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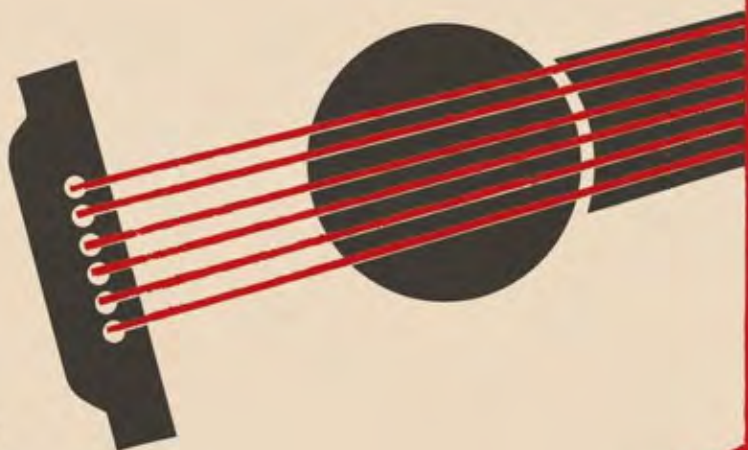
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COUNTRY MUSIC 2001 ANNUAL



Edited by
Charles K. Wolfe and
James E. Akenson

Country Music Annual
2001

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**Edited by
Charles K. Wolfe
and James E. Akenson**

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Introduction

Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson

This second volume of the *Country Music Annual* continues our efforts to provide a national venue for new writing about country music. The first volume has met with a gratifying response, both from readers and from researchers, and has confirmed our belief in the need for this series. In *Country Music Annual 2000* we sought to provide for scholars as well as for serious fans a collection of thoughtful and provocative discussions about a music that has taken its place in the new millennium as one of the major genres of American popular culture, a genre with deep roots in both folk and vernacular traditions. Indeed, country music has developed a dozen intriguing subgenres: it can be studied as business, as mythology, as history, as musical technique, as life-style, and as art that today crosses geographic, ethnic, gender, and economic lines. As this annual series has already made clear, country music is drawing serious interest from scholars in a dozen different fields. This new volume adds further to that rich diversity of scholarship.

The spectrum of subjects in *Country Music Annual 2001* ranges from a study of one of the first musicians to make country records, Henry Gilliland, to the current avant-garde stylings of the alternative country band Uncle Tupelo. Two important surveys explore the relationship between country music and two other major cultural forces of our time, cable television and the burgeoning popularity of NASCAR. Two chapters focus on gospel music: a study of the leading contemporary group Jerry and Tammy Sullivan

and an engaging bit of detective work about one of Roy Acuff's classic gospel songs. Bluegrass and gender issues are joined in new and dramatic research on a forgotten figure in bluegrass history, Sally Ann Forrester, while a more traditional approach by the definitive biographer of Ernest Tubb examines his Texas musical influences. A native of the Blue Ridge Mountains who now heads up the nation's largest traditional arts organization merges personal recollections with scholarship to explain radio's impact on the music of that area. The subject spectrum also includes a rigorous and detailed analysis of the musical style of the most famous singing group from the Appalachians, the Carter Family.

These ten articles chosen to constitute *Country Music Annual 2001* reflect our continued conception of "country music" in broad terms. We view this cultural phenomenon as musical styles sharing common historical, cultural, and demographic roots. We continue to encourage traditional historical and cultural studies, as well as musicological analyses, studies of lyric themes and techniques, of media involvement, of gender roles, song histories, biographies and studies of career development, and field research. We continue to invite letters of inquiry, and we continue to invite commentary and feedback from articles included in these annual issues. A cordial forum for reading versions of new papers, as well as for discussing ideas and plans, is provided at the International Country Music Conference, held annually at Belmont University in Nashville. Many of the papers in this issue of the *Annual* were first read in a preliminary form at that conference. We also hope to establish a regular schedule that will see publication of *Country Music Annual* in the late spring of each year.

The editors take pride in announcing an advisory board for the *Country Music Annual*. These distinguished scholars have agreed to share their expertise with the editors and on occasion to serve as readers or referees for papers submitted. The board includes Bill C. Malone, recently retired from Tulane University and recognized as the dean of country music scholars; Nolan Porterfield, the widely respected writer of the definitive biographies of Jimmie Rodgers and John Lomax; William K. McNeil, of the Ozark Folk Center in Mountain View, Arkansas, whose many books and articles have made him one of the nation's premier authorities on traditional song; Joli Jensen, whose book *The Nashville Sound* has established her as one of the country's leading young scholars; Jimmie Rogers, of the University of Arkansas, whose *Country Music Message* broke new ground in the study of song lyrics; Curtis Ellison, author of the influential volume *Country Music*

Culture; and Wayne W. Daniel, whose *Pickin' on Peachtree* and many other writings have made him a leading authority on early country and gospel music. Together this group represents a broad range of experience and expertise, and we are honored to have them involved in the *Country Music Annual*.

Having the Franchise

Country Music TV from the Third Coast

David Black

“The Nashville Network is dead.” The September 2000 *Tennessean* article reporting The Nashville Network’s (TNN) demise clearly read like an obituary in describing the network’s final transition to New York–based control and severing of its symbolic connection to the city of Nashville (Shiffman and Lawson 2000). That final development ended a process beginning four years earlier, a process that continually moved the network away from country music programming and Nashville-based management. In February 1997 Gaylord Entertainment sold TNN and Country Music Television video network (CMT) to Westinghouse-owned CBS in a strategy to redirect Gaylord away from cable television programming and distribution and toward Internet-based digital media services (Lawson, 1; Katz, 10). The sale represented a break in continuity of ownership reaching back to TNN’s beginnings in 1982. It also represented the loss for Nashville of two national media outlets. The acquisition of CBS by Viacom in May 2000 further accelerated TNN’s transformation. The development of TNN and CMT in the early 1980s placed Nashville with other media centers in the newly emerging practice of national cable television networking. With the rebranding of TNN to The National Network, this study looks back on those beginnings as examples of the major shift taking place from broadcasting to cable and how Nashville-based companies used their country music resources to become major players in that new activity.

WSM, Country Music, and Television

Readily identified as “Music City U.S.A.,” Nashville’s growth as a major media and entertainment center reaches back over seventy years to both broadcasting and country music’s formative period. In the mid 1920s, the National Life and Accident Insurance Company began broadcasting its own radio barn dance program, later named the *Grand Ole Opry*, through its radio station, WSM. The *Opry* eventually became radio’s most popular country music show and directly influenced the development of Nashville as an international center for country music recording and as a tourist destination (Wolfe 1977, 93–109). WSM began television broadcasting service in 1950 and soon became active in country music television production. Through the 1970s, WSM either produced or was involved in the production of many syndicated television programs, often in collaboration with Nashville-based syndicator Show Biz Inc. Some of those programs included *The Porter Wagoner Show*, *That Good Ole Nashville Music*, *Pop! Goes The Country*, and *Dolly*. WSM made a major commitment to country music television program production in the early 1970s when it constructed the multimillion dollar Opryland complex which included a theme park, hotel, a new Opry House auditorium, television studios, and the development of a production unit, Opryland Productions. Along with syndicated products, many live and taped television network specials were produced in the new facilities (Country Music Foundation, May 15, June 23, August 13, 1988; Wolfe 1977, 109; Hagan 1989, 281).

By the end of the 1970s, however, several conditions were developing in broadcasting and with video technology creating an “exploding entertainment market” and causing the Nashville music and television industries to rethink how television might be used and how they might contribute to that development. The most important of these was the growth of cable television. The cable industry was experiencing a sharp rise in cable systems and in programming activity as a result of government deregulation and the establishment of new cable networks (Picard 1993, 1–3; Head, Sterling, and Schofield, 1994, 76–77, 490). The music industry saw cable television as a new outlet for artist promotion through traditional programs and the developing art form of music video.

Along with cable, the emerging consumer video technologies spurred the interest of many in the industry as an alternative outlet for programming. Starting in the mid 1970s, the development of the VHS and Betamax

consumer videocassette formats and the laser videodisk by Philips and Magnavox in 1978 and by RCA in 1981 was seen as a new opportunity for program distribution that would work well with music programming. During this period, the consumer market was slow to settle on which products would succeed, and expectations were high that both tape and disk would find a place in the home (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 456–58; Erickson 1981; Inglis 1990, 440, 444–45).

WSM responded to those developments in February 1981, indicating it was going to move into national cable television network programming and the consumer video market. The next month, WSM announced it would sell off its television station as a way to raise capital for the new venture. In the announcement, the plans called for going on the air in two years with six hours of original programming (Browning 1981; O'Donnell 1981). In the next fourteen months \$5 million would be spent on satellite installations and \$50 million within three years on overall initial expenditures. Included in the cost was planned construction of a new forty thousand-square-foot facility. In their announcement, WSM's Bud Wendell compared WSM's production capabilities to the East and West Coasts: "The sale of WSM-TV is a part of our recently announced plans for a major expansion of our Opryland Productions Division into national production and distribution. WSM, Inc. has an excellent reputation for quality production and we have proven we can provide quality programming on a level with the major communications centers in both New York and Los Angeles. WSM plans to move into national videocasting and networking and wants to commit 100% of its management, talent, and resources to this end" (National Life 1981).

Later in the year, in a *Tennessean* newspaper article titled, "Cable Television May Turn Nashville Into 'Third Coast' For Producers," production company executives expressed an optimistic outlook for Nashville's future. In light of WSM's recent announcement to start up a cable network, Opryland's David Hall noted: "We are right in the middle of an exploding entertainment market and within the next three to five years Nashville will be the third coast as far as television production is concerned" (David Hall in Allen Hall 1981). The idea of comparing Nashville to the East and West Coast television production centers was not new. The tendency to do so began with Show Biz's domination of country music syndication during the 1960s and reached a greater level starting in the early 1970s with network series activity occurring during construction of the new Opryland

complex. And the term “third coast,” according to Hall, was used during the operation of Opryland Productions before the start of TNN: “We used to promote ourselves, “If you don’t need a coast, why go there?” We had a slogan that went something like “the third coast,” and we promoted ourselves as a cost-effective place to produce quality television. In the business you always talk to them [producers] about having to go to the coast: ‘got to go to the coast.’ In LA they got to go to New York or in New York they got to go to LA. Our real mission was to say, well, we are really a coast too” (Hall 1994).

The new possibilities in cable and consumer video produced optimism in the production industry. Production companies and producers were willing to jump into music video production as well as cable programming. David Hall was enthusiastic about the future of the changing media landscape: “The relationship between record companies and video grows every day. As the video disc develops, along with the expansion of home entertainment systems, record companies are beginning to provide video for that service. It’s all growing together. With Warner-Amex (an interactive cable service) and MTV channels available, there’s going to be a real void of artists’ tapes, whether it be the artist, a scene, a setting, a book illustration, or animation set to music. There’s got to be more video for artist promotion” (Mercedes 1981, 65–66).

Nashville film companies that started in the 1970s and early 1980s, such as SMS Film Productions, Thom 2, Imagemaker, Film House, and Cascom, continued to thrive primarily with commercial and corporate production but looked to new opportunities. Imagemaker made plans to produce programs for cable television, and SMS had already produced a pilot for cable. United Methodist Communications maintained a film studio, which they had operated primarily for institutional production and small-budget feature-length films since the late 1950s. Video South, later Southern Productions, began in 1977 on a modest level, expanding to computer editing by 1983 and further growth in the 1980s. Celebration Productions designed video facilities for Bullet Recording sound studio during this time to accommodate video production as well. One film company, Scene Three Film, made a big commitment to video production in 1981 when it designed a state-of-the-art video editing facility and changed its name to Scene Three Video & Film. By 1983 other companies formed, including Studio Productions and Media Productions, which were active in music videos, and Audio Video Productions Inc., investing \$2 million in studio

and equipment (Mercedes 1981, 65, 67; Backous 1996; Algee 1996; Routson 1996; Gregory 1983; Furnace 1995).

TNN did not program music videos when it was launched in 1983, and it would not air a music video program until two years later. Another network began the groundbreaking task of providing country music with a permanent outlet for the music video format. Despite the rise in production activity in Nashville, however, several years would pass before the art form for country music would develop as it had with rock music.

Country Music Television

The first cable network to originate from Nashville was the Country Music Television network (CMTV), but that significance was mostly on a technical level. CMTV began transmitting country music programming twenty-four hours a day by satellite on Saturday, March 5, 1983, from Hendersonville, ten miles north of Nashville. This was two days before TNN's grand Monday night launch and may have been a publicity stunt because there were no cable operators signed up for the service and few even knew of the venture, including Nashville's Viacom cable system. Within a few weeks, the network was formally established as a three-way partnership located across three states. Video World International in Hendersonville, Tennessee, was the center of operations, handling the production, programming, and technical details; Telstar Corporation, located in Beverly Hills, California, dealt with marketing; and Blinder Robinson & Company investment bank of Denver, Colorado, acted as the underwriting firm. Telstar and Blinder-Robinson had also been involved in other cable and pay-TV ventures with hotel chains. By July, Glen Daniels, president of Video World, claimed CMTV reached approximately four million households and was signed with thirteen of the top twenty multiple-system cable operations (Bartley 1983; *Round the Clock*, 1, 17; "Telstar Unveils" 1983; "Perspective" 1983, 6).

But there were relatively few country music videos available for airing in 1983. In *The Cable Networks Handbook*, Robert M. Ogles and Herbert H. Howard note approximately twenty videos available when CMTV was launched (Ogles and Howard 1993, 59). The Music Television network (MTV), beginning in 1981, gave music video a lasting start but for rock music and not for mainstream country music (Mercedes 1981, 63, 67). Because country music video developed more slowly in production quality and in numbers compared to rock music videos, record companies—usu-

ally involved in the production—were hesitant to apply this new art form to country music. RCA record executive Joe Galante expressed the tentative nature for country music at the time: “Until now, there really haven’t been any markets. Warner-Amex [cable system] and MTV are just getting involved with us. I don’t think country is what they are really looking for; I think they’re really looking for rock and pop. So country is confined to certain cable channels and sometimes has an outlet on special programs, clips, foreign markets and in store presentations” (Mercedes 1981, 67).

