

Kettle Valley Line

words & music by Ean Hay

arrangement by Stanley Triggs

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The railroad was instrumental in the growth and development of the Northwest, and inspired numerous folk songs. In some cases, the railroad seemed to solicit passengers through songs such as "The New Steel Trail" which appeared in 1913. It was written by Charles Hunt, Railroad Editor of the Seattle P.I., and was published by a railroad company. (Thanks to Lawrence Nordby for sharing this song.) Verse 2 gives an indication of the song's intent:

As a shaft takes its flight, so the long train e'er glides,
For the man in the cab holds you harmless;
The Pacific's loved call and the East's smiling note,
All speak of this famed yellow train.
Unsurpassed is the rule and politeness the fact that directs
this train and its rail.
You'll move swift on your way if you take this tip,
To use the New Steel Trail.

Contrast this with a verse from a poem called "Peninsula Pike" by Charley Grant, editor of the Ilwaco Tribune, which appeared a year later. The full poem appears in Songs of the American West, ed. R. Lingenfelter (U.C. Press, Berkeley: 1968). It would make a wonderful song if it had a tune!

There's a railroad they call the Peninsula Pike -
Go get me the Bible and read it -
Just two streaks of rust on top of a dyke -
O, where is salvation? I need it.
From Megler this railroad goes winding about,
Like two streaks of rust in an alley,
On low joints and high joints we're jostled about,
Till the doctor can scarcely make us rally.

My favorite Northwest railroad song is "Kettle Valley Line", written around 1952 by Ean Hay. Mike Marker, who sang it for me, said that the Kettle Valley Line ran from Spokane into the Kettle Valley in Canada during the Depression, and carried many penniless men to the Valley in hope of work. You could ride free if you rode on the roof, as the song says. This particular version is close to Stanley Trigg's arrangement which appeared on his album, Bunkhouse and Forecastle Songs of the Northwest (Folkways FG 3569, 1961).

I al-ways ride up-on the roof on the Kettle Val-ley
 Line. *fine* I al-ways ride up-on the roof, I could
 pay the fare, but what's the use? *I D.S. al fine*

I buy a sandwich from the cook, on the Kettle Valley line.
 I buy a sandwich from the cook, on the Kettle Valley line.
 I buy a sandwich from the cook, he pockets the money, the dirty crook.
 Oh, I buy a sandwich from the cook, on the Kettle Valley line.

I order my meals through the ventilator, on the Kettle Valley line.
 I order my meals through the ventilator, on the Kettle Valley line.
 I order my meals through the ventilator,
 They taste no worse and saves tippin' the waiter.
 Oh, I order my meals through the ventilator, on the Kettle Valley line.

The railway bulls are gentlemen, on the Kettle Valley line.
 The railway bulls are gentlemen, on the Kettle Valley line.
 The railway bulls are gentlemen, we'll never see their likes again.
 Oh, the railway bulls are gentlemen, on the Kettle Valley line.

They tip their hats and call you sir, on the Kettle Valley line.
 They tip their hats and call you sir, on the Kettle Valley line.
 They tip their hats and call you sir, then toss you in the local stir.
 Oh, they tip their hats and call you sir, on the Kettle Valley line.

