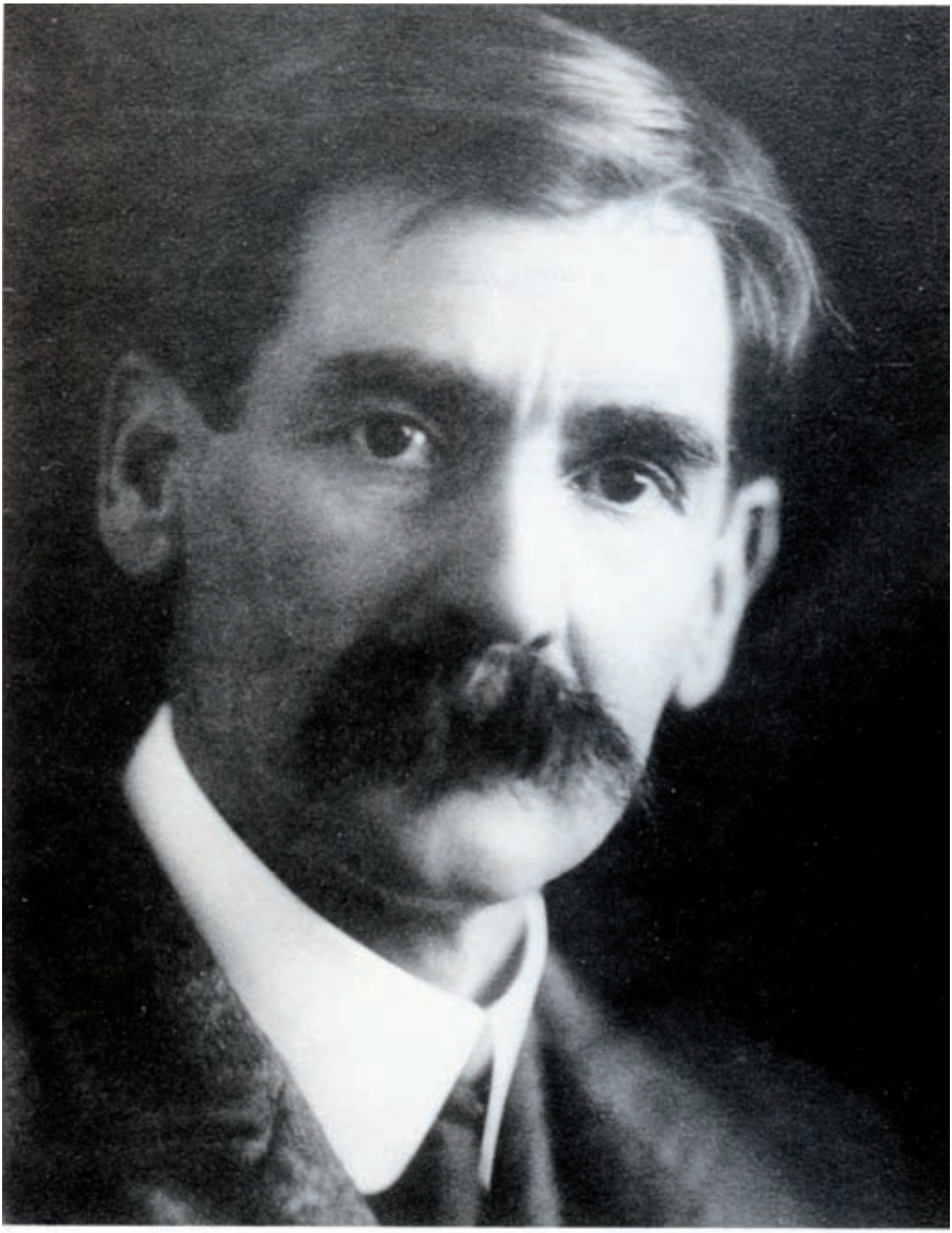

The Songs of
HENRY LAWSON
Compiled by Chris Kempster
SECOND EDITION

The Songs of
Henry Lawson

• *with music* •

Chris Kempster collected musical settings of Lawson's poetry for many years. He was a member of the first recorded bush band in the 1950s, was a foundation member of the Bush Music Club and helped to introduce Australian folk songs to the National Fitness Council in the 1960s. Chris was a high school maths teacher for twenty years, and in retirement worked on *The Songs of Henry Lawson* and his musical life. He moved to the Blue Mountains in 1992 where houses were built, songs were sung and life was lived. He died in January 2004, aged 70.



Henry Lawson, poet and story teller.
N.S.W. Government Printing Office.

The Songs of
Henry Lawson

• *with music* •

Compiled by **Chris Kempster**

VIKING O'NEIL

First edition

First edition dedicated to:
Harry Anderson and the Union Movement,
the genius of Henry Lawson,
Jan, who endured the chaos at home and helped at many crucial stages.

First edition prepared with the assistance of:
the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union of Australia,
the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body,
the Australian Folk Trust.

Viking O'Neil
Penguin Books Australia Ltd
Penguin Books Ltd
Viking Penguin Inc.
Penguin Books Canada Limited
Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd

First published by Penguin Books Australia Ltd 1989

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Produced by Viking O'Neil
56 Claremont Street, South Yarra, Victoria 3141, Australia
A division of Penguin Books Australia Ltd

Typeset in Baskerville by Southwood Press, NSW
Printed and bound in Australia by Globe Press, Victoria

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication data

The Songs of Henry Lawson.

Includes index.
ISBN 0 670 90233 0.

1. Lawson. Henry. 1867-1922 – Musical settings.
2. Folk-songs, English – Australia. I. Kempster, Chris, 1933-2004.

784.4'994

First edition front cover photograph: Lawson and Brady at Mallacoota, 1910. NSW Government Printing Office.

