

Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History Of Slavery

Benjamin Albert Botkin

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Both during and since slavery times the experiences of ex-slaves have been recorded and used in several different ways. First and perhaps best of all is the method of taking down the informant's own words as he speaks or as soon after as convenient. This method was employed by Benjamin Drew, of Boston, in *The Refugee: or The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada, Related by Themselves* (1856), a collection of over a hundred graphic sketches in the first person. Another method is that of the editorialized interview, used by James Redpath in *The Roving Editor: or, Talks with Slaves in the John Avery Lomax* (September 23, 1867 – January 26, 1948) was an American teacher, a pioneering musicologist, and a folklorist who did much for the preservation of American folk music. He was the father of Alan Lomax (also a distinguished collector of folk music) and Bess Lomax Hawes. The Lomax family originally came from England with William Lomax, who settled in Rockingham County in what was then "the colony of North Carolina." John Lomax was born in Goodman in Holmes County in central Mississippi. As noted above, he organized the narratives by state, and then alphabetically by name of informant within each state, collecting them in 1941 into seventeen bound volumes in thirty-three parts under the title *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves* (Washington, D.C., 1941). Anthologies containing selections from the Library of Congress collection include the Federal Writers' Project's *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*, edited by B. A. Botkin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945) and *Voices from Slavery* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), edited by Norman R. Yetman, author of *An Introduction to the WPA Slave Narratives* under.