Another concern for those in Nashville’s record industry during this early period in country music’s video history was the uncertainty about a video’s worth compared to its investment. CBS Records vice president Roy Wunsch noted, “It’s hard to say what it’s really worth in terms of [record] sales; we don’t really know. We just know the feelings are good and that it enhances the image of an artist” (Mercedes 1981, 66). Mary Ann McCready, director of development for CBS Records in Nashville, was likewise tentative over country music videos: “It’s really hard to tell right now how effective video is, because it’s still in such a state of infancy. There are negotiations going on between the unions, the directors and the performing rights societies about payment, for example. But video is obviously a technology that is developing so rapidly we can’t ignore it—as a possible alternative to radio” (Mercedes 1981, 66).

With little overall production of country music videos at the time, CMTV necessarily had to produce its own videos. Glen Daniels said during this period, “There is now a shortage of material but by early next year we should have a rotation consisting of 100 tapes” (“Perspective” July 1983, 6). When CMTV began, it actually ran a combination of music videos and television programs made for syndication. Daniels produced full-length syndicated programs from his Video World Productions studios in Hendersonville well before his CMTV venture. In 1981, he announced the completion of six country music pilots including guest appearances by Bobby Goldsboro, Floyd Cramer, and Micky Gilley (“Video World Completes”).

CMTV slowly grew during the rest of the 1980s and went through several ownership changes. It was sold to Music Village USA in 1985 and then to Caribou Communications, under Jim Guercio and Nyhl Henson in 1986. In 1979 Henson was one of the founders of the children’s cable network Nickelodeon, MTV’s parent channel, owned by Viacom, Inc. Upon Caribou’s acquisition the “V” was dropped, allowing CMT to differentiate its image from MTV, and it premiered on Nashville’s Viacom cable system

with a gala reception involving entertainers, politicians, and music industry executives. The shortage of country music videos remained a problem during the mid 1980s. Jeff Walker, with Aristo Video Promotions—a service that tracks music videos for record companies—noted the state of country music videos in 1987: “For country, it’s been slower but steadier growth, compared to the rock music, MTV situation. Because there are fewer country videos available, it’s just now getting to the point where a programmer can put reels together and have a consistently good show” (Weeks, 1987, 27).

During this time, CMT was running an inventory of about four hundred videos, according to Henson, which was about the same number MTV had in its second year. CMT improved under Caribou, which upgraded its programming and saw some growth. By 1986 CMT reached six million homes. Opryland’s Gaylord Broadcasting purchased the network in 1991 for approximately \$30 million. At the time, it had grown to 11.5 million households (Weeks 1987, 27–29; Bartley October 1986, sec. B, 7; “Opryland To Buy” 1990, 30; “Information for Release” 1992).

In the long run, country music video became a central component in the development of a country performer’s career. The CMT cable channel has proven to be an essential player in the country music industry, but it was WSM’s move into cable that initially created the most excitement. With The Nashville Network, country music attained an important new venue on television, and Nashville won a new position as a television production and communications center. The Nashville Network became an immediate success story in Nashville’s television production history. TNN reflected WSM’s goal in maintaining leadership and a controlling role in country music.

The Nashville Network

When The Nashville Network launched on March 7, 1983, it displayed some impressive numbers. The channel started with approximately seven million homes subscribed to its service, the most to that point for a new cable network, beating the Cable Health Network with four million homes when it began the previous year. TNN began with six hours of daily original programming involving twenty-one different shows. WSM’s initial investment was estimated at around \$50 million over the first three years; and Group W, handling the sales and marketing, spent approximately \$20 million. The inaugural, five-hour broadcast cost close to \$1 million and involved remote telecasts from five major cities. In ten years TNN’s sub-

scriber base grew nearly sevenfold to approximately fifty-four million households (Bartley 1983; Bartley and Oermann 1983, D, 1; “Nashville Goes Cross-Country” 1983). Creating a national country music cable television network was a major gamble for WSM, which had already made a risky move building the Opryland complex a decade before. WSM management saw the need to move away from television broadcasting and into production and programming, with which they already had a good deal of experience.

Formative Period

Tom Griscom, WSM’s vice president of broadcasting, was a believer among those who forecast not only cable’s rise but also the demise of the broadcast network/affiliate station relationship. With further development of satellite technology, homes would receive programming directly from the networks and need local stations only for local news and programming. In 1981 Griscom predicted: “I think we will be in the midst of massive change within five years. . . . For a long time, television broadcast stations were the only video distribution game in town. That won’t be true in the 1980s. Broadcasters were the only programmers—that also is no longer true. . . . Ultimately, each house may have its own earth station to pick up signals directly from a satellite” (Barker 1981). He also noted the importance of videodisk technology: “Video disc could rival television on its impact on set use and programming. Based on the public appetite for feature film, it appears that the video disc market will grow faster than color TV did” (Barker 1981).

Videodisks did not gain a significant hold in the consumer market, but the growth of VCRs in the 1980s closely fit that prediction. And although the network/affiliate relationship is still intact, Griscom and others at WSM clearly felt that local television broadcasting was no longer the growth industry it once had been and that they should seize other opportunities (Head, Sterling, and Schofield 1994, 97–98).

WSM’s motivation to create a cable network was not simply to seize new opportunities opening with cable and consumer video technologies; one of the “new opportunities” related directly to what had prompted building the television facilities in the Opryland complex a decade before: promotion of the Opryland park and the *Grand Ole Opry*. Although network and syndication production were beneficial, Griscom pointed out limitations with WSM’s broadcasting efforts: “WSM’s clear-channel AM station

was no longer drawing listeners as it once had. The network was started mainly because Bud Wendell [WSM president] realized we were not reaching out far enough to attract customers to the park and the complex. Radio was losing listenership. TV stations went out 110 miles and went around a circle [but] we were drawing people 400-600 miles away [to Opryland]. So why not start a cable network that can reach the whole country and be on the forefront of the new cable viewing habit? So that was the vision out here” (Griscom 1994).

As the broadcasting company that created and nurtured the *Grand Ole Opry*, Griscom and Wendell felt it was WSM’s role to make country music national presence on cable. WSM had always been protective of the *Opry* and of the image of country music and wanted to have control of that image for cable. In addition, in 1994, Griscom expressed concerns over competition:

We were pursuing the idea that we wanted to have the franchise on country music, which is still our goal, in any area. Whether it be country music, country lifestyle, any activity regarding country, we want to own it, or be a part of it and during this development period of the '70s that's when we came to that vision. And as early as '78 or '79 we felt somebody was going to put up a country music network. There were rumblings that Sears was going to start a network, and we said, “Hey, this is our business; we don't want anybody else doing this.” So we felt we had to be the first out there and to be that we needed right away to crank up, even though it wasn't profitable at this period of time, nor would it be for many, many years. But why let somebody else take away your core business? So we decided we ought to do this, and that's when Bud [Wendell] and I started putting together presentations to the NLT board to try to convince them: Let's get out there and do this. (Griscom 1994)

With a need to keep the park and attendance growing and the lucrative potential in cable and home video entertainment before them, WSM set out to convince their parent company, NLT, to approve the idea. During this period, WSM-TV's program director, Elmer Alley, was called in to play an important role. Alley—who ran audio during WSM-TV's sign-on in 1950, conducted many of WSM-TV's production efforts, and helped conceptualize the idea for the Opryland theme park—was now asked to draw up a programming plan for the new network: “Tom Griscom came in on a Monday morning and told me he wanted me to program The Nashville Network,

and I said “What in the hell is The Nashville Network?” So he came in on a Monday and said, “I need twelve hours of programming, I need descriptions of the programs, I need a schedule and a rough budget, and I need it by Wednesday.” Wednesday afternoon I handed it to him” (Alley 1993).

Gearing Up for Production

WSM and Opryland Productions first made a move toward cable production with superstation WTBS, owned by Turner Broadcasting in Atlanta. WTBS was one of the few television broadcast stations in the country that distributed its signal through satellite to cable systems across the country. Through cable, WTBS reached seventeen million homes at the time. Opryland Productions produced “Nashville Alive,” becoming Nashville’s first live weekly cable series. The one-hour program aired on Saturday nights on WTBS from Opryland’s Stagedoor Lounge. Elmer Alley was the executive producer, WSM’s Bayron Binkley produced and directed, and WSM radio and television personality Ralph Emery was the host. The program ran for twenty weeks and was the forerunner to TNN’s flagship program, *Nashville Now*, also hosted by Emery (“Nashville Alive!” 1981; Emery 1991, 167–68). With the gearing up of the new network, the program was dropped so TNN could focus all of its resources on its own show production.

In pursuit of its goal to build a country music network, NLT acquired the needed startup money in the fall of 1981 by selling WSM-TV for \$42 million to Gillette Broadcasting. Based in Wausau, Wisconsin, Gillette owned three other television stations and a variety of other businesses. The station changed its call letters to WSMV-TV, and NLT retained ownership of WSM’s AM and FM stations (“Changing Hands” 1981).

In January 1982, NLT formally announced a joint working agreement with Group W Satellite Communications (GWSC) for the formation of The Nashville Network. WSM would provide the programming through its Opryland Productions division while GWSC, a division of the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company, would handle sales, marketing, and distribution. GWSC was a co-partner with the ABC network in marketing the Satellite NewsChannel at that time and brought the marketing expertise WSM lacked. In 1981 Opryland Productions ceased as an operation except as a duplication service. The production staff and facilities fell under TNN with David Hall as general manager (“Country-Music Cable” 1982; “David Hall” 1989, 79; Hall 1994).

A big part of WSM's \$50 million initial investment went toward building construction, equipment, staffing and program production. The television facilities at Opryland were expansive but not enough to operate and produce programming for a new network. The buildings housing the television facilities were basically the same as when they were first constructed in the early 1970s with the main Opry House, one seventy by eighty-foot studio with editing facilities, and a forty-seven-foot truck for remote productions. Construction on new office headquarters at the Opryland complex were finished in March 1984, one year after the network began its operation. By this time, two more seventy by eighty-foot studios were in operation, one beginning in June 1983 and the other at the start of 1984, as well as another forty-seven-foot truck and a smaller van. Equipping the operation was impressive as well, with thirty cameras, thirty-five one-inch videotape recorders, and computer control editing using CMX 340X systems (Levine 1984, 28, 33; "Nashville Now" 1983, 12; Foti 1983, 4). But this would not all come together for another couple of years. Until that time WSM had to work under very limited and challenging conditions in a rush to get TNN launched.

The program proposals Alley drew up in a period of three days were further developed and changed over time, but his initial ideas were accepted. Under Griscom's mandate, Alley devised a collection of traditional network program formats within the framework of country music (Alley 1993; "The Nashville Network" 1983, 4). David Hall describes the network's focus: "The Nashville Network's base is broader than a fine narrowcast of country because we also present gospel, blue grass, game shows, situation comedies and sports. TNN is a themed programming service that can be described exactly, unlike a lot of other programming services that can't be identified when you hear the name. If you say TNN, you're talking about middle America, the blue collar, middle management person that loves country music" (Levine 1984, 30). The formats included music performance, talk and interview, game show, situation comedy, outdoor sports, variety, and movies (Alley 1993).

Office space was in such short supply at Opryland that Alley began in a temporary office away from the complex in early 1982. Until the new headquarters were ready, trailers were also set up on the complex to handle the extra demand. For production manager, Alley hired Buddy Regan, then the station manager for Nashville's WNGE-TV. The two first worked on planning, budgeting, and hiring before production began. These hirings plus the

administrative and engineering needs for the network increased the Opryland Productions' original staff from 40–50 to 150–200 personnel when the network went on the air (Varnell 1993, 341–43; Hall 1994; Levine 1984, 28).

Another challenge faced by TNN during this time was in the booking of talent. Ralph Emery notes in his autobiography that many stars were hesitant with a wait-and-see attitude about appearing on his show since it was not yet on the air (Emery 1991, 207). According to Alley, pretaping in advance was the biggest problem: “Well, it was hard to book talent. We were taping a year in advance and nobody was seeing it. They would come out and do shows but wouldn't see it on the air. It wasn't going to happen for a year, and managers don't want to put songs on that aren't going to be current. I think it was just not very prestigious. I mean here was this fledgling little thing that Waylon Jennings said there was no way it was going to work. They were all wanting to be on the national networks, not TNN. We had no stature” (Alley 1993).

Production began in June 1982. With the extra hiring, TNN still did not have the facilities and staff to create all the programming. Many programs were produced in-house, but during that nine-month period of production leading to launch it was necessary to utilize remote sites and other production facilities, contract with outside producers, and purchase programs. Many shows were produced live, on tape, a quicker approach than editing them together (Bartley 1983; Varnell 1993, 354, 358 359; Hall 1994). Producer/director Bill Turner recalls the frantic pace of production that existed at the time: “Very spastic. We were producing shows like crazy. I know I had a hundred-and-some-odd shows produced that no one had seen except me, and I went in to ask Elmer if someone would like to review those shows. He said, “Are you happy with them?” I said, “Yea.” he said, “Well, I don't have time to look at them.” So the year before we went on the air, there was a lot of taping going on” (Turner 1994).

During this busy period in November 1982 another important corporate event occurred. NLT, the holding company for National Life and WSM, Inc., was bought by American General Corporation. The Houston-based insurance company indicated immediately it had no interest in keeping the WSM properties and would be looking for a buyer (Berg 1983). Now under the temporary ownership of a company based outside Nashville, the *Grand Ole Opry* faced an uncertain future. Under these conditions, the personnel at TNN and WSM continued the challenge of getting the network ready to go on-line.