Second edition

Dedicated to:
Chris Kempster

Published by Folk Federation of NSW

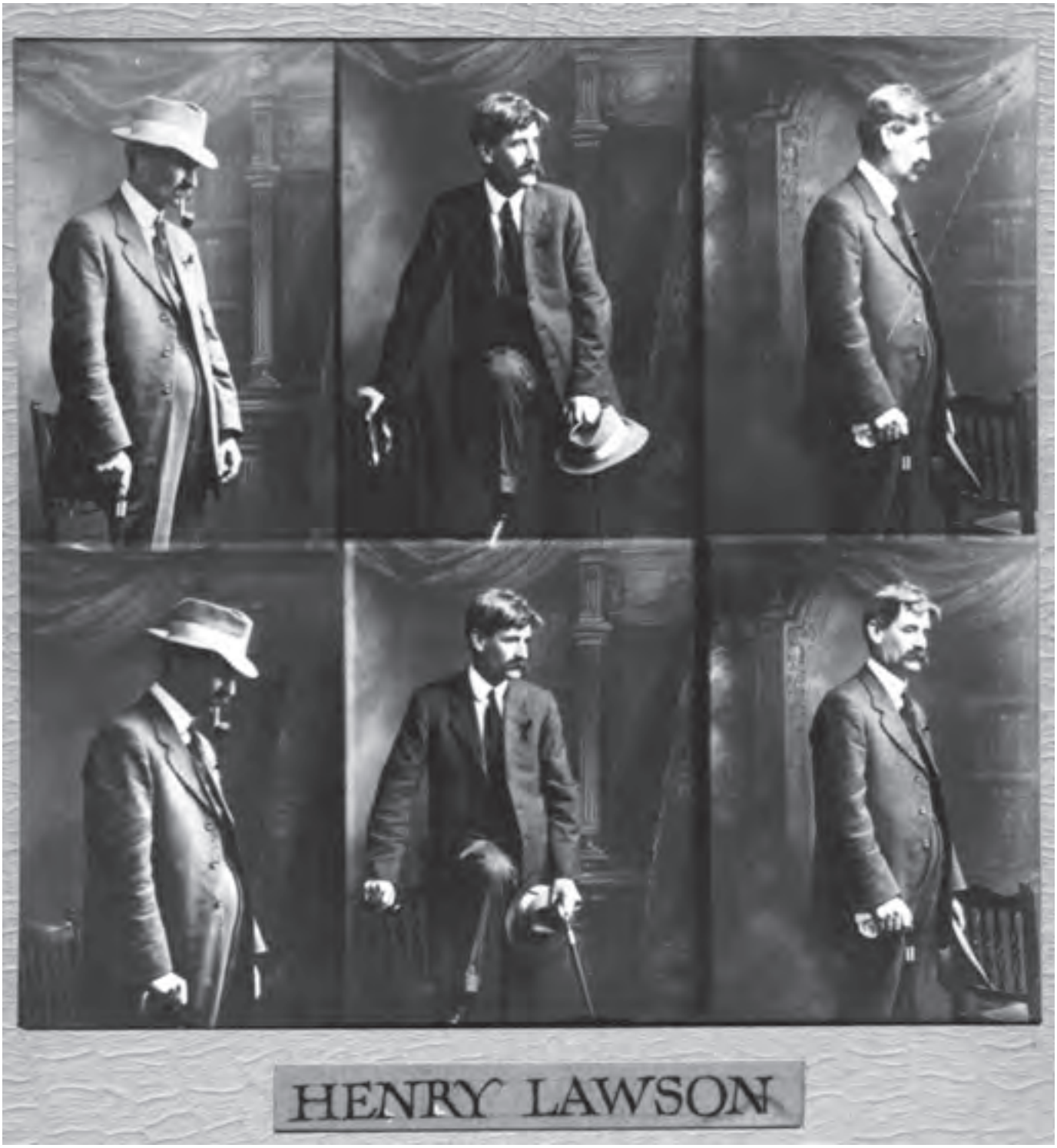
Printed at Dobsons Printing, Chatswood

The Songs of Henry Lawson – Second Edition.

ISBN 978-0-646-48569-0

Cover design: Michael Bryers, Twin Peak Images (Caricature used with permission State Library of Victoria)

Contents



HENRY LAWSON

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the people:

the gold miners, free selectors, shearers, drovers, bullockies and rouseabouts, and to all who humped their drum, or waltzed their matilda, far out on the wallaby track,
the bushgirls and bushwives, who shared the work, tackled the unknown on lonely selections and endured the good times and the bad,
the city workers in factories and offices, and the unemployed in shoddy overcoats reading the work-wanted boards by match light,
the soldiers who marched away, leaving sad people and children singing in the rain.

Thanks to the land:

the tinted cliffs, high rocky ledges and 'deep green banks of fern'
the 'north-west-by-west over ranges afar, to the plains where the cattle and sheep-stations are'

Thanks to the passion of Henry Lawson:

the poet and short story writer, who came to the city as a 'delicate, shabby, super-sensitive, soul-starved and almost totally uneducated bush boy in blucher boots' (Henry Lawson, 1913),
'who spoke for the nameless, the unknown and un-sung, and wrote as Australia spoke' (Denis Kevans, 1985).

Thanks to:

Professor Colin Roderick for three volumes: *Henry Lawson, Collected Verse*. Until 1967 when this collection of nearly 1000 poems was released, few people knew anything of Lawson's poetry outside the 177 poems in *Poetical Works of Henry Lawson*. Fewer still knew that not all of these were as Lawson wrote them.
Professor Manning Clark, for his introduction to this book, his Lawson biography and his devotion to Australian history. Thanks also to the many other biographers who have opened more windows into Lawson's life.

Thanks for funding and support:

Harry Anderson, Judy Driscoll, Yve Bennett, Chris Raper and the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union,
the Arts in Working Life section of the Music Board of the Australia Council,
the Australian Folk Trust,
and everyone who supported the production of the CD *The Songs of Chris Kempster*.

Thanks to the following for:

Music: transcription & script under music: Jane Copeland,
Music: computer input & printing of music: Neil Currie,
Selected illustrations: Richard Baldwin,
Typing and proof-reading: Barbara Drysdale,
Proof-reading: Diana Harris, Denis Kevans, Fleur Ellis and Enid Gilbert,
Technical assistance, *and more:* Rodd Shaw, Gillian Harrison and Dave Scott,
Computers: Col Gordon, Denise Phillips, Burford Sampson and Shirley Alexander,
Photographic assistance: Bob Bolton, Kevin Jeffcoat (NSW Dept of Water Resources), Paul Cochrane (Redback Graphics), Roy Harbour, Olive Lawson, Frank O'Gallagher, Brian Bolton & Stephen B. Mutch,
General Assistance: Jan Hackett, Chris Woodlands, Keith McKenry, Frank Hardy, Dave Alexander, Dave Scott, John McClymont, Phyl Lobl, Margaret Walters, Geraldine Selke, Enid Hokan, Ron McCoy, Trish McPharlin, Barbara Baird (Aust Music Centre), Peter Herlinger, Brian Dunnett, Chris & Laurie Gilbert, David Cleaver, Warren Target, Richard Evans, David Wenban, Warren Fahey, Jill Stevens, Chris Bates, John Derum (ABC TV), Bill Dowsett (2GB) and David Mulhallen (ABC Radio), and to Tanya Re, Rod Ritchie and the staff of Hale & Iremonger for ongoing assistance as this book evolved.

Thanks to the editors of the second edition, 2007-2008: Mark Gregory, Ian Hamilton, Alison Jones, Wayne Richmond and Christine Wheeler.

And thanks for help along the way to: Julie Bishop, Maria Dunn, Bob Bolton, Jim Luck & Gial Leslie.

Introduction

by Manning Clark

It is not surprising that many of the poems written by Henry Lawson have been put to music, because he wrote with that passion which clamours for music. He also had the gift for the memorable words. To endure, music must be memorable, and the words of a song must say something not only to those then living in a particular place, but also to the people of all times and all places. Henry Lawson had that gift in abundance.

In many ways Henry Lawson seemed an unlikely medium for the words which would become the expression of the Australian dream and the Australian conscience. He was born at Grenfell on 17 June 1867. He became deaf during childhood, yet he was possibly the first Australian writer to catch the rhythm of Australian speech – that much maligned language in which we Australians say things to each other. His education was truncated and left him pitifully equipped in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Yet Lawson had the gift of finding the word or phrase which would survive. He had something to say to Australians, and he found the words in which to say it.

He spoke first to Australians as a revolutionary and a nationalist, beginning at the age of twenty with his first published poem: *A Song of the Republic* which appeared in the *Bulletin* of 1 October 1887. This had two messages – one nationalist and the other radical. Lawson asked Australians, the 'Sons of the South' to 'choose true' between 'the Old Dead Tree' (Australia as an outpost of British civilization) and 'the Young Tree Green' (the future Australian nation). Australians must decide whether they want to grovel to a 'Lord' and a 'Queen', or work for and enjoy 'the land that belongs to you'.

A Song of the Republic also contained this radical exhortation to the 'Sons of the South':

> Banish from under your bonny skies
> Those old-world errors and wrongs and lies
> Making a hell in a Paradise
> That belongs to your sons and you.

It is not surprising that these words were later put to music. Perhaps the most stirring rendition is by George Dreyfus in the recent musical of *A History of Australia*. Dreyfus wrote a chant, a hymn of praise to both Australia and Australians. For what Lawson hoped for has still not come to be.

Henry Lawson, from a series of studio photographs (c. 1917, photographer unknown).
Courtesy of Lawson's grand-niece, Olive Lawson, given to her in 1985, by his daughter Bertha Jago. Other copies available.

