

“DOWN THE OKANAGAN”

A Group of Skipping Songs from Regina

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In the spring of 1972, I started what I hope will be a five-year project of collecting skipping and counting-out songs in Regina, Saskatchewan. My purposes are to study folk groups in action, and contribute, in the form of a definitive collection from one urban area, to the study of these folk forms.

The first year's collecting has yielded, among others, an interesting group of six related skipping songs, only one of which is listed in Roger D. Abraham's *Jump-Rope Rhymes: a Dictionary*.

The basic song is Abrahams 120:



Abrahams lists ten sources, indicating that the song has been found in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, California, Wisconsin, the District of Columbia, and other unspecified parts of the United States.

It's interesting to speculate on this song and its use in Regina, Saskatchewan, in the middle of the prairies so far from river boats. The song must have originated close enough to the Mississippi for some one to have observed that on that river the boats do indeed go *push*. When I moved, many years ago, from my home beside the Hudson River to a new home next to the Mississippi, one of the first things I noticed was that the boats I grew up calling *tugboats* did not, on the Mississippi, *tug* barges from in front, but went behind the barges and *pushed*.

Regina's skipping songs, like so much else in Regina culture, come partly from Great Britain, partly from the United States, and partly from local development. This song must have come north with an American family which included girls of the rope-jumping age (in Regina, I have found this to mean roughly from age five to twelve). It is kept intact so far from the river by the fact that it is linked to a specific action. On the first line of the song, a second rope-jumper joins the one already in action; on the word *push*, the new jumper pushes the old one out. The song is repeated over and over, with a change of jumpers each time. It's a fine way of giving everybody a chance to participate and I have found it not only widespread but one of the favourite songs.

Other songs exist side by side with this basic one, which presumably have been developed from it, and use the same melody. One goes:

*Down the Mississippi
Where the boats shake hands.*

It was probably made by confusion with the "Teddybear" songs or one of the many others which specify such actions. Two jumpers, of course, shake hands while skipping. This song thus widens the repertoire, but drops the historical accuracy of number 120.

Another goes:

*Down in Dixie
Where the boats go tricky
They go 1, 2, 3, 4 . . .*

The parallel is obvious, but we can only speculate on the relationship. Two others, however, seem certainly to have been formed as parodies of number 120:

*Down in the graveyard
Where the ghosts go "Boo!"*

and

*Down in the orchard
Where the apples go "Squoosh!"*

In each of these, the skipper makes the appropriate noise. These seem to be usually thought of after doing number 120, and are accompanied by laughter.

Finally, a serious parody, which uses number 120 as a model but is made of local materials:



On the word *comes*, a new jumper comes in; on the word *goes*, the old jumper goes out. In practice, this song is repeated many times and like number 120 is a good one for giving everybody a chance. The Okanagan is, of course, well known in Regina as the valley in British Columbia from which much of our fruit comes.

Skippping songs are not only fascinating in themselves, especially in action, but as this group illustrates they are also interesting examples of such phenomena as diffusion, modification, the creation of new forms by parody of old ones, and the use of familiar materials in old artistic patterns to create new folk songs.

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Résumé: *A Regina, le Docteur Crosbey a recueilli auprès de jeunes enfants, un groupe intéressant de six chants apparentés les uns aux autres et construits sur des rythmes "sautillés"; le chant principal, d'origine américaine, s'est enrichi de plusieurs variations.*