Programming

When TNN began in March 1983, Alley and Regan generated a reported five hundred hours of programming covering twenty-one different shows. The daily network schedule consisted of six hours of original programs and then two repeats of that schedule to make up an eighteen hour programming day. The weekday first-run programming ran from 7 p.m. to midnight and 1:30 to 2:30 a.m. The weekday shows included *Dancin' USA*, *I-40 Paradise*, *Fandango*, *Nashville Now!*, *Yesteryear in Nashville*, *Nashville After Hours*, *Offstage*, and *Opryland on Stage* (Bartley 1983; "Nashville Goes Cross Country" 1983). The weekend programming included a wider range of subjects, including outdoor sports: *Country Sportsman*, *American Sports Calvacade*, *Stars of the Grand Ole Opry*, *Bobby Bare and Friends: Songwriter Showcase*, *This Week in Nashville*, *Tumbleweed Theater*, *Performance Plus from Popular Hot Rodding*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Backstage at the Grand Ole Opry*, *Gospel Country*, *The Tommy Hunter Show*, *That's Country*, and *Phantom of the Opry* (Bartley 1983; "Nashville Goes Cross Country" 1983, 146).

Weekday Programming

Dancin' USA

Referred to as a countrified *American Bandstand*, the sixty-minute *Dancin' USA* program began the primetime lineup. It covered country and western dances and presented dancing lessons. Bill Turner was hired as producer and director, and the program was produced on location in cities throughout the country.

I-40 Paradise

The first made-for-cable situation comedy, *I-40 Paradise*, was produced by Cinetel Productions in Knoxville, Tennessee, and was among the most ambitious programs produced for TNN. Reminiscent of Yongestreet's *Hee Haw Honeys*, the thirty-minute program was set at a roadside diner/tavern in Crab Orchard, Tennessee, where country music artists would stop by and perform. According to Cinetel president Ross Bagwell, up to ten sets were used for each program. They took a nontraditional approach in finding actors for the Knoxville production, using professional dinner-theater

actors as the regular characters. Bagwell, who had previous broadcasting network experience, was contracted to produce the show after TNN ran into big problems with the show's original producer, Coke Sams. Sams's company, which was mostly experienced with single-camera film commercial production, had difficulty adjusting to multicamera video shooting and took three weeks to complete the pilot. This trouble reflected the production limitations experienced in Nashville, where few had experience in producing long-form situation comedies. Bagwell's Cinetel company rented a warehouse in Knoxville for a studio and produced a pilot in thirty-six hours. The early success with *I-40 Paradise* created a spin-off series the following year, *Pickin' at the Paradise*.

Fandango

As a quiz game show set around country music, *Fandango* was another program format new to Nashville and was contracted to Reid/Land Productions. Reid/Land became an active program producer for TNN. Bill Anderson was the program's host.

Nashville Now!

As TNN's signature program, this ninety-minute variety/talk show was cable television's first live nightly entertainment program. Hosted by Ralph Emery, the show combined interviews, music performances, and viewer calls. The show started in the Opryland Hotel's Stagedoor Lounge for three months before moving into one of the new studios. The studio was added to the park's Gaslight Theater, and Opryland claimed it was the only theme park in the world providing a live television show as an attraction.

Yesteryear in Nashville

This was a retrospective thirty-minute program on country music's past using old film and video clips.

Nashville After Hours

A thirty-minute program shot on remote, *Nashville After Hours* spotlighted a variety of talent playing in Nashville night clubs, including jazz and rock groups.

Offstage

This program, hosted by WSM's Teddy Bart, developed around interviews with country performers.

Opryland on Stage

Opryland hired approximately three hundred teenagers during the summer months to cover the various jobs in the park. The sixty-minute variety show presented Opryland entertainers in shows produced in the park.

Weekend Programming

Country Sportsman

The Saturday schedule originally began with this thirty-minute fishing show hosted by Bobby Lord.

American Sports Calvacade

Produced by Diamond P Productions based in Hollywood, the ninety-minute *American Sports Calvacade* covered "Grassroots sports" such as car racing and tractor pulls. The series was promoted as one of the largest sports packages produced for cable by one producer. Diamond P developed a long working relationship with TNN.

Stars of the Grand Ole Opry

A sixty-minute program featuring Opry members in a concert setting from the Opry House stage, *Stars of the Grand Ole Opry* was a contemporary program different from Al Gannoway's syndicated series from the 1950s.

Bobby Bare and Friends: Songwriter Showcase

This sixty-minute program featured performances and interviews with country performers in the low-key setting of Bullet Recording studios.

This Week in Nashville

This program reviewed past activities and news in country music and Nashville.

Tumbleweed Theater

This ninety-minute program featured old cowboy movies with stars such as Tex Ritter, Gene Autry, John Wayne, and Roy Rogers.

Performance Plus from Popular Hot Rodding

Started the Sunday schedule, *Performance Plus from Popular Hot Rodding* presented interviews with racers and profiles of hot-rod vehicles.

Fire on the Mountain

Here was a thirty-minute show featuring bluegrass and mountain music.

Backstage at the Grand Ole Opry

This thirty-minute program presented a look behind the scenes of the *Opry* with interviews and performances. It was first syndicated in 1980 by Opryland Productions and Show Biz. The show reached 125 markets in syndication.

Gospel Country

The hour-long *Gospel Country* was presented in a concert setting from the Opry House stage.

The Tommy Hunter Show

TNN bought this sixty-minute program which had aired on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation network for the previous eighteen years.

That's Country

Country artists from New Zealand and Australia were spotlighted on this show.

Phantom of the Opry

This show featured horror and suspense movies and was modeled after a similar program hosted for many years locally in Nashville by vampire Sir Cecil Creep, played by WSM-TV's film director Russ McCown.

The Launch of TNN

The morning before TNN's start, cable viewers were presented an added attraction. TNN's new channel was not scheduled to sign-on until that evening; nevertheless, many viewers tuned in to what was supposed to be a national closed-circuit press conference with WSM and GWSC officials ready to take questions. By mistake, some cable operators put the Nashville signal onto their systems, allowing viewers a chance to participate. One viewer from Seattle, Washington, identifying himself as a transplant from Alabama, said "This is like a blessing out of the sky" and added "It's going to be a relaxin' environment around my house" (Bartley and Oermann 1983).

That day TNN and GWSC were in the final countdown preparations for an 8 p.m. sign-on. The network's premiere would consist of a special five-hour live edition of *Nashville Now!* hosted by Ralph Emery at Opryland Hotel's Stagedoor Lounge and of concerts from the Grand Ole Opry House and by satellite from New York's Savoy Club, the Palomino Club in Los Angeles, the Park West in Chicago, Denver's After the Gold Rush, and Austin's KRLU-TV, home of PBS's successful country/western/folk program *Austin City Limits*. The idea for the five-city remote actually came from GWSC's marketing vice president Ron Castell. The approach was to use current satellite technology on a national level to generate interest among the cable and advertising industries (Bartley and Oermann 1983; "Nashville Goes Cross-Country" 1983; Varnell 1993, 398–99).

The Opry House concert was hosted by Roy Acuff and Patti Page, while the five-city concerts were headlined by Roseanne Cash, T.G. Sheppard, Bill Monroe, Emmylou Harris, Lynn Anderson, George Lindsey, Tanya Tucker, Hoyt Axton, Tammy Wynette, and Don Williams. Also performing on the premiere were Minnie Pearl, Chet Atkins, Larry Gatlin and the Gatlin Brothers Band, Ray Stevens, and the Nashville Network Concert Orchestra ("Nashville Goes Cross Country" 1983).

Bob Boatman, whose network credits from Nashville includes *Hee Haw* and PBS's *Live from the Grand Ole Opry*, produced and directed the program. The production staff grew to approximately 900 for the premiere. TNN estimated 5,000 to 5,500 people were on hand for the various concerts ("Nashville Goes" 1983, 146).

Part of the definition of the "Nashville sound" goes beyond the sound or style of the music itself. Producers Owen Bradley and Chet Atkins, both central to its creation, have noted that it also included the people involved in its production and the way songs were produced ("The Unseen Hand"



During a 1984 rehearsal for TNN's *Nashville Now!* country legend Grandpa Jones ponders a song arrangement while staff musician Grady Martin (with beard) looks on. (Charles Wolfe collection)

1987; Morthland 1987; "Owen Bradley" 1987). In the control room preparing for the start was TNN's program director Elmer Alley, someone who had experience with Nashville music recording. Alley brought continuity to the network's launch, having participated in WSM TV's sign-on in 1950, in many of WSM's television productions, and in the formation of the Opryland complex. The influence of the Nashville sound was evidently present in the control room with Alley that night. According to Alley:

The opening night we had the Nashville Symphony and Ralph Emery in the Hotel and five remote locations around the country. Bud Wendell came in about a half-hour before we were to go on, and I was sitting with my feet on the desk and he said, "Are you sure we're ready?" I said "Sure we're ready Bud; just go on out and take care of the crowd." They had this wonderful party for everyone. And about ten minutes before air, he said, "Are you sure you're ready?" I said "Bud, I've been working on this for a year. You've never

asked me that before." Bud and Tom [Griscom] are the type of management people who will give you an assignment and leave you alone. Tom never asked me if we had the programming finished; we just did it. (Alley 1993)

At 8 p.m. Ralph Emery started TNN, saying: "Welcome to the opening night of The Nashville Network. It's a coast-to-coast party and we've invited 20 million people to join us" (Bartley and Oermann 1983). The premiere of TNN went off without any major troubles, giving the network a healthy start.

The network's future was further solidified three months later when American General announced in July it found a buyer for the WSM properties, Gaylord Broadcasting. This was a logical purchase, the conservative Gaylord organization already owning the syndicated program *Hee Haw*, which was videotaped at the Opryland facilities. Along with TNN, the sale included WSM's AM and FM stations, the *Grand Ole Opry* the Opryland USA theme park, the Grand Ole Opry House, and the Opryland Hotel. The sale took effect in September 1983, and Gaylord created the Opryland USA division to operate the properties (Berg 1983).

Conclusions

CMT broke important ground in establishing a platform for country music video development, but was beset by slow and inconsistent growth. The premature start of the network without a subscriber base and promotional awareness created an inauspicious launch. CMT was up against a music industry with a bias toward rock and pop and uncertain over the value of the country music video format. With the network's acquisition by Caribou Communications, the video network established a more sound marketing strategy and country music video production eventually gained a productive threshold. Now with its acquisition by Viacom, CMT no longer competes with TNN and has outlasted its former cable cousin as a country music outlet.

The development of TNN was brought about by the same ambition at WSM that established the Opryland complex in the early 1970s. Through the leadership of Bud Wendell and Tom Griscom, WSM risked a major transformation from traditional broadcasting into cable networking. WSM management now saw themselves less as broadcasters and more as providers of country music entertainment. The greatest importance was placed on maintaining the level of control and influence they had over country

music, to “have the franchise.” They saw cable television as a better way to promote that franchise and were willing to sell their television broadcast property, WSM. TNN was an extension and outgrowth of the *Grand Ole Opry* and of the Opryland USA theme park, two properties that traditional broadcasting helped develop but that a cable network would take to another level.

The country music industry has now lost a national media outlet and a chapter has closed in Nashville’s history as a unique provider of national television programming. Faced with a declining and older audience, Viacom’s MTV Networks has decided to abandon the country music approach altogether on TNN. The new TNN has moved away from country-lifestyle programming and toward more varied entertainment in order to attract younger male viewers. The first death knell rang when three long-running shows were cancelled: *Prime Time Country* (the descendant of *Nashville Now!*), *This Week in Country Music*, and *Crook and Chase*. (Shiffman and Orr, 1999). Soon, the network lost its lucrative NASCAR franchise. Programs now running or in development include WWF’s wrestling-feast *Raw Is War*, the action-drama *18 Wheels of Justice*, and coverage of WWF’s newly-formed Xtreme Football League. New management is considering moving *Grand Ole Opry* to CMT to complete the purging of any country music material (“TNN Drops Nashville”).

The reasons for CMT’s continued success and especially of TNN’s decline will be worthy of examination and debate. Peaks and valleys notwithstanding, the relatively healthy state of the country music industry would not suggest a shrinking of opportunities for exposure as drastic as the loss of a cable television network. Cable, an industry itself in a state of expansion, still seems as natural a place for full-service country music programming as it was during its growth period in the early 1980s. The development of new media channels, as in digital broadcasting and broadband interactive services, should work with cable in providing new creative forms for performers to express themselves and fans to enjoy the music.

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The Country Music— NASCAR Connection

Lawrence E. Ziewacz

Over the last decade, NASCAR racing has vaulted into the forefront of spectator sports, both live and on television. In 1998 NASCAR celebrated its fiftieth season, and part of the celebration, no doubt, was over cable and network television ratings—soaring dramatically upward with attendance at NASCAR events increasing by 50 percent over the last five years—and over the sale of NASCAR merchandise, up by an astounding 1,000 percent during the last decade. Obviously attracted by these numbers, corporate sponsors, many of them Fortune Five Hundred companies, have poured millions of their estimated \$6 billion budget allotted for sponsorship into NASCAR. Additionally, the Motor Racing Network (MRN), which is an independent operating subsidiary of the International Speedway Corporation and is composed of over 450 radio stations—predominantly country music stations—broadcasts twenty-nine Winston Cup races and eleven Grand National races. And whereas most networks pay affiliated stations to pick up network programs, each MRN station pays \$2,000 for its network membership and proudly proclaims its affiliation. For example, disc jockeys on WCUZ, an “oldies” country station emanating from Grand Rapids, Michigan, regularly boast of their status as an MRN affiliate, that NASCAR was West Michigan’s top rated sports event, and that prospective advertisers can reach thousands of potential customers by spending their advertising dollars on WCUZ programming.¹

In hindsight, this marriage between NASCAR and country music might

seem as natural as that between Colonel Sanders and fried chicken. Here is music steeped in southern influence and a sport deeply rooted in the moonshine madness of the South. Yet, serious analysis of the connection between NASCAR and country music provides insights necessary to judge whether or not this relationship is as mutually beneficial as it seems from a cursory examination. The cultural-historical-demographic ties between NASCAR and country music can best be analyzed by examining the two in terms of four major categories: (1) regional geographic roots, (2) working-class, rural, white southern origins, (3) the economic power of the audience, and (4) the commercial success of both phenomena and the problems associated with it.

