

Tom Russell, The Ballad Of William Sycamore

My father was a mountaineer
His fist was a knotty hammer
He was quick on his feet like a runnin' deer
And he spoke with a Yankee stammer

And some are wrapped in linen fine
And some like a godling's scion
But I was cradled on twigs of pine
In the skin of a mountain lion

I lost my boyhood and found my wife
A girl like a Salem clipper
A woman as straight as a hunting knife
With eyes as bright as the Dipper

We cleared our camp where the buffalo feed
Unheard of streams were our flagons
And I sowed my sons like apple seed
On the trail of the Western wagons

They were right, tight boys, never sulky or slow
A fruitful, goodly muster
The eldest died at the Alamo
And the youngest fell with Custer

The letter that told it burned my hand
I smiled and said, "So be it!"
But I could not live when they fenced my land
Oh it broke my heart just to see it

I saddled the red, unbroken colt
I rode him into the day there
But he threw me down like a thunderbolt
And he rolled on me as I lay there

Now I lie in the heart of the fat, black soil
Like the seed of a prairie thistle
It has washed my bones in honey and oil
And it's picked 'em as clean as a whistle

And my youth returns, like the rains of Spring
My sons, like wild geese flying
And I lie and I hear the meadowlark sing
And there's much content in my dying

Go play with the town you have built of blocks
The towns where you may have bound me
I sleep in the earth like a tired old fox
And my buffalo have found me

I sleep in the earth like a tired old fox,
And my buffalo have found me