The radical message was repeated in a whole series of poems published between 1887 and 1891. Perhaps the two most famous of these were *Faces in the Street*, first published in the *Bulletin* on 28 July 1888, and *Freedom on the Wallaby* which first appeared in the *Worker* (Brisbane) on 16 May 1891. In *Faces in the Street* Lawson prophesied:

> But not until a city feels Red Revolution's feet
> Shall its sad people miss awhile the terrors of the street -
> The dreadful everlasting strife
> For scarcely clothes and meat
> In that pent track is living death - the city's cruel street.

So, in *Freedom on the Wallaby* he called on Australians to be rebels:

> So we must fly a rebel flag
> As others did before us
> And we must sing a rebel song
> And join in rebel chorus.
> We'll make the tyrants feel the sting
> Of those that they would throttle
> They needn't say the fault is ours
> If blood should stain the wattle.

The young Henry Lawson was also a gifted historian of his own times. He observed accurately the direction of the river of life. He had seen the railway train arrive in Mudgee in 1883, when he was sixteen years old. He realized that the railway meant the end of the 'Old Australia' of his childhood. Once again he found the memorable words in which to portray the end of one era and the beginning of another in his poem *The Roaring Days*, first published in the *Bulletin* on 21 December 1889:

> But golden days are vanished.
> And altered is the scene;
> The diggings are deserted,
> The camping-grounds are green;
> The flaunting flag of progress
> Is in the West unfurled,
> The mighty bush with iron rails
> Is tethered to the world.

The young Henry Lawson also touched on another theme: the fret and fever experienced by a man and a woman when first aware of their attraction to each other. At that time he was a romantic who hoped love and marriage would give a man and a woman inner peace and grace. Yet, stranger as he was at that time to such an experience, he seemed to have a foreboding that such love, which promised so much, would end in disaster. This is foreshadowed in his poem *Reedy River,* first published in 1900. Nature promised much:

> Ten miles down Reedy River
> A pool of water lies,
> And all the year it mirrors
> The changes in the skies,
> And in that pool's broad bosom
> Is room for all the stars

There the poet became aware of Mary Campbell, and she of him. There

> The moonlight lent a glory
> To Mary Campbell's face.

They married. It all looked promising:

> I cleared the land and fenced it
> And ploughed the rich red loam,
> And my first crop was golden
> When I brought Mary home.

But nature and life were malign. Years later there were no traces of the hut in which they had known their brief happiness together. Mary Campbell was dead. The melancholy in the poem foreshadowed the misery and wretchedness in his own relations with women. The words called for music. Again, people have arranged music to heighten the tragic grandeur and the underlying melancholy in the poem.

Henry Lawson was a great short-story writer, but stories in prose rarely attract the attention of musicians. Lawson was also the apostle of mateship in the Australian bush. He summed up mateship in his poem *The Shearers*, first published in 1902:

> And though he may be brown or black,
> Or wrong man there or right man,
> The mate that's honest to his mates
> They call that man a "white man"!
> They tramp in mateship side by side -
> The Protestant and "Roman" -
> They call no biped lord or "Sir"
> And touch their hat to no man!

By an odd irony the man who had dreamed a great dream about the destiny of Australia, the man who called on his fellow-countrymen to liberate themselves from a 'living hell', was to descend into a hell of his own making for the last twenty years of his life. But that was a different story. Lawson died in September 1922. His work was to live on – both the words and the music. Even in the depth of degradation he knew he would live on. In the poem *The Wander Light*, first published in the *Bulletin,* 10 December 1903, just as he was walking into the darkness, he wrote his own epitaph:

> And my dreams are strange dreams, are day dreams, are grey dreams.
> And my dreams are wild dreams, and old dreams and new;
> They haunt me and daunt me with fears of the morrow -
> My brothers they doubt me - but my dreams come true.

This book of songs to the words of Henry Lawson is evidence that he is still with us. He wrought a great marvel. The boy from Grenfell became part of the conscience of Australia.

Lawson's parents: Niels Hertzberg Larsen (later, Peter Lawson) and Louisa Albury, at about the time of their marriage, 7 July, 1866. State Library of NSW.

Main events in Lawson's life

by Chris Kempster (1989)

Parents: Louisa Albury 1848-1920
Niels Hertzberg Larsen (later called Peter Lawson) 1832-1888
Children: Henry, Charles, Peter, twins: Henrietta (died at age 2) and Gertrude.

1867: Birth on Grenfell goldfields, l7th June.

1875: Began schooling in bush schools.

1882: Family break-up, selection at Eurunderee leased.

1883: Louisa moved to Sydney with 3 of the children, Lawson followed later that year.

1884: Apprenticed as coachpainter and attended night school. Failed to matriculate.

1887: 'Republican riots' in Sydney. First published poem in the *Bulletin.* To Melbourne for treatment for deafness (unsuccessful).

1888: Louisa began publishing her monthly paper *The Dawn*. First story published in the *Bulletin.* Met Mary Cameron (Gilmore). Death of Niels, at Mt Victoria.

1890: To Albany, WA, 5 months with youngest brother. Waterfront Strike in Sydney and Melbourne. Labour Electoral League established in Sydney.

1891: Brief visit to Eurunderee. Worked 6 months on the *Boomerang* and contributed to the *Worker,* both in Brisbane. Shearers' strike (mainly Queensland) suppressed by the military. 35 Labour Electoral League candidates elected to NSW Parliament.

1892: Drinking too much. Met E J Brady. Began contrived argument in verse, the city vs. the bush, with Banjo Paterson. To Bourke 'in search of copy'. Tramped to Hungerford with J W Gordon, 27th Dec, looking for work.

1893: Back to Sydney. Depression in eastern colonies. Possibly met Hannah Thornburn. Missed editorship of *Worker.* To New Zealand for work.

1894: Worked as linesman. Offered job on new Sydney *Daily Worker.* Returned to Sydney as the paper converted to weekly, only given token and temporary employment. Louisa published on her own press, first collection of his work.

1895: Met Bertha Bredt (future wife).

1896: A & R published their first book of Lawson verse: *In the Days When the World Was Wide*. Proposal to Bertha (then about 19 years old), not well received. To NZ to 'prove himself', but returned and married Bertha secretly. Couple to WA for 3 months. A & R published first book of prose: *While the Billy Boils*. Couple returned to Sydney.

1897: Hard times. Friendship (affair?) with Hannah Thornburn. Henry and Bertha to New Zealand for 1 year.

1898: In NZ, first child, Joseph. Returned to Sydney. Living in poverty, Jack Lang (brother-in-law) gave a home in Dulwich Hill. Dawn and Dusk Club, plus drinking; entered 'home for inebriates'.

1899: Tram accident in December left Louisa bedridden for nearly a year. This, plus the fact that she was cheated of royalties for her mailbag fastener, contributed to the folding of *The Dawn* and to her instability in later life.

1900: Daughter, Bertha. Family to England for 2 years. Two more books published by A & R in Sydney: *On the Track, Over the Sliprails*, and *Verses Popular and Humorous*. Organised publication of Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*. Blackwood published 2 of his own books: *The Country I Come From* and *Joe Wilson and His Mates*. Lawson and wife Bertha estranged; Bertha sick. Bertha and kids departed for Australia, Lawson followed later.

1902: Death of Hannah Thornburn, said to be from endometritis, but the Royal Melbourne Hospital records indicate that this is incorrect. Family back in Sydney. Women given voting rights, partly through Louisa's efforts (a world first). Methuen in England published *The Children of the Bush.* Fell(?) from cliff, Dec.

1903: In Prince Alfred Hospital for alcoholism. Judicial separation from Bertha (alimony 30/- per week). Began autobiography.