Richard Peterson and Paul DiMaggio in their article “From Region to Class, the Changing Locus of Country Music: A Test of the Massification Hypothesis,” have demonstrated that prior to the 1880s, country music had spread from the Appalachian hill country to the rest of the nation but that at the same time pockets of indigenous “fiddle-music” were already present in most states and were part of a “single historical process.” They further found that “the early forms of country music comprised the staple of popular music throughout most of America up until the 1880s, when commercial popular music (written, published, and plugged by firms in large cities from New York to Chicago) began to dominate the urban market.” The advent of and continued success of this “urban pop music” beginning in the 1880s had an isolating effect, “relegating the older music to the most rural and most remote regions of the country. By 1920 the single largest enclave of country music was the crescent-shaped arc of states beginning with West Virginia in the Northeast continuing south and west, encompassing most of the Southeast, as well as Texas and Oklahoma.”² Today, as documented by Peterson and DiMaggio, country music fans are represented throughout the economic and social spectrum, but the core fans are “middle-aged, white, working-class irrespective of whether they live in small towns, rural areas or large cities.” They further note that many of these “hard-core” fans “have never lived in the crescent-shaped homeland of country music”—meaning that most or a major portion of the modern following of country music resides outside the arc.³

Peterson and Russell Davis Jr., in an article addressing the geographical roots of country music performers, have concluded that most country music notables have come from the South. The more populated Northeast and “East North Central region—the midwest states east of the Mississippi with

22% of the population” of the country have contributed sparsely to this number; the Western-North-Central, as they note, has produced more stars than any region outside the South, but this is skewed by the fact that several popular performers have come from the Missouri Ozarks, “which is still more closely linked culturally to Arkansas and Kentucky than it is to Iowa and Nebraska.”⁴

In addition, Peterson and Davis show that Tennessee has, despite its small size, produced more country music celebrities per capita than other states and at a rate “almost twice as great as that for the South as a whole.” Texas, with a much larger population, has produced the greatest number of notable performers.⁵

Peterson and Davis also give evidence to indicate that even those country music notables from areas other than the “fertile crescent” generally come from small towns and rural areas, and that in general “country music has been and continues to be made by performers born in the fertile crescent of country music which ranges from West Virginia in the northeast to Texas in the Southwest.”⁶

The evidence and conclusions offered by Peterson and Davis thus imply some important overarching truths about the nature of the country music phenomenon. Although the South, the fertile crescent of country music origins and development, is statistically the heaviest contributor to the performer and fan base of country music, the phenomenon is by no means a geographically or culturally isolated one. Clearly, it has little to do with any necessity of growing up in the South or with a particular speech accent or with a steeped background in the music, instrumentally or vocally. Nor does an appreciation of country music require being a cultural part of the “fundamentalist, fatalistic, populist culture of the [southern] regions.” Nor is it necessarily the case that to be successful the country music performer must be a product of that region where the music is revered. Finally, they suggest that the “networking,” so much a part of star success, be studied in the field of country music, just as it has been done in other areas of the entertainment industry.⁷

John Shelton Reed suggests that what is regarded as “southern” is not merely a geographic reference point. Stated in sociological terms, “the South serves not only as a membership group but as a reference group.”⁸ Reed agrees with regard to modern southern cities that “there is really nothing distinctively Southern about them” but “that the people of these cities remain ‘distinctively Southern.’”⁹ For many, then, according to Reed, being

southern is a state of mind—in fact an us vs. them mentality—with southerners defending themselves “from outside forces: abolitionists, the Union Army, carpetbaggers, Wall Street and Pittsburgh, civil rights agitators, the Federal Government, feminism, socialism, trade unionism, Darwinism, communism, atheism, daylight savings time, and other by-products of modernity.”¹⁰ Hence “Southerners see changes forced upon them from the outside.”¹¹ Therefore, Reed contends that one “can look at the South, not as just a distinctive economic or cultural area, but as the home of people somehow bound together by ties of loyalty and identification.”¹² Thus, country music and its cultural heritage is undoubtedly a bridge for country music fans, no matter how broadly dispersed over the nation. Whether living in the South, living elsewhere but originally from the South, or *from* and living *in* other sections, fans of country music share a love for its “traditional” sound and for its undergirding ethos, a love that can help explain why country’s fans are national in scope but why the performers are regional in origin.

Perhaps Reed’s explanation of southern as a “state of perception or mind” helps to explain Gerald Haslam’s contention in *Workin’ Man Blues* that the “fertile crescent” described by Peterson and Davis needs readjustment because the crescent includes Texas and Oklahoma, which are not truly southern. Haslam, agreeing with the work of John Shelton Reed and Dale Volberg, asserts that the eastern portion of Texas retained a southern influence while the central and western areas had a distinctive western influence and notes that many Texas-born country singers, from “Bob Wills to Buck Owens,” migrated to California. He would further argue that Peterson and Davis’s “use of ‘production of notables’ as a criterion, while interesting, is by no means a definitive revelation of the music’s hub.” He argues that California has become “second to Tennessee in country music’s history; only Texas challenges.”¹³ Still, if one accepts Reed’s perception of southern as more than geography, as a perception in people’s minds, then the diaspora of country musicians from their geographic birthplaces does not necessarily mean that they have left their “Southernness” behind.

Similarly, the “fertile crescent” for country music performers is a common area of origin for NASCAR drivers. The sport originated in the back-hills country of the South where “moonshiners”—makers of illegal liquor—needed “souped up” cars to elude the revenue agents on their deliveries to urban areas. Although often glamorized—as in the early 1950s movie *Thunder Road*, starring Robert Mitchum—those who participated in

it were just trying to make a living. As one interviewed North Carolina woman said, "Moonshining wasn't fun . . . it was a hard way to make a living and it was anything but glamorous."¹⁴

One of the early heroes of NASCAR tracks was Junior Johnson, "whose tenacity on the racetrack was formed, according to sports folklore, from years of doing battle against federal agents on the backroads of North Carolina. Racing lore also credits Johnson with originating the "bootlegger's turn," a move used during races when a car gets spun in the opposite direction."¹⁵ As a matter of fact, Johnson "served a 10 month jail sentence in Ohio" for bootlegging but earned 50 NASCAR victories.¹⁶ As Professor Mark Howell notes: "Whether Junior Johnson created such a move or not is left up to debate. What makes this an important issue is that it has become part of NASCAR folklore. . . . Legions of stock car followers learn these stories, interpret them, and take from the cultural contexts they consider to be most important at that particular time."¹⁷

Many of the early NASCAR drivers like Johnson, such as Tim and Fonty Flock, Curtis Turner, Red Byron, and Lee Petty, had similar backgrounds, trading an illegitimate for a legitimate career, bringing with them the tenacity, boldness, and fierceness they demonstrated in their nightly moonshine runs. Thus, as Howell has noted, "Moonshine haulers became athletes, recognized names throughout the country, and their stories—now a part of NASCAR folklore—addressed the culture from which they came."¹⁸

Also an ex-moonshiner, Wendall Scott was an African American NASCAR racer from Virginia who became famous when a movie was made of his life in 1977, *Greased Lightening*, starring Richard Pryor. The movie emphasized "Scott's driving talent, bootlegging background, and the racism he encountered while working his way up to the big time." (Scott was the "first African American to drive in the NASCAR Grand National division. . . . Scott won one event—a 100 lap dirt track race in Jacksonville, Florida—on December 1, 1963.")¹⁹

The list of birthplaces of the current crop of NASCAR Winston Cup drivers reinforces the "fertile crescent" as the origin not only of country music notables but also of NASCAR drivers. An examination of the known birthplaces of the fifty-one drivers who were on the 1999 Winston Cup circuit shows that twenty-nine of the fifty-one, or 56.9 percent, hail from the "fertile crescent" area.²⁰ If we throw out the almost irrelevant fact that the three talented Bodine brothers, Geoff, Todd, and Brett, were born and raised in rural Chemung, New York, the percentages would be even higher.

Thus, both NASCAR drivers and country music stars appear to be from predominantly the same geographic area.

In describing country music, scholars sometimes have a difficult time defining what is meant by the term. “The name means so much and so little. . . . Some see it as the hard-living songs of a hard-living people.”²¹ Another scholar defines country music as “a world and a way of life” made by musicians who have “farmed, worked railroad gangs, been truckers and mechanics, baseball players, machinists” and a form of express that “tells about real problems like work and love and death, and foolin’ around and sex and divorce.”²² Suffice it to say that country music from its origins has been music of the working man—particularly the rural, white, southern working man.

Country music as a commercial entity began in 1922 when Henry C. Gilliland and Alexander C. “Eck” Robertson meandered into the Victor Talking Machine Company and cut six fiddle songs for production. It was the phonograph and radio that would provide the growth and development for what is known as country music today.²³

As Charles Wolfe points out, George Hay began the Grand Ole Opry on WSM in Nashville with Uncle Jimmy Thompson on November 28, 1925, as a solo fiddle player. Hay gradually came to appreciate what developed as the Opry as more than southern show biz; he became genuinely aware of the role the Opry played in the “folk transmission process.” And as Wolfe candidly notes, almost all the musicians on the Opry prior to 1930 were “amateurs and southern.”²⁴

In fact, Wolfe shows how Hay carefully cultivated a rustic, working image for Opry performers. He accordingly renamed bands with distinctive names and gave nicknames to headliners. In the early programs, performers appeared in formal attire, but a gradual rustification took place. As Wolfe states, “By 1935 the image of the Opry as a rustic hillbilly show was well entrenched.”²⁵

The pivotal performer who revolutionized country music as the “working man’s music” was Jimmie Rodgers, the “Singing Brakeman” from Meridian, Mississippi. Although his recording career would only last six short years, his life cut short by an early death from tuberculosis, Rodgers’s songs appealed “to the ordinary people.”²⁶ What is most interesting is that his career occurred in the depths of the Great Depression, and that many people who would not pay forty cents for a steak would pay seventy cents for a Rodgers record.²⁷

Bill Malone notes that although Rodgers can be credited for moving country music toward the Southwest, his “blue yodel” technique influencing many “hillbilly performers,” Rodgers cannot be easily categorized.²⁸ As Malone observes, “The popularity of the Rodgers yodel and of his blues renditions should not obscure the fact of his multi-faceted repertory. He recorded almost every conceivable type of song—serious, humorous, maudlin, religious, risqué, and rowdy.”²⁹ Although many country music listeners may not have directly heard of Jimmie Rodgers, his influence has been passed on by those country recording artists whom he has influenced. These include such stellar luminaries of country music as Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow, and Gene Autry.³⁰

The “rags to riches” Horatio Alger story of country boy makes good was embodied in Rodgers’s own life. Nolan Porterfield, in his thorough biography of Rodgers, notes how Rodgers returned to Asheville, North Carolina, in triumph after previously having been fired by radio station WWNC and having been laughed at or ignored by others. Rodgers returned in December of 1929 to the headline “Jimmie Rodgers Left City Broke: Returns as King of ‘Blue Yodel’” His arrival included throwing out a “shower of greenbacks” as an affirmation of his affluence.³¹

In a similar vein Robert Goldblatt notes, “Partially because of the humble origins of many country music stars, the glamour of Nashville is part of the ‘American dream’ of the rise from rags to riches. . . . Yet so many country stars have moved from lives of privation into comfort and luxury, that it represents part of the lure and part of the legend of this whole field.”³² Certainly such country stars as Eddy Arnold (“the Tennessee Ploughboy”), Webb Pierce (a former Sears Roebuck salesman), Roger Miller (a former elevator operator in a Nashville hotel), and Loretta Lynn (a coalminer’s daughter) are just a few of the more familiar examples of the working-class roots of country music stars.³³

NASCAR drivers also carry the mystique of the working man who made good. As Mark Howell notes: “Stock car drivers, like the horsemen of the American West, occupy a special place within American culture. Just as frontier scouts and cowboys have become a romanticized part of our national history, Winston Cup drivers have become symbols of the character traits that Americans admire.”³⁴ Among such traits are “courtesy, humility, and respect. . . .” Unlike many sports heroes in baseball, the NBA, or the NFL, where players behave with “aloofness,” NASCAR drivers, in spite of the appearance of singularity, talk about the accomplishments of their “teams,” emphasizing the *we*—not the *I*—when referring to their triumphs.³⁵

Richard Petty, NASCAR's first true superstar, personified those three previously mentioned qualities and set the pattern for future drivers. Typically NASCAR drivers express satisfaction just for the opportunity to run in the elite racing set, and thus, for the opportunity to achieve fame and fortune. When asked about his attitude once, Petty remarked, "If they didn't come, there would be no racing and hence there would be no Richard Petty."³⁶ This is a much different attitude than that of former NBA player Charles Barkley, who rejects the idea that he is a "role model" or Detroit baseball player Juan Gonzalez, who could barely appear in a Detroit uniform when required, let alone allow fans access to him.

Stock car drivers are much akin to the early American frontiersman "who gained acclaim for his abilities to shoot, hunt, track game, and ride." Instead of taming the wilderness, NASCAR drivers "use and manipulate technology." The stock car driver attempts to "defy principles of physics and engineering" in a "3400 pound machine" testing "every aspect" of it—"its engine, its handling characteristics, and its durability."³⁷

For early stock car racing hero Barney Oldfield, "success came through hard work." Jimmie Rodgers attached the working man's label on country music, so also did Oldfield's "rags to riches" attach that label to stock car racing. "Like Alger's characters—who achieve respectability and success through their dedication to honesty, sincerity, strong morality, and the sweat of their brow—Barney Oldfield 'struggled upward' persistently to earn national honor and recognition."³⁸

Oldfield's example of hard work and family loyalty became ingrained as traits reflective of NASCAR drivers today. This "loyalty to family and community are strong traits in the image of stock car racing, and Oldfield set the stage for the drivers who would follow him decades later."³⁹ Again, NASCAR drivers, like their country music counterparts, seek to reflect an image of hard work and dedication to their routine. Although much different from the ordinary working man's routine, the image of the NASCAR driver is of one who gives an honest day's effort and takes pride in his work, the ideal image of the average hardworking American.

As in other parts of the entertainment industry, the economic power of the audience is crucial to both country music and NASCAR. Although country purists may deny it, country music became a commercial enterprise once it developed into a radio staple and artists began making country music for sponsored broadcasts and stage performances. The purpose of a professional performer is to earn a living, and once that becomes a reality,

then the performer and those who produce and market the artist are engaged in commercial enterprise.

