

# Down in the River to Pray

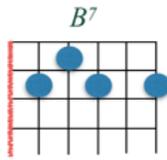
Traditional American Gospel

*B<sup>7</sup>*            *E*  
As I went down in the river to pray;

*B<sup>7</sup>*            *A*                    *E*  
Studyin' about that good ol' way.

*E*  
And who shall wear the starry crown?

*E*    *B<sup>7</sup>*    *A*                    *E*  
Good Lord show me the way!



*B<sup>7</sup>*            *E*  
O sisters let's go down;

*A*                                    *E*  
Let's go down, come on down.

*B<sup>7</sup>*            *E*  
O sisters let's go down;

*A*                                    *B<sup>7</sup>*  
Down in the river to pray.

As I went down in the river to pray;  
Studyin' about that good ol way.  
And who shall wear the robe & crown?  
Good Lord show me the way.

O brothers let's go down;  
Let's go down, come on down.  
Come on brothers let's go down;  
Down in the river to pray.

As I went down in the river to pray;  
Studyin' about that good ol way.  
And who shall wear the starry crown?  
Good lord show me the way.

O fathers let's go down;  
Let's go down, come on down.  
O fathers let's go down;  
Down in the river to pray.

As I went down in the river to pray;  
Studyin' about that good ol way.  
And who shall wear the robe and crown?  
Good Lord show me the way.

O mothers let's go down;  
Come on down, don't you wanna go down?  
Come on Mothers let's go down;  
Down in the river to pray.

As I went down in the river to pray;  
Studyin' about that good ol' way.  
And who shall wear the starry crown?  
Good Lord show me the way.

O sinners let's go down;  
Let's go down, come on down.  
O sinners let's go down;  
Down in the river to pray.

As I went down in the river to pray;  
Studyin' about that good ol way.  
And who shall wear the robe and crown?  
Good Lord show me the way.

# History

"Down in the River to Pray" may also have been known through the generations as "Down to the River to Pray," "Down in the Valley to Pray," "The Good Old Way," and "Come, Let Us All Go Down."

It is an American folk Gospel song variously described as traditional Gospel, a slave spiritual, a Christian folk hymn, and an Appalachian song.

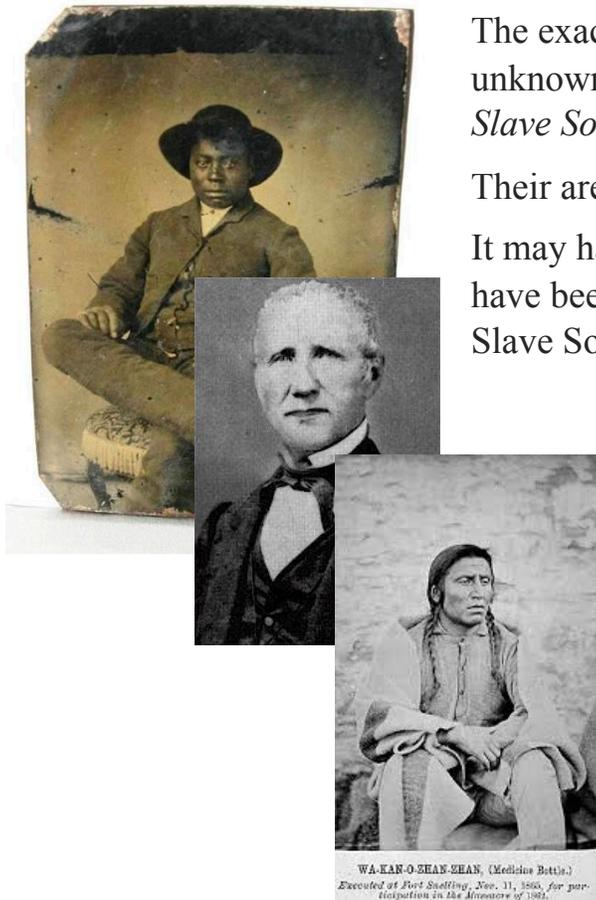
The exact origin of "Down in the River to Pray" is unknown. It was first collected in 1867 in a book entitled *Slave Songs of the United States*.

There are multiple stories about its origin.

It may have been composed by George H. Allan who might have been a slave. He is cited in the contents section of the *Slave Song* book of 1867.

It may have been written by the composer William Walker nicknamed Singing Billy. He was an American Baptist song leader and shape note "singing master."

There is also evidence that supports the contention that it is a derivative of a First American tribal song that was adapted with Christian lyrics.



WA-KAN-O-SHAN-ZHAN. (Medicine Bottle.)  
Executed at Fort Snelling, Nov. 11, 1866, for participation in the Alouette of 1861.

from *The Bluegrass Gospel Songbook* by Wayne Erbsen, <http://podbay.fm/>,  
[www.speroforum.com/](http://www.speroforum.com/), [firstpeople.us](http://firstpeople.us), and Wikipedia