1904: Cared for by Mrs Isabel Byers, who became a constant companion and helper right until his last days. Autobiography commissioned by A & R.

1905: The first of many jail terms for desertion and arrears of maintenance, totalling about 105 days, 1905-1909. Also spent longer periods in hospital. *When I was King and Other Verses* published by A & R. Last issue of *The Dawn.*

1906: With Mrs Byers at Naremburn. Sold copyright of *Children of the Bush* and *Joe Wilson and his Mates* to A & R for £50.

1907: *Children of the Bush* republished by A & R as *Send Round the Hat* and *The Romance of the Swag.* Hospital and jail terms.

1908-9: Completed autobiography. Spent much time in hospital and prison.

1910: *The Rising of the Court* published by A & R, and *The Skyline Riders* by Fergusson.

1911-15: Some time in hospital. *A Coronation Ode and Retrospect* published by Coffill & Co, *For Australia* and *Triangles of Life* by Lothian, and *My Army, O, My Army* by Tyrrell.

1916-17: Appointed to publicise the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas. Moved with Mrs Byers to Yanco, near Leeton. Corresponded with Robertson and others on revisions of poetry. David McKee Wright imposed further amendments ". . . to father on Lawson a poetic diction that never belonged to him" (p 177, Colin Roderick's *The Real Henry Lawson,* Australia: Rigby, 1982). Returned to Sydney.

1918: *Selected Poems of Henry Lawson* published, A & R.

1920: Hospital again. Commonwealth Literary Fund given. Death of Louisa.

1921: In the Coast Hospital (Prince Henry) after cerebral haemorrhage.

1922: Death at Abbotsford, 2nd September.

1925: *Poetical Works of Henry Lawson,* published by A & R with many changes to poetry, some made after his death.

Henry Lawson, from a series of studio photographs (c 1917, photographer unknown).
Courtesy of Lawson's grand-niece, Olive Lawson, given to her in 1985 by his daughter Bertha Jago. Other copies available.

Lawson's Poetry

by Chris Kempster (1989)

Much of Lawson's poetry has been changed. Many of the alterations are small – a few words only or a verse left out, for a later publication of the poem. Some of these changes were made by Lawson himself, but many were imposed, for better or worse, by editors.

In *Henry Lawson by His Mates,* Roderick Quinn recalls a morning in the 1890s when he arrived at the Bulletin office, to see Lawson pacing about at the bottom of the cedar stairs that led to the office of the chief editor, J F Archibald. After some enquiry, Lawson explained: "You see, I came in here to see Archie about an alteration in that story of mine in last week's Bully. I don't like sub-editing and I don't like sub-editors, I like them even less than editors, and I just had my foot on the stairs there, to go up and tell the same to Archibald, when Brady blew in like a 'southerly buster'. He had a look of sudden death about him – beard bristling and eyes blazing.

"'I've had enough of this,' he hissed, 'and it's got to end. I'm on my way to see Archibald, and then – talk of Greek meeting Greek!'

"'But I want to say something to him, too. I've got a crow to pluck.'

"'Never mind about your crow,' Brady said to me; 'it's only a fledgling compared to mine. Let me go first. Let me see him first, and then you can interview the remains.'

"Seeing Brady has a better command of language than I have – he learnt it from sailors down on the Quay – I made way for him. 'Go ahead.' I said.

"Half-way up the stairs he paused, bent over the rail and called down to me – 'Stand well from under the gangway, Henry, because in a minute or two something defunct is going to come hurtling down these stairs. When you examine it you'll find it to be either Archibald or Brady.'"

Some hours later Quinn met Lawson again, and on asking "How did Waterloo get on?", Lawson told him of how he got tired of waiting and went up to Archibald's office to investigate.

"As I opened the door," Lawson explained in tones of disgust, "I wondered what I should see, and what I saw was this: Brady sitting back in a chair and smoking a cigar, and Archibald sitting back in another chair and smoking another cigar. And they were swapping yarns!"

Lawson paused, asked Quinn for a match, and lit his pipe. "Never trust Brady," he said; "he's a defaulter."

Later the same day Quinn saw Lawson once again, but this time with Brady, in the friendliest of conversation.

It should be noted that Archibald was held in high esteem, and his editorial skills were widely respected.

With little more than three years of formal education, spread over a five year period, at four bush schools, it's

Archibald and Lawson in 1919; probably the last photo of 'Archie' before his death in September that year.

little wonder that Lawson's spelling and punctuation were poor, and perhaps invited editorial changes. But his writing was inspired. The yarns and experiences of his mother's family and the lives of those around him feature in his writing. His deafness sharpened his observation and sensitivity to people and their circumstances. He grew up in a time before radio, films and television. News and people's joy and sadness were mainly conveyed by word of mouth. (There were newspapers of course - the Bulletin was said to be written by half Australia and read by all Australia.)

As few of his editors had the same experience of the characters and yarn-spinners Lawson met 'along the track', I have more often used the form in which a poem was originally published, in preference to later versions.

This seemed especially important in view of the nature and extent of alterations made by David McKee Wright and others, in the preparation of two extensive volumes of his poetry. The first of these was *Selected Poems of Henry Lawson,* 1918, where, although Lawson was usually consulted, pressure was put on him to accept the changes proposed. Also, there were times when he was not sober enough, or in a fit enough state to make rational judgments. Other smaller editions were culled from this book, with no further changes to the poems. The second was *Poetical Works of Henry Lawson,* 1925, prepared after his death in the period 1922-24. This edition of three volumes sold well, and was later released as a single volume under the same name. It was for a long time regarded as the definitive book of Lawson's poetry, although it contained alterations made after the author's death.

The alterations were made with the best of motives and, in some cases, it is generally agreed, achieved improvements, but no attempt was made to show the original poem or the extent and location of the changes. Three particular examples where I prefer the original form of the poem are: *Andy's Gone with Cattle* and *Down the River* – changed during Lawson's life, and *On the Night Train* - changed after his death.

The task of searching manuscripts, papers, journals etc, for nearly a thousand poems, and the tracing of the evolution of so many of them, is a task one can only wonder at. I add my humble tribute to the work of Professor Colin Roderick in this regard. The versions I have taken as 'original' are as presented in his three volumes of *Henry Lawson, Collected Verse,* 1967. The chronology of composition is also as presented there. It is noted that Leonard Cronin's chronology differs slightly from the above.

Where I have preferred, or have been induced by common usage, to use a later version of a poem, the following footnote has been added: "This version is taken from *Poetical Works of Henry Lawson.* 1925."

Editors are not the only ones who make alterations. Singers and composers can, do, and will continue to, make changes - for good reasons and bad. To some extent and in most cases with reluctance, I have tried to accommodate these adaptations and to indicate where and how.

Besides the ever present problem of which version to use, many of the poems were too long. Lawson was often paid a-penny-a-line, and one could be excused for wondering if this had anything to do with the fact that *Peter Anderson & Co* runs to 106 lines. Where a poem has been shortened, a note to that effect has been added.

To allow music and poetry lines to match exactly (in all but two cases), short lines of poems have been combined.

Wherever changes of any sort were made, I had intended to have the full poem printed in an appendix, allowing the reader ready access to the original. It soon became obvious that this couldn't be, as one by one the shortened poems and their originals, were typed into my computer. It would have nearly doubled the size of the book. The reader is urged to consult the original poems, as given in the two collections, edited by Colin Roderick and by Leonard Cronin.

In summary, unless otherwise stated, the poems in this songbook are as presented in *Henry Lawson, Collected Verse,* and this, and *Poetical Works of Henry Lawson,* were the two main sources used.

Lawson and Brady at Mallacoota, 1910. See *The Bar,* p. 197. NSW Government Printing Office.