In an article entitled “Single-Industry Firm to Conglomerate Synergistics: Alternate Strategies for Selling Insurance and Country Music,” Richard A. Peterson notes that the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, the owner of WSM (We Shield Millions) of Nashville began broadcasting what was seen as a “toy” for the company’s president’s son, Edwin Craig. However, once Edwin Craig took over his father’s business, the radio station was expanded to 50,000 watts and was viewed as a means of providing brand loyalty to the insurance company. It was not until about 1934 that the station advertised its insurance.⁴⁰

Much of Nashville—regarding itself as the “Athens of the South”—felt disgraced that the station regaled in country music and was making the city the “Hillbilly Capital of the world.” As Peterson reveals, National Life’s reason was profits. The insurance giant sold small insurance policies that were collected weekly. To expedite sales, salesmen “gave away pictures of the Opry cast, and invited clients to come see the product.” Such tactics helped National Life weather the economic declines of the Great Depression.⁴¹

According to Peterson, Edwin Craig resisted efforts for WSM to involve itself more directly in the country music industry. WSM and the Opry were perceived to be contributors to the profits of the insurance company and not regarded as sources of profit, in and of themselves. Peterson identifies such an economic approach as a “single industry policy,” which contrasts sharply to today’s “conglomerate synergistics” corporate approach.⁴²

Peterson, however, also indicates that the strategy behind the development of Opryland in 1969—“a massive financial venture into the entertainment field, launched to be profitable in its own right”—was to emphasize diversification and to insure that a downturn in one sector of the economy would not be a disaster for the diversified corporation. Ideally, each unit of the corporate structure makes more money because it is related to the other entities in the corporation, with unprofitable companies being sold off to cut losses and profitable companies available for sale at the right price. The ultimate result is that a “conglomerate may completely sell out of the industry in which it was originally based.”⁴³ According to Peterson, “conglomerate synergistics seems to be as successful in this era as Edwin Craig’s single-industry radio policy was in his time.”⁴⁴

Charles Wolfe notes in his *Good Natured Riot: The Birth of the Grand Ole Opry* that with the naming of Harry Stone as station manager of WSM in

1932, National Life began to emphasize professionalization and a more business-like approach to the Opry. In particular, the Vagabonds, a professional trio of entertainers whose roots were not in the South, became popular and brought a sophistication in musical styling and showmanship, new to the Opry. The Vagabonds' job was their music, and when not performing they perfected their craft, answered fan letters, and toured. It was from such a notion of linkage with the fans that country music performers would develop a pattern for success.⁴⁵

This linkage between country artists with their fans was noted with wonderment by columnist Erma Bombeck, who once commented that “most marriages should be as exciting, compelling and lasting as the one between country singers and their fans. Those who sit out in the darkness give them loyalty, forgiveness, love and admiration. Those in the spotlight give it right back”⁴⁶

Country music stars spend time with audiences signing autographs, provide services to their fan clubs, and have a week devoted to fans in Nashville called Fanfare, wherein fans from all over the country trek to country music's holy land to meet country stars firsthand. Many country stars exude that “good ol' boy” demeanor and expound on their common working man's background, whether from Texas or Trenton, New Jersey. This “behavior and live performances by country stars helps maintain this rapport with the audience” or at least “helps their audience to perceive them as being close, as not getting above themselves, forgetting where they came from, or who got them there.”⁴⁷ As David Bryan, music programmer for WDAF-61 Country, Kansas City, Missouri, has stated, “Country music performers (with a few exceptions) are known for treating their audience with respect and warmth, by singing to them, not at them, and by spending as much time as possible talking to them after a performance.”⁴⁸

In many ways, NASCAR development has followed the single-policy vs. synergistics analysis Richard Peterson made of WSM and the National Life and Accident Insurance Company. Much like Edwin Craig, NASCAR is privately owned by the France family. Founding NASCAR in 1949 to provide stability and organization to stock car racing, William France ran NASCAR until 1972, when he relinquished control to his sons Jim and Bill. Much like the more modern approach that the National Life took toward country music with the 1969 expansion into Opryland, the younger Frances run NASCAR like a corporate component. Under their guidance, “stock car racing has become associated with consumer-oriented sponsorship, sophisticated marketing and national promotion.”⁴⁹

NASCAR does “accept members on a dues paying basis,” but the process is controlled by the France family. Thus NASCAR drivers are “independent contractors funded by corporate sponsors.” One consequence of this modus operandi is that the racers own their own images and cut individual marketing and promotional deals. This means that personality and charisma can produce lucrative endorsements and that profitability for a driver is not always tied to his winning or his placement in races but to the driver’s appeal to his fans and to his fans’ eagerness to buy driver-endorsed products and those of his sponsors.⁵⁰

Thus both country music performers and NASCAR drivers must rely entirely on themselves, whereas in the professional team sports such as the NFL and the NBA competition among the teams allows the players monetary worth to escalate wildly depending on a team’s needs. The player can gain a guaranteed salary and will have an income despite his personal behavior unless a serious crime or infraction is committed. Since NASCAR is primarily a dictatorship by the France family, drivers have to be attractive to racing team sponsors in terms of the fans that they can attract.⁵¹ Similarly, country music stars need to find a recording company that will give them a contract in order to produce their product. The more that they can convince a recording company that they can attract customers for their music, the more likely it is that they can obtain a recording contract. Whether or not they can continue to record will depend on their fan support, so it is vital that country music stars also cultivate their fans. Thus one could argue that the “independent” nature of the country music star and the NASCAR driver within the corporate affiliation removes a safety net (as employee) normally enjoyed by other entertainers and helps to explain why both assiduously cultivate their fans, as it is crucial to their professional survival.

Whereas advertising is a direct appeal to consumers, sponsorship is a more subtle approach, which sponsors hope will engender a “lasting bond between consumers and the company.” With consumers being deluged by advertising on radio and television that can be turned off by a flick of the remote button, sponsorship allows companies to reach a “captured audience.” With corporations spending \$6 billion on sponsorship in 1997 and the amount spent on sponsorship growing by 13 percent annually in the 1990s, many major corporations obviously believe that sponsorship is a worthwhile endeavor.⁵²

Of the \$6 billion corporations allotted for sponsorship in 1997, about 65 percent was allocated for sports.⁵³ Given the enormous growth of

NASCAR's television ratings and merchandising, it is not startling to note that "stock car racing compared to football, baseball, and even the Olympics is providing the highest return for its sponsorship dollars—a fact that is no longer lost on Madison Avenue."⁵⁴

NASCAR currently has sought to revise the somewhat "outlaw" image of its drivers by promoting clean-cut drivers like Jeff Gordon and presenting itself as family entertainment (women make up almost 50 percent of stock car race attendees). This change has helped NASCAR appeal to corporations seeking to maximize their advertising dollar.⁵⁵ Despite this "mother, flag, and apple pie approach," as Shannon Rose of the *Kansas City Star* has noted, "money makes NASCAR's wheels go around." As he further states: "NASCAR wants people to believe that it's about racing people, families, and good times. OK. So that may be true but that's not all. It's also about money. Lots of it. Money doesn't just make the world go 'round, it fuels every car circling race tracks."⁵⁶ Therefore, sponsorship is crucial to NASCAR, and one can easily witness this from "the very names of NASCAR's major racing series—Winston Cup, Bush Grand National, and Craftsman Trucks. These companies don't get a share of the winner's purse, but they believe that they are receiving the right bang for the bucks."⁵⁷

More importantly, it appears that these companies—again many of them among the Fortune Five Hundred—are getting the "bang for their bucks." According to Julius and Associates of Ann Arbor, Michigan, a company whose business is to evaluate the impact of corporate sponsorship, found that "more than seventy percent of NASCAR fans almost always choose a sponsor's product over a nonsponsors. With one-third of NASCAR fans earning above \$50,000 a year, that can be an important fact to a company.⁵⁸ And companies do indeed receive plenty of exposure. Currently, all Winston Cup races are televised nationally, attracting an audience of 47 million nationally and 58 million internationally."⁵⁹

Even NBC, a Johnny-come-lately to NASCAR televising, announced that it would do a live broadcast of the Bush Grand National Jiffy Lube 300 on November 13, 1999, and the Winston Cup Jiffy Lube 400 the following day. Part of NBC's eagerness to add NASCAR to its sports repertoire generates from its loss in the NFL bidding wars. NBC Sports president Ken Schanzer announced that "we have wanted to be involved with NASCAR for a long time. Now we have the broadcast time available."⁶⁰

In the face of NASCAR's dramatically rising ratings and growing interest among competitors to televise NASCAR events, NBC's gamble of pitting

NASCAR against professional football does not seem a dangerous venture for NBC. For example, the 1998 Pepsi 500 televised on TNN earned a 4.7 rating, the top-rated cable show ever. Obviously emboldened by such success, all four new events in the last three years on the Winston Cup schedule received commercial television bids, with ABC paying \$5.5 million for the rights to televise the Las Vegas 400.⁶¹

Particularly interesting is NASCAR's recent trend—or at least that of the media involved with NASCAR—to link NASCAR with country music as a way to keep NASCAR in the minds of its audience. For example, CBS, which had long been a programmer of NASCAR recently purchased the Country Music Television network (CMT) and The Nashville Network (TNN), “both NASCAR fans.” TNN in particular has focused on country lifestyles, featuring hunting and fishing in addition to motor sports. This purchase allowed CBS to televise eleven of the Winston Cup races.⁶² One CBS executive was quoted as saying that the purchase “was a strategic move to expand the reach and scope of CBS's media business into high-growth segments. With this acquisition, CBS was now a powerhouse in the country music and country lifestyle franchises.”⁶³ The approach seems to be the “conglomerate synergistics” approach described by Richard Peterson. Not only could the plan take advertising advantage of NASCAR-associated products and sponsors, but it could also appeal to manufacturers of hunting and fishing equipment as well, with each segment contributing to the prosperity of the network. (In addition, the website, *CountryCool.Com: The World of Country Music* also features NASCAR news.)⁶⁴

Much like the country music industry, which is based on the musical abilities of individuals and groups to attract fans and retain them, NASCAR racing is an individual sport—one man and his machine constantly asking the question—“how fast is fast enough?”⁶⁵ The NASCAR driver uniquely combines the attractiveness of the country music star and the athlete. As Howell noted, “Folk heroes often come from the ranks of professional athletes. . . . Athletes soon become the forces of our popular folklore as Americans begin to swap stories about the lives, talents and accomplishments of these newfound celebrities.”⁶⁶

And in NASCAR racing danger is part of the attraction. Racing fans understand the risks these drivers take when they are in their “offices.” Driving a race car for three and a half hours at well over one hundred miles an hour is an outstanding feat, necessitating split-second reactions, steady nerves of steel, and tremendous concentration, while at the same time know-

ing that making one mistake in a turn can result in either serious injury or death. Thus, as one analyst notes, “NASCAR stock racing is action packed combat. There is no room for cowards in this sport. Once the flag drops, the excitement, the danger, the intensity never stops.”⁶⁷

Understanding the risks and challenges facing the NASCAR driver, fans apparently respond accordingly with recognition of and loyalty to those sponsoring NASCAR events. For example, Performance Research’s *Race Start* surveyed NASCAR fans and asked them to identify companies associated with the sport. The survey reveals that fans associated cars and sponsors with amazing accuracy, with only 1 percent responding incorrectly. This is all the more astounding when one considers that in 1992 Visa paid \$20 million to sponsor the Summer and Winter Olympics, and the survey results show that 30 percent of those surveyed believed that American Express was the official sponsor.⁶⁸

Racing fan awareness of sponsors is more than merely accurate. Performance Research’s survey results indicate that 75 percent of NASCAR fans “purchase products of NASCAR sponsors.” Only 50 percent of tennis and golf fans purchase sponsors’ products, and this percentage drops to about 33 percent for professional baseball, football, and basketball.⁶⁹

In addition, NASCAR takes care of its facilities with groomed grounds and “well-kept, clean, and orderly grandstands” to maintain a family atmosphere. Since a high percentage of NASCAR fans are female, the Texas Motor Speedway was built with twice as many women’s rest rooms as men’s. In addition, fans are allowed to walk around the pit and garage areas and mingle with their racing heroes. Drivers are accommodating and sign autographs freely, and most have websites where fans can glean additional information about them.⁷⁰

On such bases one can argue that, in terms of recognizing the importance of the relationship of the “notables” to their fans, the country music industry and NASCAR are much alike. To an unusual degree both industries seem anchored in a commitment to their fan base and make provisions to accommodate their fans. In turn, the fans of both provide a great measure of economic support, not only by purchasing the drivers’ and musicians’ own merchandise but also the broad range of merchandise advertised in the media promoting and sponsoring these entertainment genres.

In our fourth category of analysis, problems created by commercial success, country music and NASCAR share close similarities in the difficulties each faces for the future. Both economic entities have largely regional

southern roots and are striving constantly to achieve a broad national base. Yet adapting to the changes necessary to attain that national audience requires accommodations, perhaps dropping the sounds of banjo and steel guitar from country music or abandoning the romanticized image of the moonshiner from stock car racing. As both entities seek to abandon "the restraints of tradition," however, both risk losing their core base of fans. Secondly, in an increasingly integrated society, both NASCAR and the country music industry are basically "lily white" organizations, and so are their fan bases, a point both groups try hard to ignore. For example, country music's Charlie Pride is arguably the only prominent black country music star of recent generations (he was the first black performer to be voted into the Country Hall of Fame),⁷¹ and he is basically relegated to the "legend" category today. Similarly, there are no current NASCAR drivers who are black. Arising from these bald facts is the question, Are the NASCAR and country music arenas for "whites only"? a question that in and of itself runs counter to the goal of broadly based national acceptance.

As country music broadens its appeal, its definition becomes more and more difficult to articulate. When pressed, fans speak in general, abstract terms: "It is sincere" and "It tells about real problems like work and love and death. . . . Its language is simple, clear, and direct."⁷² One scholar contends that "the current, fashionable 'top-40' version is actually a southern style of pop music so middle-of-the-road that a white line should be painted on it. In fact, it is probably more southern now than ever, thanks to Nashville's command of the business."⁷³ Basically, this scholar is referring to the problems of what constitutes "authenticity" in country music and whether or not there has been a "sell out" by those that produce country music to "water it down" in order to make it palatable for a larger audience.

