

On the Fly!

Hobo Literature and Songs, 1879–1941

Editor: Iain McIntyre

From the 1870s until the Second World War, millions of Americans left their homes to board freight trains that would carry them vast distances, sometimes to waiting work, often to points unknown. Congregating in skid rows, socializing around campfires, and bringing in the nation's crops, these drifters were set apart from conformist America by a lifestyle possessing its own haunts, vocabulary, and cultural, sexual, and ethical standards. Alternatively derided and lionized for their footloose ways and nonconformity, hoboes played a crucial and largely neglected role in the creation of not only America's infrastructure, industry, and agriculture but also its culture, politics, and music.

The first anthology of its kind, *On the Fly!* brings forth the lost voices of Hobohemia. Dozens of stories, poems, songs, stories, and articles produced by hoboes are brought together to create an insider history of the subculture's rise and fall. Adrenaline-charged tales of train hopping, scams, and political agitation are combined with humorous and satirical songs, razor sharp reportage and unique insights into the lives of the women and men who crisscrossed America in search of survival and adventure.

From iconic figures such as labor martyr Joe Hill and socialist novelist Jack London through to pioneering blues and country musicians, and little known correspondents for the likes of the *Hobo News*, the authors and songwriters contained in *On the Fly!* run the full gamut of Hobohemia's wide cultural and geographical embrace. With little of the original memoirs, literature, and verse remaining in print, this collection, aided by a glossary of hobo vernacular and numerous illustrations and photos, provides a comprehensive and entertaining guide to the life and times of a uniquely American icon. Read on to enter a world where hoboes, tramps, radicals, and bums gather in jungles, flop houses, and boxcars; where gandy dancers, bindlestiffs, and timber beasts roam the rails once more.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iain McIntyre is a Melbourne-based author, musician, and community radio broadcaster who has written a variety of books on activism, history, and music. Previous publications include *Girl Gangs, Biker Boys, and Real Cool Cats: Pulp Fiction and Youth Culture from the 1950 to 1980* (PM Press, 2017), *How to Make Trouble and Influence People: Pranks, Protest, Graffiti and Political Mischief-Making from Across Australia* (PM Press, 2013), *Wild About You: The Sixties Beat Explosion in Australia and New Zealand* (Verse Chorus Press, 2010), and *Tomorrow Is Today: Australia in the Psychedelic Era, 1966–70* (Wakefield Press, 2006).

ACCOLADES

"This book is a tantalizing boxcar ride back through the history of the hobo, all told from the hobo's point of view. What more could anyone ask?"

—Paul Garon, coeditor of *What's the Use of Walking When There's a Freight Train Going Your Way: Black Hoboes and Their Songs* and author of *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*



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