The Music

by Chris Kempster (1989)

To most of the Lawson poems presented in this collection, the reader will find more than one tune. Though these tunes have by necessity been placed in some order, it is not intended that the 'best is first and the worst is last'. I have tried not to favour any one contributor, as judgments of this kind are only relative, and influenced by many factors. Readers are urged to make their own decisions as to relative merits.

In all except one of the 230* tunes in this book, each line of the tune is formatted to match the corresponding line of the poem. This helps the reader to place the words with the notes of the tune, and to recognise the logic and structure of the tune.

The keys have been restricted to the major keys: C, D, F, G and A, plus their relative minors.

My thanks to Jane Copeland and Neil Currie, for bringing their talents, and devoting many hours of hard work, to this project.

Despite many hours of effort by myself, Dave Alexander, Chris Woodlands and others (including the editors of the second edition), some contributors have not been contacted. To these or their relatives, I extend my apologies and hope that they will contact me.

** The 2008 edition adds 44 new settings.*

"Bogged" (before 1900?).
Australian News and Information Bureau.

Selected References

(1989 edition)

Clark, M, 1978, *In Search of Henry Lawson*, Macmillan, Melbourne.
Cronin, L (ed), 1984, *A Campfire Yarn 1885-1890,* Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
Cronin, L (ed), 1984, *A Fantasy of Man 1901-1922,* Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
Kiernan, B, 1982, *The Essential Henry Lawson*, Currey O'Neil, Melbourne.
Lawson, B L & Le Gay Brereton, J (eds), 1931, *Henry Lawson by his Mates*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
Ollif, L A, 1978, *Louisa Lawson, Henry Lawson's Crusading Mother,* Ollif Publishing, Sydney.
Poetical Works of Henry Lawson, 1925, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
Prout, D, 1963, *Henry Lawson, The Grey Dreamer*, Angus & Robertson, London.
Roderick, C (ed), 1967, *Henry Lawson, Collected Verse,* 3 vols, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
Roderick, C, 1982, *The Real Henry Lawson,* Rigby, Melbourne.
Selected Poems of Henry Lawson, 1918, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.
Stone, W, 1974, *The World of Henry Lawson*, Paul Hamlyn, Sydney.

Govett's Leap Falls (c. 1882).
Macquarie University Australian History Resources Centre.

Chris Kempster and *The Songs of Henry Lawson*

by Alison Jones (2008)

In his first edition of *The Songs of Henry Lawson*, Chris restricted his own presence in the book to a footnote or two, convinced that Henry Lawson and the music he inspired should take centre stage. While acknowledging the humility and propriety of that, I now think it's time for the reader to know a little more about Chris Kempster.

Chris was a self-starter. He approached difficult and demanding tasks with a sense of adventure, and a belief that he could pick up the skills he needed to do the job. Poverty was one of the leitmotifs of his growing years, a double-edged sword which both denied material comfort and honed his resourcefulness. Not trained in carpentry, he built houses. Not trained as a bricklayer he built walls. Not trained as a musician or composer, he wrote and performed music. Not trained in publishing a book such as this, he resolved to do just that.

It's interesting to speculate on the links between Chris and Henry Lawson, who died eleven years before Chris was born. Both men were passionate, emotionally expressive and idealistic, actively looking for a better, kinder society and prepared to help construct it. Both were instinctive socialists. Both knew poverty, and felt deep sympathy for the strugglers. Both were fuelled by intelligence and high energy, both reined in by physical limitations (Chris's damaged lungs, Henry's alcoholism and deafness). Both had a strong aesthetic sense. I see Henry Lawson night-walking from Mt Victoria to Govett's Leap, just to experience the beauty of the great forested basin by moonlight; and Chris Kempster standing on a tree-stump at Mt Blackheath, playing his 6-string and gazing down to the green valley below. Both had grace and charm, both were cheeky and irreverent. Both had musical bones, but Lawson hitched his music to the wagon of poetry, while Chris inhabited the poetry in order to make his music. Oh, and neither could spell to save his life.

Chris began setting Lawson's poetry to music around the age of 16. His first Lawson setting, *Reedy River,* travelled widely, and helped give birth to Dick Diamond's ground-breaking musical play of the same name. Over the years Chris continued to set Lawson's poetry to music, as did many others, but it wasn't until the mid-1980s that he thought seriously of pulling together all the settings he could track down and publishing them. He envisaged a backroom edition photocopied and stapled, to hand out to friends. However, when he put out a general invitation for settings of Lawson he was knocked over in the rush. It became apparent that a homemade collection wasn't going to do the job.

Chris took a term off teaching high school maths to start work on the book. A few financial grants, small but very welcome and enough to prime the pump, meant that Chris could pay a typist, and a musician using what was then a very new computer program, to write up the music for publication. As the scale and breadth of the task dawned on him, Chris resigned from teaching altogether to work on the book. Over 200 different arrangements of Lawson's poetry came across his desk, from all over Australia and further afield. He was tapping into a rich vein.

How did he choose, from this avalanche of offerings, which settings to include? "The tunes come," Chris told interviewer Sharon Davis in 1989, "from politicians to post-hole diggers!" There were good contemporary settings, so those were chosen. There were Duke Tritton's tunes, a little uninteresting in Chris's view, but of historical significance, having been sung in the shearing sheds. There was a university theatrical production in the 1920s featuring some Lawson settings, so he used those. Dorothy Hodges, Alfred Hill and George Dreyfus were classical composers, who offered a different orientation. Slim Dusty's settings, though recorded and listened to throughout Australia, had never been written out, so after heartfelt requests from Chris, Slim's wife Joy McKean convinced Castle Music to allow some of them to be published in the book. Chris enriched the book's appearance by the inclusion of photos that spoke of Lawson's era, of shearers, swagmen, timber-getters; and Olive Lawson allowed the use of some photos of her great uncle. Historian Manning Clark agreed to write the Introduction, an inspired choice, as he shared with Chris a passion for Lawson.

Eventually the settings were chosen and written out, the proofs were printed and Chris, always ingenious, made his own lightboard at home to arrange, painstakingly, all the material on this. Although the subject he was exploring evinced strong interest from many Australians, no publisher felt that the resulting book would bring much financial reward. In the end, Viking O'Neil, an imprint of Penguin, published a limited run of what became *The Songs of Henry Lawson.* The job was done, and the book was launched – several times! In an interview in 2002 with Keith McKenry Chris said "I was extremely happy with the book, I never in my wildest dreams thought it could happen."

There was, of course, no publicity machinery to promote the book, beyond Chris's own contacts in the musical, folklore and union worlds. It sold moderately well, and by early in the new century could only be bought secondhand.

Before his death in January 2004, Chris was thinking of a second edition. Since the book's launch in 1989 a number of new settings had come to his attention. As his health deteriorated he thought about just putting it all on the net, and allowing it to grow there of its own accord, Wikipedia-style.

However, a small group of people (Ian Hamilton, Wayne Richmond, Chris Wheeler, Mark Gregory and Alison Jones) decided that there would be enough interest in a new edition of the book to make it worth republishing. They chose a musician-friendly spiral-bound edition that could be propped open on a music stand, and decided to add any new settings in an Appendix, retaining the 224 pages of the first edition in pretty much their original form. This group met to rough out a concept, then through folk music channels invited composers to send Lawson settings written since the publication of the first edition.

You hold in your hand evidence of continuing interest in Lawson's work by musicians. Revenue from the sale of this book will be used by the Folk Federation of NSW to fund future projects. In time you will find the contents of the book online, as Chris envisaged, so watch this space: *chriskempster.net*

Photograph by Sue Mills, Hazelbrook, 1994.

