organizing music lessons, brass bands, church choirs, and community concerts.

The wide variety of songs and pieces that I've collected in my research includes fiddle tunes, vocal pieces, solo piano works, guitar works, marching band music, and transcriptions of wax cylinder recordings made by musicologists toward the end of the 1800s. My research included combing through the archives of historical societies in New Mexico, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Oregon, and Idaho, and Washington. National archives such as the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian also turned up a mountain of musical gems.

Below are a few examples of music that I've been playing for musical presentations and author events over the past couple of years. In the book's appendix, you will find a selected list of songs and musical works from each chapter- much of the sheet music, as indicated in the appendix, is available in digital format.

- “Flute Call and Love Song” by Thurlow Lieurance (1878-1963). This plaintive piano solo features a melody originally played by John Turkey Legs, a Northern Cheyenne flute master. Thurlow Lieurance recorded the flute song on a wax cylinder recording machine and then harmonized the melody in this work for solo piano. In my early research, I traveled to Montana to meet with Jay Old Mouse, who was the flute maker of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe in south-central Montana. His flute lineage can be traced back to John Turkey Legs. You can find the score in the Nebraska Memories Archives.  
(<http://memories.ne.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/Polley/id/698/rec/1>)
- “Old Dan Tucker” was a popular dance tune in the nineteenth century. As people moved west, they did not have room in their wagons for pianos, or other keyboard instruments, but they did have room for violins. Fiddle music was a primary source of entertainment and diplomacy in the Lewis and Clark Expedition. This piano solo of “Old Dan Tucker,” captures the rollicking spirit of the fiddle. One can just imagine the men of the Corps of Discovery gathered around the campfire while the boatman and lead musician, Pierre Cruzatte, sawed away on the fiddle. You can find the score in the Library of Congress digital archives. (<https://www.loc.gov/item/2023798922/>)
- *Fandangos* were a popular style of music played in 19<sup>th</sup> century parlors of Americans living on the East Coast. *Fandangos* also referred to gatherings that were held in the Santa Fe area in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century where participants gathered to sing, play music, dance, and socialize. Here's an example of a fandango for piano that I found in the digital archives of the Biblioteca Nacional de Espana: *Fandango para piano con cantos y variaciones* by Antonio Mercé.  
(<https://datos.bne.es/edicion/bipa0000111397.html>)

- “Missionaries Adieu,” also known as “My Dearest Lovely Native Land,” was a hymn sung by Narcissa Whitman on her wedding day as guests wept into their hankies, knowing that they, more than likely, would never see Narcissa again. For on the next day, she and her new husband, Dr. Marcus Whitman, led by a frontier guide, headed West on a mission to convert Native People to Christianity. They traveled the grueling 2,000 miles by horseback from the Eastern United States to what is now the area of Vancouver, Washington. They eventually founded the Whitman mission near what is now Walla Walla, Washington. This hymn and thousands of other old hymns can be found on hymnary.org. ([https://hymnary.org/tune/perseverance\\_51712](https://hymnary.org/tune/perseverance_51712))
- “The Blue Juniata” (1844), by Marion Dix Sullivan, was the first popular U.S. song written by a woman. Pioneer journals indicate that this was a favorite song of the Oregon trail. In 19<sup>th</sup> century fashion, the song was adapted for the piano as a theme and variations. You can find a solo piano version of it at the Library of Congress Online Archives, along with stacks and stacks of digitized music from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (<https://www.loc.gov/item/2023798903/>)
- Charles Wakefield Cadman: pianist, composer, musicologist specializing in the “Indianist Style,” popular in the late 1800’s. There are several pieces by the composer available on IMSLP, including a piano arrangement of Thunderbird Suite, op. 39. ([https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/0/00/IMSLP97336-PMLP200172-CWCadman\\_Thunderbird\\_Suite,\\_Op.63\\_piano.pdf](https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/0/00/IMSLP97336-PMLP200172-CWCadman_Thunderbird_Suite,_Op.63_piano.pdf))
- Marion Bauer (1882-1955), composer, teacher, and music critic, was born into a musical family in Walla Walla, Washington toward the end of the Westward Expansion. Over the course of her career, she wrote more than 150 compositions and became known as a pioneering woman composer of the twentieth century. Her *6 Preludes for Piano, Op. 15*, can be found on IMSLP. ([https://imslp.org/wiki/6\\_Preludes%2C\\_Op.15\\_\(Bauer%2C\\_Marion\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/6_Preludes%2C_Op.15_(Bauer%2C_Marion)))
- Dave Brubeck grew up on a ranch in Northern California, and his collection, *Reminiscences of the Cattle Country* for solo piano, a suite of 6 short pieces, pays homage to his earliest musical memories of his mother, who played classical music on the piano, and his father, who played cowboy-style harmonica. *Reminiscences of the Cattle Country* is available on JW Pepper.

This short list provides a tiny taste of the variety of music inherent in the musical story within the larger story of the Westward Expansion. Each that traveled west brought heart to the experience as they wove their unique thread into the musical tapestry that was as diverse as the people and experiences of the nineteenth century American West. I hope that musicians, arts enthusiasts, and K-12 educators find inspiration in my book as a jumping off point for exploring composers, music, and content that offers a new look at the history of the Westward Expansion, one that looks through the lens of music to highlight the wide range of diversity that was part of this important moment in history.

Sincerely,

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