Although 25 percent of commercial radio stations play country music, slowing growth in appeal and a growing disenchantment with tight top-40 play lists have resulted in many experienced country music program directors leaving the industry. Also, in 1993 country music accounted for 18.7 percent of record purchases, but this percentage had declined to only 12.4 percent by 1997. Ticket sales are down for country music concerts, and the number of radio stations playing country music has declined to 2,285 since its peak of 2,427 in 1994. The Grand Ole Opry has trimmed twenty matinees from its summer schedule, and the Opryland park has closed to make way for a \$200 million shopping center.⁷⁴

A recent poll indicates that country music radio listeners are dissatis-

fied with country music, and about half of them are listening to top-40 stations in addition to country. Many of the survey respondents indicated they wanted faster-tempo songs and fewer commercials and traffic reports. When asked about what they wanted most at country concerts, their surprising response was more “autograph opportunities.” Survey director Bruce Clark views this response as “symptomatic of how the artist/audience relationship has declined after country’s early ’90s boom.”⁷⁵

In a *U.S. News and World Report* article entitled “America’s Inner Hillbilly,” Jon Marks comments that “in American commercial music, the big money has always been in pop. So once every two decades or so, hoping to cash in, the country industry tries to kill its inner hillbilly. It bans banjos and fiddle, chases the twang out of vocal arrangement, and generally discourages the sorrowful strain that emerges in traditional lyrics.”⁷⁶ Thus, much of contemporary country music follows the direction of Garth Brooks and Shania Twain, being the two most vivid exponents of “crossing the musical borders.” Yet Brooks far outsells any other country artist by an enormous margin and “owns the rights to his albums, fronts his own money for videos, calls the shots on when he’ll release his records, chooses his own singles.”⁷⁷

Recently, Brooks has attempted a foray into the rock market with a rock album release under the pseudonym of Chris Gaines. It sold far less in its first week of release than anticipated, which only made Brooks’s enemies in Nashville happy.⁷⁸ Yet as this event seems to prove, according to critic Kaen Schoemer, “Garth can’t escape country music. . . . Artistically speaking, he and Nashville are stuck with each other. Pop radio won’t play him. Rock fans think he’s a watered-down Bob Seger impersonator.”⁷⁹

Many of Brooks’s critics dislike the way he meticulously controls his image. He projects a “good ol’ boy” image by driving around Nashville in a “mud splattered truck and walks around in tractor coveralls,” working hard to fulfill his fans’ image of him as a “kindhearted Christian with solid family values. A Wrangler-clad Middle American with a pizza paunch. A regular guy.”⁸⁰

A backlash of sorts has developed against the “less traditional country sound” represented by Brooks and others. Many country artists are now reverting back to using steel guitars and banjos and are willing to deal with “controversial themes like immigration, capital punishment, labor unions, and racism.” Steve Earle, for one, “embraces them, emphasizing the folk element in country which always had a social agenda.” In concert, Earle likes to say, ironically, “There is one place where I support the death pen-

alty, and that's in hillbilly music. . . . and in trying not to look like hillbillies, we end up looking like the worst hillbillies of them all."⁸¹

Two recent studies of the conflict in country music between tradition and commercialism have recently been published, shedding much light on the nature of this controversy. Joli Jensen's *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization and Country Music* contends that "country music has developed a number of what can be called authenticity markers, symbolic devices that define what is and is not "really country." Jensen argues that "country music certifies its genuineness through some combination of these, locating its authenticity in its origins, performers, performance style, lyrics, and fans. Yet each of these attempts at the location of authenticity involves contradictions."⁸² Thus country, Jensen argues, "is both a real and imaginary landscape, one that people actually know and live in but also one that is invented to symbolize other things."⁸³

Jensen offers an example of what she means: in Nolan Porterfield's biography of Jimmie Rodgers, Porterfield describes a recording session full of acrimony between Rodgers and the Carter family; yet the "music landscape that is created" is just folks relaxing and singing a few songs together. For Jensen, this recollection reveals the "paradox that underlies commercial country music from its beginnings." The music is "commercially constructed, via technology, to evoke and to honor uncommercial, 'natural' origins. Those who create, perform, and market country music work hard to maintain a rural, pastoral image, an image that appears detached from, and utterly uninterested in, the technology and economics of commercial music."⁸⁴

Jensen argues rather convincingly that "cultural forms, be they music, colas, or books, matter in relation to their ability to please, identify, and locate people. Whether the topic is the Nashville Sound, New Coke, postmodern anti-narrative, the issue of generic change becomes, How does this affect who I am and who I am linked up with?"⁸⁵ Jensen further asserts that "when the honky-tonk sound gave way to the Nashville Sound, when the old Coke gave way to New Coke, . . . fans of the older forms felt betrayed, cheated, and therefore hostile."⁸⁶

Jensen believes then that these cultural forms serve as means of identity and "help give our lives orientation and meaning—worlds in which we live." Jensen thus asserts that these "generic changes matter because they disrupt the alliance process."⁸⁷ Therefore when new, softer styles such as the Nashville Sound came along, fans of the older forms of country music and honky-tonk felt betrayed and when these fans had their music labeled

as “hillbilly,” they perceived that as both “betrayal” and “insult.”⁸⁸ Jensen’s findings seem to help explain the antagonisms generated between country traditionalists and so-called “modern country.”

In a somewhat similar vein, Richard A. Peterson in *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* agrees with Jensen that what is real and authentic for fans is not something concrete but “that which allows something new to be plausibly represented as something unchanging. . . .”⁸⁹ Peterson would define authenticity as “not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed upon construct in which the past is misremembered. . . . No authority is in a position to dictate authenticity in country music. Rather . . . is continuously negotiated in an ongoing interplay between performers, diverse commercial interests, fans, and the evolving image.”⁹⁰ Authenticity is therefore a creative effort, and people pick and choose for a variety of reasons—hence Jensen’s “cultural forms”—to forge their own conceptions of what is or what is not authentic.

Peterson points out, as others have, that the hillbilly image of the Opry was an image created to respond to a “commercially successful format.” Similarly, when Peterson mentions the crafting of the “hard-core” sound of Roy Acuff and his band, he clearly shows that it was “fabricated rustification.”⁹¹ Contrasting Acuff’s “hard core” with what he terms “soft shell,” Peterson describes the Pickard Family’s music as songs that were more national in scope, with the instruments providing a background for the singing, the singing less nasal, and the presentation in general more polished than emotional.⁹² Again, this was a creation of a certain type of music in order to attract a larger national (rather than a regional) audience.

Similarly, in examining the career of Jimmie Rodgers, Peterson outlines how Rodgers balanced creativity with a sense of the past. In other words, Rodgers forged new paths in country music but made it appear that it was truly traditional. Peterson comments on Rodgers’s billing himself as “America’s Blue Yodeler,” asking, “what is the visual image of a blue yodeler?” In an earlier period, Peterson argues, it would be the “blackface ‘stage Negro’ attire but in Rodgers’ fabrication the bluesman is imaged as the dapper white boy we see in the [accompanying] photo. . . .”⁹³

Peterson concludes that of all the definitions of authentic, the two most relevant for a discussion of country music are that the music must be (1) credible in current context and (2) real not imitative. Peterson contends that these two definitions of authentic are crucial when evaluating country music because music-recording producers responded in a query that they

sought artists who were “authentic” and songs that were “original.” Though the terms seem contradictory, Peterson argues that this makes “perfect sense” because “prospective performers have to have the marks of tradition to make them credible, and the songs that would make them successful had to be original enough to show that their singers were not inauthentic copies of what had gone before, that is, that they were real.”⁹⁴

The studies by Jensen and Peterson clarify the debate between what is traditional or authentic in country music and what is not. Both stress that commercialization has always been present in country music but that the image of a pure, unalloyed product has generally been a carefully manufactured landscape created by music producers. Since music is a cultural norm, people use it to identify who they are and what their world is, and in doing this they bring to bear many influences in their lives. They hold sacred those cultural items with which they most strongly identify, and when those are ridiculed or vilified or looked upon as not worthy, they react often with rage and indignation. The trick for a country music star is to appear traditional but to sing songs that mark him or her as an “original.” And this seems valid, for as one recording company executive has said: “It has always been a great song sung by a compelling artist that creates star potential.”⁹⁵

This debate over what tradition is and what it is not is also seen in NASCAR. At one time NASCAR was proud of its image based on drivers who had been thought of as “outlaws” and as the last of the “rugged individualists.” For example, as Mark Howell points out, Dale Earnhardt in 1986 was featured with his employer Richard Childress and Willie Nelson in a Wrangler magazine ad, with all three wearing Wrangler hats and the caption reading: “Wrangler Jeans and these three men have a lot in common. They’re all authentic, down-to-earth and hardworking. They have a lot of fans in common, too, and their fans stand for the same values.”⁹⁶

As Howell notes, besides solidifying a link between country music and stock car racing, the ad also indicates Americans’ identification with “rebels.” Nelson was a leader of country music’s “outlaw” movement, which appealed to Americans of all walks of life but who could not help but admire how Nelson lived life on the edge, even refusing to pay his taxes. Similarly, Earnhardt was “an outlaw” of sorts in the stock car racing community. As Howell states, “Wrangler wanted its customers to identify with these men”—men who were “authentic,” not just celebrities.⁹⁷

In a way pertinent to the previous discussion of authenticity and commercialism in country music, Howell cites two examples of creating an

“authentic” image for Earnhardt: (1) In 1994 one of Earnhardt’s sponsors, Stetson, had an ad with Earnhardt wearing a black Stetson and holding his trophy after winning his sixth Winston Cup championship in 1993. Like the cowboy of old who conquered the prairies, Earnhardt had conquered the asphalt tracks of America’s speedways. (2) One of the T shirts featuring Earnhardt displayed cowboys on horseback and print on the back, reading, “Cowboys and Engines.” On one level the connection is tenuous, but on another, readily absorbed by the fan, the message is that the stock car driver is America’s twentieth-century cowboy, complete with all the folklore culture that goes with that image.⁹⁸

With the expansion of Winston Cup racing and the building of new grandstands and facilities, and NASCAR’s overt effort to attract families, the efforts of the organization have been toward shedding the outlaw image and promoting drivers with a “squeaky clean,” more sophisticated image—a “soft sell” so to speak. However, this eagerness to go to Madison Avenue—the equivalent of the Nashville Sound for stock car racing—in order to extend NASCAR’s audience beyond its southern base risks alienating the sport’s original supporters, who steadfastly defend the sport as their own version “red neck and blue ribbon beer.” L. Jon Wertheim in an article in *Sports Illustrated*, subtitled “NASCAR’s Marketing Plans Are Far From Modest,” comments: “Not that NASCAR’s cultural sea change has come without the cry of dissenting voices. Particularly vexed are the lifelong fans who reminisce about the sport’s brawling, renegade days when the fans knew the drivers personally. More pretty boy than good ol’ boy, Gordon epitomizes the sport’s changing face and is routinely booed by old-time fans at events.”⁹⁹ However, “handsome and self-effacing, Gordon is a refreshing change from almost a decade of arrogant, spoiled-brat athletes. . . . More than most celebrity sponsors, Gordon really moves the merchandise.”¹⁰⁰ With the relationship between sponsor and driver “more intimately related than other sports the sponsor has an interest in making sure that the racer has an attractive image” since “race teams cannot survive without a sponsor.”¹⁰¹ “But the growing pains have hardly been sharp. ‘We like to say the sport will never move so fast it will forget where it comes from,’ says George Pyne, NASCAR’s vice president of marketing. ‘Right now, our goal is to reach racing fans 365 days a year, 24 hours a day through all channels and points of sale.’”¹⁰² Obviously NASCAR officials believe that they can walk the tightrope on the issue.

Regarding racial issues both country music and NASCAR are remark-

ably similar, that is, they are nearly all white—not only the performers and the drivers but also the fan bases. As noted earlier, Charlie Pride is the lone exception in recent country music history. Although inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2000, Pride's first three singles were released without his picture in order to conceal his race.¹⁰³ At present no concerted attempt within country music appears aimed at attracting more African American stars, despite a 1993 Harris poll revealing that 24 percent of country music listeners were black.¹⁰⁴

NASCAR is similarly an all-white affair, both in terms of drivers and fans. A minority Winston Cup enterprise called Washington Erving Motorsports is financed by former sports stars Joe Washington and Julius Erving.¹⁰⁵ How successful this effort will be remains to be seen, but at the very least the financial challenge for the black driver and sponsor is enormous. And there are, sadly, other problems.

When asked about why there weren't more black drivers and fans, Bill France said that "there was no game plans to keep minorities away. . . . We would like to have them as competitors and certainly as fans. We don't have a problem with a black driver or a black team."¹⁰⁶

Yet on July 8, 1999, at New Hampshire International Speedway, two NASCAR truck drivers put pillow cases over their head in front of David Scott, a black motor-coach driver for Jeremy Mayfield. The drivers were promptly fired, but the incident was "covered up."¹⁰⁷ Several weeks earlier, NASCAR president Brian France stated that NASCAR had "sought to market, hire and reach out to blacks, Hispanics and women."¹⁰⁸ However, this incident indicates that there does exist racial prejudice in the NASCAR community. Certainly if NASCAR seeks to truly maximize its audience potential, it cannot ignore the large minority population which is a source of more revenue.

In conclusion, it appears that both country music and NASCAR—both southern born and bred—have remarkably close connections and histories. Both rely on star performers who become folklore heroes, and both entities need to worry that in their eagerness to reach a national market they could lose their distinctive identity—something which scholars of both find sometimes difficult to define but of which their fans seem keenly aware. Yet one wonders if there is not a point of diminishing returns for both the country music industry and NASCAR. With the continual erosion of the number of individual farmers and the growing urbanization, will the "fertile crescent" still be the birthplace of country performers and will elec-

tronic innovations like the Internet, digital television, etc., bring a homogenization to American culture that will leave little room for a regional musical culture? Similarly, will innovations in cars which now require mechanics with computer certification to repair them reduce the numbers of the potential NASCAR fan who no longer develops an interest in autos because he fixed and repaired his own? Will new environmental concerns create a hostility to a sport dependent on squandering oil and gasoline? Will the introduction of a fuel cell or electric car create a disinterest in race cars fueled by gasoline, as they would be viewed as “dinosaurs” and not “modern”? Is there a point at which neither country music nor NASCAR can attract more fans because of just who they are? And finally, with all demographic studies indicating a rapidly growing minority population in the United States can either afford not to seek the minority market aggressively and not to develop minority “music performers” and “race car drivers?” These seem to be pertinent questions that need to be pondered by both the country music industry and NASCAR with the dawning of the twenty-first century.