Songs added in the 2008 Edition

Since his death there have been many changes to the words of Lawson's poems, particularly by those who have set them to music. Following Chris Kempster's example in the original edition, we have chosen to use Henry Lawson Collected Verse *edited by Colin Roderick as our primary reference. Poems covered in the first edition have only been reprinted where space allowed.*

A Song of the Republic *(see also p18)*

1887

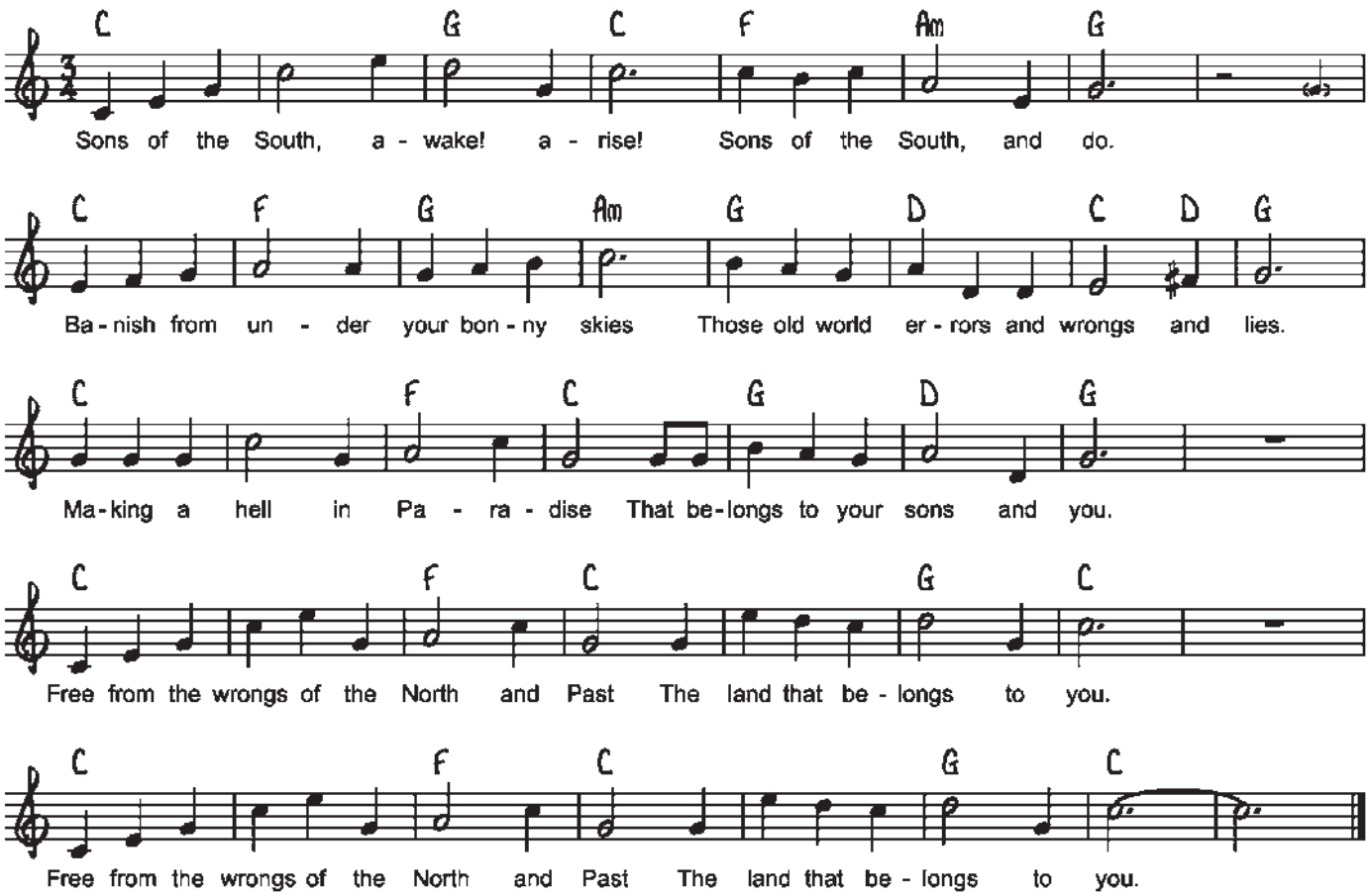
Sons of the South, awake! arise!
Sons of the South, and do.
Banish from under your bonny skies
Those old-world errors and wrongs and lies
Making a hell in a Paradise
That belongs to your sons and you.

Sons of the South, make choice between
(Sons of the South, choose true)
The Land of Morn and the Land of E'en,
The Old Dead Tree and the Young Tree Green,
The Land that belongs to the lord and the Queen,
And the Land that belongs to you.

Sons of the South, *your* time will come –
Sons of the South, 'tis near –
The "Signs of the Times", in their language dumb,
Foretell it, and ominous whispers hum
Like sullen sounds of a distant drum,
In the ominous atmosphere.

Sons of the South, aroused at last!
Sons of the South are few!
But your ranks grow longer and deeper fast,
And ye shall swell to an army vast,
And free from the wrongs of the North and Past
The land that belongs to you.

Kay Dreyfus



The Army of the Rear

1888

A song of solidarity with the urban poor and dispossessed - and an indication of Henry's inherent socialist values. - Lyell Sayer

I listened through the music and the sounds of revelry,
And all the hollow noises of that year of Jubilee;
I heard beyond the music and beyond the local cheer,
The steady tramp of thousands that were marching in the rear.
Tramp! tramp! tramp!
They seem to shake the air,
Those never-ceasing footsteps of the outcasts in the rear.

I heard defiance ringing from the men of rags and dirt,
I heard wan woman singing that sad "Song of the Shirt",
And o'er the sounds of menace and moaning low and drear,
I heard the steady tramping of their feet along the rear.
Tramp! tramp! tramp!
Vibrating in the air –
They're swelling fast, those footsteps of the Army of the Rear!

I hate the wrongs I read about, I hate the wrongs I see!
The tramping of that army sounds as music unto me!
A music that is terrible, that frights the anxious ear,
Is beaten from the weary feet that tramp along the rear.
Tramp! tramp! tramp!
In dogged, grim despair –
They have a goal, those footsteps of the Army of the Rear!

