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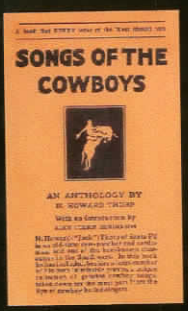
On the Trail of Jack Thorp

A Film by Susan Gervasi

The Story of the Man Who Catalogued and Preserved The Music of The American Cowboy





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On the Trail of Jack Thorp

One spring night in 1889, New Mexico cowhand Nathan Howard "Jack" Thorp encountered a team of black cowboys singing a mysterious ballad calledDodgin' Joe.

Intrigued by Dodgin' Joe's elusive lyrics, Thorp made an arduous 1500-mile Western quest through New Mexico and Texas in search of other unknown cowboy songs. . Fascinated by the music of the state's cattle culture, he began documenting what he saw as a disappearing art form — rural poetry worthy of not only praise but preservation.His 1908 book, Songs of the Cowboys, became America's first published collection of such ballads.

But Jack - son of a wealthy Manhattan lawyer who lost the family money in a bad real estate deal - never achieved the fame of rival collector John Lomax or the fortune made by record companies from Thorp's hit song, Little Joe the Wrangler.

Yet Thorp's groundbreaking work established a new musical genre, setting the stage for Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and generations of cowboy singers to come. This is Jack's story, told by historians, cowboys, cowboy singers and Thorp relatives whose rare family photographs reveal Jack's complex life.

With narration by Kelli Biggs - great-granddaughter of legendary cowboy movie star Tom Mix - On the Trail of Jack Thorp includes the work of contemporary cowboy musicians dedicated to preserving the musical legacy of the Old West.

Running Time: 30 Minutes

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