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Performance, Faith, and Bluegrass Gospel

An Anthropological Journey with Jerry and Tammy Sullivan

Jack Bernhardt

From Brewton northwest to Goodway, Alabama, State Road 41 seems an ordinary stretch of southern roadway, its two-lane black top snaking lazily past swaying stands of loblolly pine and baking fields of plowed red clay. Aging mobile homes and small frame houses signal an economy of modest-scale truck farming and lumbering today, lumber camps and subsistence farming in the recent past.

The setting is a warm April Sunday in the season of Pentecost. Jerry and Tammy Sullivan and their bluegrass gospel band are on the road again, leaving one church and bound for the next on the first leg of their first tour of 1993. Our bus, a geriatric Greyhound converted a hundred thousand miles ago into a roomy motor home, rolls steadily toward Goodway, where the band will attend services and perform a benefit singing at the homecoming of the Church of the Lord Jesus. Inside, the bus is a rolling joy explosion. A tape of last night's singing at the Pleasant Hill Holiness Church in Brewton's Wildfork community blares from a boom box perched precariously on the dashboard. Jerry and his young bandmate, John Paul Cormier, revel in the thrill of an especially tasty guitar lick or a passionate turn of phrase rendered by Tammy in her powerful, textured contralto. The concert was an artistic success, enjoyed by all who attended.

Pleasant Hill Holiness Church is a humble house of worship in a remote section of the piney woods in rural Escambia County. Ten miles north



Left to right, John Paul Cormier, Tammy Sullivan, and Jerry Sullivan singing at the Church of the Lord Jesus in Goodway, Alabama, on April 18, 1993. (Jack Bernhardt collection)

of the Florida Panhandle, the church reflects the community it serves—a small, working-class congregation that once made its living in the dense forests that tower majestically above both sides of County Road 67. Scarred acres of clear-cut land attest to the ongoing importance of lumbering here, but the lumber camps that provided employment earlier in the century have vanished and been replaced by single-story frame houses and mobile homes sparsely scattered along the road, looking out upon modestly landscaped lawns.

While the Pleasant Hill singing was an artistic success, it was a financial disappointment. The Saturday night concert drew only forty-two people. It was an older crowd, averaging around sixty years of age, retired and living on fixed incomes or working at manual labor occupations. The Sullivans were playing for a “love offering,” a pass-the-plate arrangement that depends on generosity, or on the ability of the audience to contribute, if the artists are to cover expenses and make a living wage. When the collection plate was tallied at the end of intermission, the love offering totaled

a mere \$72. The pastor, a truck driver by occupation, asked the audience to dig deeper, hoping to help defray the cost to the Sullivans of diesel fuel, which was selling for around \$1.21 a gallon. At the end of the evening, the pastor handed Jerry an envelope containing \$107.41. Never mind a living wage: On this night the Sullivans would not recover the money they had spent on fuel for a bus that got five miles to a gallon, on salaries, and on meals for four musicians, a bus driver, and a guest anthropologist on tour.

Earlier on the tour, I might have dismissed the Pleasant Hill Holiness singing as an aberration—an atypically poor congregation or just an off night—but my knowledge of this evangelical subculture expanded as we proceeded on our two-week tour along the back roads of the deep South. Along the way, the Sullivans would play for audiences that were better off financially than the one at Brewton; but they also took their music to less fortunate communities, performing in churches with memberships as few as fifteen persons and Sunday offerings scant as \$14. The Sullivans' ministry, I was beginning to understand, is a calling that bears no relation to the "Gospel of Wealth" theology that scandalized the evangelical community when the excesses of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's PTL Club and other televangelical enterprises were made public in the 1980s (Shepard 1989).

Ethnography and the Culture of Gospel Music

Unlike the high-tech, middle-class constituents of Pat Roberston, Jimmy Swaggart, and Jerry Falwell, the Sullivans and their audience remain rooted in southern folk culture and are brought together through their mutual embrace of a musico-religious tradition originating in the nineteenth century. Gospel music is one of the most enduring cultural expressions in the American South, and musical ministries are among the most popular means for evangelizing the Gospel. With origins in the Great Revival and the camp meetings that stirred the souls of nineteenth century southerners (Bruce 1974), gospel music has evolved into a multi-million-dollar-a-year industry and a significant musical expression of faith. The importance to rural Americans of gospel music was understood by Bill Monroe, who made songs of faith a major ingredient of the bluegrass music he developed between 1938 and 1945 (Rosenberg 1985). Following Monroe's lead, most bluegrass bands today and in the past have incorporated gospel songs into their repertoires, and some, like the Sullivans, have chosen bluegrass gospel as their sole musical expression.

Gospel songs, like testimony and prayer, resonate on many levels, and



Left to right, John Paul Cormier, Tammy Sullivan, Jerry Sullivan, and Stephanie Sullivan singing at a benefit for the Shepard Volunteer Fire Department in Shepard, Texas, on April 24, 1993. (Jack Bernhardt collection)

understanding the Sullivans' ministry depends upon knowing how their songs are framed and interpreted in the many contexts in which they are performed and heard. In this study I will discuss how fieldwork has illuminated for me the meanings of three songs in the Sullivans' repertoire, "Sing Daddy a Song," "Brand New Church," and "Steer Me on the Righteous Pathway"—songs whose meanings derive from personal, familial, and congregational experiences. These songs are central to the Sullivans' ministry in ways that cannot be determined from analysis of their lyrics alone.

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a defining feature of cultural anthropology has been the practice of fieldwork as the primary means of "knowing" other cultures through the interplay of experience and dialogue. Ethnographers "go into the field," living with a host community for an extended period of time, and observe and participate in activities sacred and profane, spectacular and routine. The methodology of *participant observation* allows the ethnographer to share in people's lives as well as to observe them, opening doors to understanding the culture from the point of view of those who live it. Following Clifford Geertz, most ethnographers accept "the proposition that in understanding 'others' . . . it

is useful to go among them as they go among themselves" (Geertz 1985, 624). Participant observation is one of numerous methods of data collection and analysis developed for the social sciences (Berg 1998). But as the strategic method for anthropology, it makes possible the collection of many kinds of data, including oral histories and other forms of dialogue recorded in the context of their cultural setting. Through such intimate encounters with other cultural communities, ethnography's chief contributions to the social sciences have been to increase awareness of cultural diversity and to reveal the meaning of social life as it is held by those who act on and believe in its tenets.

Since 1993 I have carried out fieldwork with Jerry and Tammy Sullivan, a bluegrass gospel father-daughter team from Wagarville, a small rural community fifty-five miles north of Mobile, in Washington County, Alabama. With a gospel lineage of over sixty years, the Sullivans follow the teachings of Unitarian, or Oneness, Pentecostalism, a minority movement that split from the Assemblies of God in 1916, disavowing the doctrine of the Trinity in favor of a belief in Jesus as the sole figure of the Godhead (Reed 1975). The Sullivans attend Victory Grove Church, a modest frame house of God built by Jerry's late brother, Arthur Sullivan, in 1949. I have spent time with the Sullivans in their homes, in their church, and in their bus while traveling with them as they have taken their music and testimonies into small community churches that dot the back roads of the rural South. With the permission of the Sullivans and of the pastors of the churches in which they sang, I was able to tape-record the performances, testimonies, prayers, and other events at each venue on their 1993 and 1994 tours. I have recorded more than fifty hours of oral history interviews with Jerry and Tammy and with family members, ministers, fans, and residents of Washington County and have been given access to family records and heirlooms. These ethnographic documents, along with my field notes and an extensive series of black-and-white photographs and color slides, comprise a rich source of data for analysis and interpretation of the Sullivans' ministry and its cultural profile. My work examines what Turner (1988) calls the anthropology of performance, especially how performance "highlights the social, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of the communicative process" (Bauman 1992, 41).

Throughout most of the twentieth century, anthropologists preferred to work in exotic locales and with preindustrial societies. Today, however, "the field" is commonly located here at home, as ethnographers seek to document and evaluate diversity and meaning in America's subcultures.

Since the 1960s, the practice of “doing” ethnography and writing ethnography have also shifted, from the positivist approaches of anthropology’s formative years to reflexive, dialogic models. An earlier generation of ethnographers referred to their host communities as “informants” and attempted to discover laws of cultural behavior (e.g., White 1949; Steward 1955; Harris 1979), but many ethnographers today regard their hosts as consultants or collaborators (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and are concerned with interpretive perspectives that invest authority in the people whose lives are being documented. This shift in perspective from ethnographer-as-authority to consultant-as-authority is divesting anthropology of its position of privilege and giving voice to members of the community being studied (Clifford 1983). Collaboration may also aid in avoiding misunderstandings, as folklorist Elaine Lawless discovered during the course of her field research with Pentecostal believers in Indiana (Lawless 1988a, 1988b, 1997). As my collaborators, Jerry and Tammy Sullivan share authorship as we work together to craft the story of their lives as musicians and evangelists who work through the medium of bluegrass gospel music.

The importance of religion in cultural systems has been recognized since the earliest days of anthropology, and field studies of religious institutions and communities in the United States constitute a large and important body of ethnographic literature. Despite the abundance of field studies, the press continues to marginalize and sensationalize Pentecostals, often associating them with such rare, though spectacular, spiritual practices as snake handling. And the diversity of Pentecostal worship is sometimes overlooked by academic researchers who write as if the pattern of belief and behavior observed in one community is a model of Pentecostal worship elsewhere. While Pentecostals share precepts of faith, they may differ significantly in scriptural interpretation, behavior, governance, and the conduct of worship. These differences can be observed at the local level, which is the frame of ethnographic fieldwork. For the Sullivans and other members of the Victory Grove community, faith informs everyday existence, and its importance can be heard in their conversations and observed in their day-to-day lives beyond the formal confines of the church.

In *God’s Peculiar People: Women’s Voices and Folk Traditions in a Pentecostal Church*, Elaine Lawless documents her fieldwork with a Oneness Pentecostal community in southern Indiana. Lawless focuses her work on the ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1962), especially on what Pentecostal language reveals of the cultural status of women in her community of wor-

shippers. Because of its setting in Oneness Pentecostalism, Lawless's ethnography provides a comparative framework for this study, which suggests that the Sullivans' world of Oneness Pentecostalism and evangelicalism are more diverse and more complicated than Lawless's work would allow. To demonstrate this overlooked complexity, I will discuss some important differences between the Victory Grove Church community and the one studied by Lawless.

The role of music in religious communities has been the subject of some excellent recent work. Tison (1988) has examined song, speech, and chant in an Appalachian Baptist church, and singing in a Primitive Baptist congregation has been studied by Patterson (1995). Dorgan (1987, 1993) has documented variations in Baptist worship services and the importance of local radio stations in broadcasting musical programs and disseminating information in Appalachia. Glenn Hinson's extensive analysis of a gospel performance in an African American church demonstrates how complex layers of meaning inform and unfold within every moment of a gospel service (Hinson 2000).

Regional studies also provide a valuable source of data for documenting structure and process of cultural traditions in time and space. In his survey of amateur gospel groups in south-central Kentucky, Montell found that between 1900 and 1990 40 percent of 825 known groups in his study area "were familial in their basic composition" (Montell 1991, 180). For the past forty years, family-based bluegrass gospel groups have been an important feature of Alabama's spiritual landscape (Bernhardt 1995). Family-centered gospel groups have a long legacy elsewhere in the South, giving rise to such popular acts as the Lewis Family, the Blackwood Brothers, the Isaacs, and the Happy Goodmans (Jackson 1933; Blackwell 1985; Cusic 1990). These ensembles take their music and their testimonies to communities throughout the South, both as a religious vocation and as a means for earning a livelihood. This colorful and enduring way of life offers a sharply focused lens through which the religious culture of the South, including the often misperceived community of Pentecostal worshippers, may be observed and understood.

Family, Faith, and Community Traditions

Jerry Sullivan, sixty-six, is the second-youngest of twelve children born to J.B. and Hattie Sullivan in Washington County, Alabama. The family's ac-

tive religious involvement began in the early 1940s with Jerry's brother, the late Arthur Sullivan. Arthur suffered from a congenital heart defect, and in 1939 he suffered a heart attack and slipped into a coma. According to Jerry Sullivan, two holiness preachers walked five miles from St. Stephens to the Sullivans' home and prayed overnight for Arthur's recovery. In the morning, Arthur emerged from the coma, recovered, and announced that he would dedicate his life to the Lord. Soon afterward, he helped build a brush arbor in a field near his home and invited preachers to the community to hold services and revivals. He eventually took to the pulpit as a minister in the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus and brought his parents, siblings, and children into the faith. A charismatic preacher, Arthur was often invited to lead revivals and to preach for church communities throughout the South, where he remains a legend in evangelical circles.