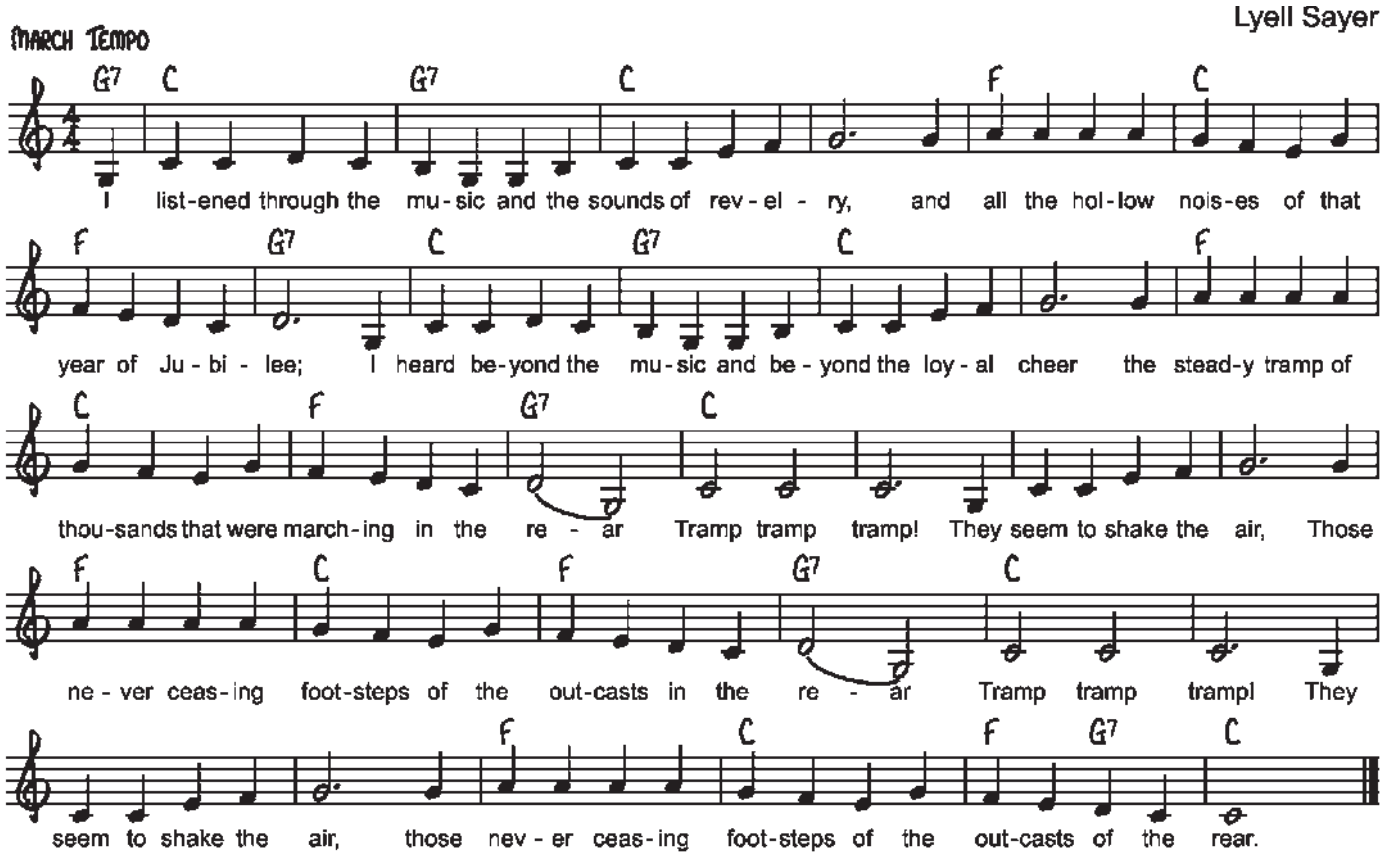
I looked upon the nobles, with their lineage so old;
I looked upon their mansions, on their acres and their gold,
I saw their women radiant in jewelled robes appear,
And then I joined the army of the outcasts in the rear.
Tramp! tramp! tramp!
We'll show what Want can dare,
My brothers and my sisters of the Army of the Rear!

I looked upon the mass of poor, in filthy alleys pent;
And on rich men's Edens, that are built on grinding rent;
I looked o'er London's miles of slums – I saw the horrors there,
And swore to die a soldier of the Army of the Rear.
Tramp! tramp! tramp!
I've sworn to do and dare,
I've sworn to die a soldier of the Army of the Rear!

"They're brutes," so say the wealthy, "and by steel must be dismayed" -
Be brutes among us, nobles, they are brutes that ye have made;
We want what God hath given us, we want our portion here,
And that is why we're marching – and we'll march beyond the rear!
Tramp! tramp! tramp!
Awake and have a care,
Ye proud and haughty spurners of the wretches in the rear.

We'll nurse our wrongs to strengthen us, our hate that it may grow,
For, outcast from society, society's our foe.
Beware! who grind out human flesh, for human life is dear!
There's menace in the marching of the Army of the Rear.
Tramp! tramp! tramp!
There's danger in despair,
There's danger in the marching of the Army of the Rear!

The wealthy care not for our wants, nor for the pangs we feel;
Our hands have clutched in vain for bread, and now they clutch for steel!
Come, men of rags and hunger, come! There's work for heroes here!
There's room still in the vanguard of the Army of the Rear!
Tramp! tramp! tramp!
O men of want and care!
There's glory in the vanguard of the Army of the Rear!



Faces in the street *(see also p20)*

1888

They lie, the men who tell us for reasons of their own
That want is here a stranger, and that misery's unknown;
For where the nearest suburb and the city proper meet
My window-sill is level with the faces in the street –
  Drifting past, drifting past,
  To the beat of weary feet –
While I sorrow for the owners of those faces in the street.

In hours before the dawning dims the starlight in the sky
The wan and weary faces first begin to trickle by,
Increasing as the moments hurry on with morning feet,
Till like a pallid river flow the faces in the street –
  Flowing in, flowing in,
  To the beat of hurried feet –
Ah! I sorrow for the owners of those faces in the street.

And when the hours on lagging feet have slowly dragged away,
And sickly yellow gaslights rise to mock the going day,
Then flowing past my window like a tide in its retreat,
Again I see the pallid stream of faces in the street –
  Ebbing out, ebbing out,
  To the drag of tired feet,
While my heart is aching dumbly for the faces in the street.

I wonder would the apathy of wealthy men endure
Were all their windows level with the faces of the Poor?
Ah! mammon's slaves, your knees shall knock, your hearts in terror beat,
When God demands a reason for the sorrows of the street,
  The wrong things, and the bad things,
  And the sad things that we meet –
In the filthy lane and alley, and the cruel, heartless street.

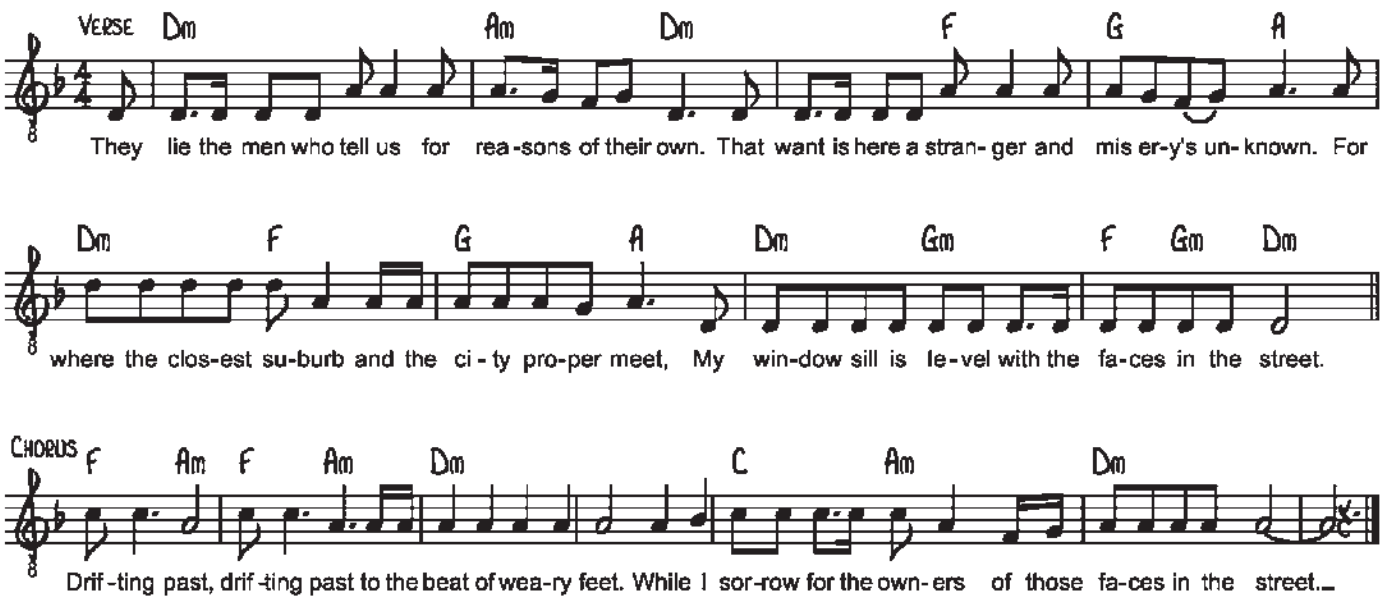
I left the dreadful corner where the steps are never still,
And sought another window overlooking gorge and hill;
But when the night came dreary with the driving rain and sleet,
They haunted me – the shadows of those faces in the street,
  Flitting by, flitting by,
  Flitting by with noiseless feet,
And with cheeks but little paler than the real ones in the street.

Once I cried: 'Oh, God Almighty! if Thy might doth still endure,
Now show me in a vision for the wrongs of Earth a cure.'
And, lo! with shops all shuttered I beheld a city's street,
And in the warning distance heard the tramp of many feet,
  Coming near, coming near,
  To a drum's dull distant beat,
And soon I saw the army that was marching down the street.

Then, like a swollen river that has broken bank and wall,
The human flood came pouring with the red flags over all,
And kindled eyes all blazing bright with revolution's heat,
And flashing swords reflecting rigid faces in the street –
  Pouring on, pouring on,
  To a drum's loud threatening beat,
And the war-hymns and the cheering of the people in the street.

And so it must be while the world goes rolling round its course,
The warning pen shall write in vain, the warning voice grow hoarse,
But not until a city feels Red Revolution's feet
Shall its sad people miss awhile the terrors of the street –
  The dreadful everlasting strife
  For scarcely clothes and meat
In that pent track of living death – the city's cruel street.

Ian Hamilton (2001)



Andy's gone with cattle *(see also p22)*

1888

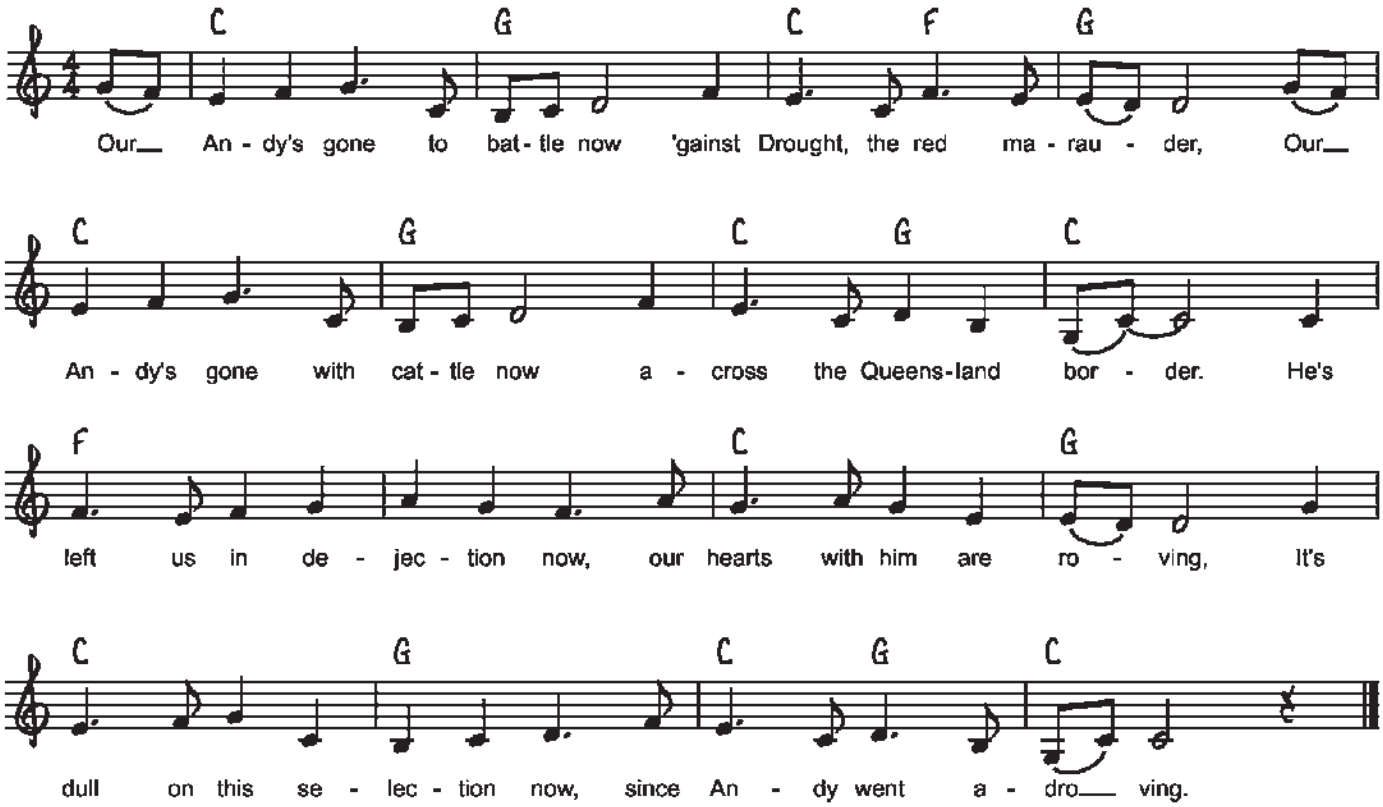
Our Andy's gone to battle now
'Gainst Drought, the red marauder;
Our Andy's gone with cattle now
Across the Queensland border.
He's left us in dejection now;
Our hearts with him are roving.
It's dull on this selection now,
Since Andy went a-droving.

Who now shall wear the cheerful face
In times when things are slackest?
And who shall whistle round the place
When Fortune frowns her blackest?
Oh, who shall cheek the squatter now
When he comes round us snarling?
His tongue is growing hotter now
Since Andy cross'd the Darling.

The gates are out of order now,
In storms the 'riders' rattle;
For far across the border now
Our Andy's gone with cattle.
Poor Aunty's looking thin and white;
And Uncle's cross with worry;
And poor old Blucher howls all night
Since Andy left Macquarie.

O may the showers in torrents fall,
And all the tanks run over;
And may the grass grow green and tall
In pathways of the drover;
And may good angels send the rain
On desert stretches sandy;
And when the summer comes again
God grant 'twill bring us Andy.

Chris Kempster



A May night on the mountains

1888

Lawson's first published poem A Song of the Republic *was written in June 1887 and appeared in the* Bulletin *after he 'screwed up courage' to submit it. By the end of 1888 Lawson had produced 17 poems including* A May Night on the Mountains, *written at Mt Victoria while he was working with his father, painting houses. Other poems written in this period include* Hymn of the Reformers, Only a Sod, The Watch on the Kerb, The Army of the Rear, Faces in the Street, Andy's Gone with Cattle *and* The Blue Mountains. *This was clearly a period in which Lawson was enthusiastic and inspired to write about the world around him. - Ian Hamilton*

'Tis a wonderful time when these hours begin,
These long 'small hours' of night,
When grass is crisp, and the air is thin,
And the stars come close and bright.
The moon hangs caught in a silvery veil,
From clouds of a steely grey,
And the hard, cold blue of the sky grows pale
In the wonderful Milky Way.

There is something wrong with this star of ours,
A mortal plank unsound,
That cannot be charged to the mighty powers
Who guide the stars around.
Though man is higher than bird or beast,
Though wisdom is still his boast,
He surely resembles Nature least,
And the things that vex her most.

Oh, say, some muse of a larger star,
Some muse of the Universe,
If they who people those planets far
Are better than we, or worse?
Are they exempted from deaths and births,
And have they greater powers,
And greater heavens, and greater earths,
And greater Gods than ours?

Are our lies theirs, and our truth their truth,
Are they cursed for pleasure's sake,
Do they make their hells in their reckless youth
Ere they know what hells they make?
And do they toil through each weary hour
Till the tedious day is o'er,
For food that gives but the fleeting power
To toil and strive for more?