In 1949 Arthur Sullivan built Victory Grove Church in Wagarville. Victory Grove serves as the family's home church and is pastored by Arthur's son, Glenn Sullivan. While the doctrine of the Assemblies sets Oneness Pentecostals apart from their Trinitarian counterparts and marks them as a relatively exclusive branch of Christianity, it does not appear to influence the way in which the Sullivans conduct their lives or compose their gospel songs, which are ecumenical in message. Encouraged by Arthur, several members of the Sullivan family learned to play acoustic instruments, and they often accompanied Arthur for street sermons, revivals, church services, and Sunday radio broadcasts. Arthur was preaching from the pulpit one Sunday in 1957 when he suffered a heart attack and died. His work and death are celebrated in "Sing Daddy a Song," one of the family's most popular compositions, written by Jerry Sullivan in 1961. Arthur was Jerry's sibling, but with a twenty-year difference in their ages Jerry regarded Arthur as his "spiritual father." The title of the song refers to that relationship, which is also acknowledged by other members of Jerry's nuclear and extended family. Arthur is celebrated in family lore and, as the song narrates, he is honored with this and other songs at the family's homecomings:

Chorus:

Let's sing a song for Daddy, he left us a long time ago
Though it broke our hearts when God called him he's happy
in heaven I know
His parting words when he left us, 'Remember me when I am gone
When you have a family reunion, please sing Daddy a song

Before Daddy died he taught us many gospel songs that we sing
 And under God's great inspiration, my how his voice would ring
 He never grew tired of helping or correcting us when we were wrong
 When you have a family reunion, please sing Daddy a song

Chorus

(Jerry, Spoken/Chanted) He was workin' so hard when God called him
 tryin' to prepare the way
 For us children to sing for Jesus 'til we leave here and join him one day
 He died while preaching a sermon tellin' the sinful to turn from their
 wrongs
 A great man of God, our Daddy, and we proudly dedicate him this song

Chorus

Following Arthur's death, the Sullivan Family Gospel Singers continued their musical ministry traveling the back roads and serving the backwoods churches from the Florida Panhandle to the East Texas plains. The core band consisted of Arthur's sons Emmett and Enoch, along with Enoch's wife, Margie, although it often featured other musicians, including Joe Cook, Carl Jackson, Marty Stuart, and Jerry's brother, Aubrey. Jerry made a living playing secular bluegrass, rockabilly, and rhythm and blues and had served a two-year hitch in the army before rejoining the Sullivan Family in the late 1950s. He wrote songs and played bass with the Sullivan Family until a near-fatal traffic accident forced him to discontinue his travel with the band in 1977. Two years later, Jerry and his thirteen-year-old daughter, Tammy, whose singing style then echoed Margie's old-time gospel sound, began their career together following the model of backwoods service Jerry had known for more than twenty years. This model forms the foundation of their ministry today (Bernhardt 1995).

The 1993 Washington County telephone directory lists a total of 150 active churches of different denominations. This calculates to one church for every 114 of the county's 17,000 residents (Slater and Hall 1992). (By comparison, the Yellow Pages of the 1992 Nashville, Tennessee, telephone directory lists 871 churches for Nashville and its suburbs. With Nashville's metropolitan area population around 1.1 million, the "Protestant Vatican" offers approximately one church per 1,148 residents.) Victory Grove Church has a relatively small congregation, and attendance at Sunday or Wednes-

day night services may fluctuate from a handful of Sullivan family members and close friends to perhaps forty people. Victory Grove conforms in most ways to the characterization of “folk religion” and “folk church” that Lawless describes for her Oneness Pentecostal community in Indiana: “Folk religion must be recognized as a traditional religion that thrives in individual, independent religious groups that owe little allegiance to hierarchical powers. Each church shares certain tenets of belief and religious experience with other similar denominational religious groups in the geographic area but develops, from its own traditions, its own order of service, protocol, male/female participation, and group identity” (Lawless 1988a, 5).

Dating to its founding by Arthur Sullivan, Victory Grove is a tradition-rich institution awash in family memories and the focus of much family lore. Although the church has received some notoriety outside Washington County in recordings, television broadcasts, and commercial videotapes featuring Jerry and Tammy Sullivan, Victory Grove is a community-based association of Oneness Pentecostal believers that has developed its own traditions and group identity. Originally, Victory Grove was associated with the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus, the Oneness Pentecostal organization that licensed Brother Arthur to the ministry. But concerned that Assemblies’ doctrine was exclusionary, Arthur distanced himself from the organization while he continued to preach its oneness canon. Many of Victory Grove’s mores and customs derive from Brother Arthur’s interpretation of the Bible and his tolerance for ideas and behavior that run counter to the rules of the Assemblies and of other like-minded denominations. These local customs account for much of the difference between Victory Grove and the churches Lawless studied in Indiana, and with Glenn Sullivan minding the pulpit, today’s Victory Grove Church enjoys a large measure of continuity with its past.

Conformity and Conflict in Pentecostal Lifeways

Wednesday, April 21, 1993, we pull out of Wagarville heading for Philadelphia, Mississippi, a trip of about 120 miles on narrow back roads most of the way. Joining us on the bus are Jerry and Tammy, Stephanie Sullivan—Jerry’s nineteen-year-old daughter and the keyboard player on this tour—and John Paul “J.P.” Cormier, a multi-instrumentalist from Nova Scotia who has played with Jerry for about a year. J.P.’s brother, Bob, drives the bus. The band will give a concert at the Church of the Lord Jesus, a Oneness Pentecostal church pastored by Brother Theo Wilson. A carpenter by trade,



Stephanie Sullivan on the bus preparing for a stage performance, April 1993. (Jack Bernhardt collection)

Brother Theo is a robust man of around seventy, who was saved by Brother Arthur and pastored Victory Grove Church following Arthur's death. The event in Philadelphia will be the first during six days on the road and will be followed by a concert in Louisiana and four in East Texas.

Our path turns north onto Mississippi State Road 19, the route taken by three Civil Rights workers the night they were murdered in 1964 and buried in an earthen dam. We share the haunted highway with logging trucks bowed with the heft of pine logs bound for pulp and saw mills, and with glistening chrome tankers rolling toward chemical plants near the cities to the south. Warm winds gust heavily, tossing the bus from side to side. Bob slaps a full nelson on the steering wheel and wrestles the ragged dog to right of centerline.

As we ride, Tammy and Stephanie begin talking about codes of con-

duct enforced in some Pentecostal churches and about how these rules have been a source of conflict for them over the years. They tell me of the time they were about to take the stage in a Pentecostal church in Florida when the pastor stopped them and ordered them to remove their makeup and jewelry. They explain how the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus, inspired by 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, requires men to keep their hair short and forbids women from cutting theirs. And they recount the time when Stephanie was ordered to leave her own church when a deacon took offense that she arrived for services wearing a long shirt and slacks. The Sullivans call these restrictions “bondage” and feel strongly that they inhibit their ministry and impose inessential limitations on their lives.

Their conversation echoes what they shared in an interview four days earlier at their home in Wagarville, where the pride in her sister’s moxie was obvious as Tammy told the tale: “She don’t mind speaking out at these places where there’s a lot of bondage. Like the preacher that told us to take the makeup off before we played, after everybody had already seen us with the makeup on. She said, ‘I’ll take it off. But I’m going to tell you, it’s not really what I want to do. But in order to go ahead and play, I’ll do it. But I don’t think it’s right.’ She told the pastor that!”

Moved by Tammy’s narrative, Stephanie chimes in: “I’ve noticed a lot of places—even at my home church—they have done me that way. Asked me not to wear pants, or don’t do this, don’t do that. I know how it feels when you don’t believe that way, but you have to conform. It’s really not fair. I had on a pair of—it wasn’t blue jeans, it was like black pants with a shirt down to my knees. It looked, I mean, if you’d have saw me from a distance, my shirt was so long it looked like a dress. It was a big shirt. I figured I was so tired and I didn’t want to have to dress up for Wednesday night, so I said I’ll just wear this and go on and sit on the back pew. And oh, the church just . . .”

“One man,” interrupts Tammy.

“One man,” Stephanie confirms.

“Well, see,” Jerry explains, “we lost people at our church because of this.”

“Yeah,” says Tammy. “We had to get all those traditions out of our church. That just had to be done away with so we could be free in our church.”

Getting “those traditions out” of Victory Grove Church meant removing the deacon who objected to Stephanie’s garb. After a period of debate and negotiation, the deacon and his followers left Victory Grove, and the

church continued to worship under Brother Glenn. This incident involving the imposition of a dress code on Victory Grove members is remembered as a defining moment in the history of Sullivan Family worship. The potential it held for destroying the Church that Brother Arthur built is recognized by the family, and it is recounted often by Jerry in testimony relating to the purity of worship as opposed to the taint of fashion. It is also the subject of “Brand New Church,” one of the Sullivans’ most significant and personal songs. Written by Jerry Sullivan and Marty Stuart, the song celebrates the emergence of Victory Grove Church from this potentially destructive episode as the institutional equivalent of a “born-again experience.” The song does not mention specifics of the conflict but concentrates instead on the spirit of freedom and unity that characterizes the church with those proscriptions removed:

We’ve got a brush arbor meetin’ at our brand new church
 Brand new church, brand new church
 Got some old-fashioned singin’ and hell-fire preachin’
 Down at our brand new church

Brother Harley Johnson used to be like a Scrooge
 Be like a Scrooge, be like a Scrooge
 Last night he got so happy he paid for the pews
 Down at our brand new church

Well it’s the same old building but a brand new church
 Brand new church, brand new church
 Preacher put it back together it just took a little work
 Down at our brand new church

Now Sister Sarah Bentley used to lag behind
 Lag behind, used to lag behind
 Now she dances in the Spirit almost all the time
 Down at our brand new church

We’ve got an old camp meetin’ at our brand new church
 Brand new church, brand new church
 We’ve got em rockin’ and a’reelin’ with that old-time feelin’
 Down at our brand new church

Everyone’s invited to our brand new church

Brand new church, brand new church
 Yeah we're all God's children, we want to share it with you
 Down at our brand new church

For the Sullivans, to “be free in our church” would seem to contradict notions of Pentecostals as slaves to theological orthodoxy. Clothing and the ban on jewelry and cosmetics constitute a signaling system (Enninger 1992) that encodes and transmits messages about membership in the Pentecostal subculture. In discussing the formalized dress codes enforced by members of her Indiana community, Lawless writes:

Women always wear dresses, and the dresses they wear are usually of somber colors, fall well below the knees, and have long sleeves and high necklines. . . . Pentecostal women wear no jewelry or makeup and, because they are not allowed to cut their hair, it either falls down their backs or is piled high on their heads in a 1950-ish “behave” hairstyle or pulled back in a severe bun. . . . Similarly, Pentecostal men will have shorter haircuts than other men in the community and will be clean-shaven; it is not uncommon for Pentecostal men to sport a “burr” or “flat-top” haircut. Their clothing, too, is recognizable, as they are most likely to “go to town” in black pants, a white shirt, white socks and black shoes. Even Pentecostal young men are not likely to wear blue jeans for fashion, although they may actually work in them. (Lawless 1988a, 36)

While dress codes for both men and women are an important component of canonical doctrine for members of the Assemblies of the Lord Jesus, it should be remembered that Victory Grove Church has followed its own path since Brother Arthur broke with Assemblies elders in the early 1950s, when he acted against their wishes by inviting non-Pentecostal ministers to preach from the pulpit of his church. In family lore, and among former members of Brother Arthur's congregations, Arthur is remembered as a free thinker who placed the individual's personal relationship to Christ above outward symbols of faith, such as theological orthodoxy and dress. Arthur's position on this important issue is remembered by his sister, Elva Sullivan Powell, who recalls a conversation with her daughter, Faye:

That oldest daughter of mine, she said, “Well Uncle Arthur, I could always ask him what to do.” She told me one time, a branch of holiness—a lot of 'em back then, they didn't want you to cut your hair and they harped on your makeup and all this, and my daughter, she was little and we was

coming up the road one day, and she said, "Mother, when I get big I'm going to be a Baptist, I'm not going to be a Pentecostal." I said, "Why?" She said, "'Cause I want to wear makeup"—she was in the third grade—"and Miss Smith wears makeup and she's a Christian and she's a Baptist, so that's what I'm going to be." I said, "Okay." So she asked Uncle Arthur, "Uncle Arthur, do you think it's wrong to wear makeup and wear shorts?" And he says, "Well baby, I feel like this: How would you feel if you had on your shorts and you had on makeup, and you saw Jesus? What would you do?" And she said, "Run and meet him." And he says, "Well, you've got your answer." (Interview with Elva Sullivan Powell, May 30, 1999)

While Arthur's embrace of scriptural literalism fit squarely within evangelical tradition, his flexibility on matters of personal choice was a source of his charisma and leadership. But while his style of leadership contributed to making Arthur an effective cleric within his faithful circle of followers, it also led to conflict with more orthodox members of his congregation, resulting in the periodic defection of members of his church. Dissolution and reorganization of church membership is a process familiar to many evangelical Protestants in the South. The autonomy of Baptist congregations is well-known, and a similar dynamic has been noted among Pentecostals, where "controversy became an institutionalized means for removing pastors and denominational officials or, failing that, establishing new fellowships. Internal dissension and schism constituted a means for the upward mobility of new leaders, either within existing organizations or through the creation of new ones" (Anderson 1979, 194).

The discriminatory effects of bondage and the dangers of congregational schism are of concern to Jerry and Tammy Sullivan, whose testimony frequently speaks against divisiveness and in favor of an ecumenism that invites all sinners to share in the promise of salvation. Jerry's testimony often precedes the performance of "Steer Me On the Righteous Pathway," a bluegrass gospel song written by Carter Stanley and originally recorded by the Stanley Brothers. Jerry calls the song his "prayer song," and its story line, which sings of a worshipper who is unwanted at church until the congregation receives word from God to accept him, is a familiar story to the Sullivans who have battled similar concerns at Victory Grove Church and elsewhere in their ministry.

While specifics of his testimony differ from audience to audience, Sullivan's message reminds the listener of the importance of not excluding people because of symbolic expressions of cultural membership. The fol-

lowing testimony was given by Jerry Sullivan at Salem Baptist Church in the Cohay Community near Raleigh, Mississippi, on April 16, 1993:

Listen, my friend, when you close those doors and say, "Us four and no more," it ceases to be a church anymore; it's just a building where you have a social gathering. When the love is gone. But the only way that God can speak to this community right here is through His people, is through you. It's through this church. His church has got to go and tell—we've got to go and tell people we love them, and say, "Come on in, regardless how you're dressed. If your hair's to your knees, if it's falling to the floor—whatever it is. If your hair's shaved—Come on in here, Jesus loves you." And you point him to Jesus, and let Jesus fix it. Jesus can fix it! If you don't like the way he's dressed, pray for him, and Jesus will change him! And that's the way it happens. That's what this song is saying here. It's so much a part of our—listen, friend, I don't want to try to tell the other person how to go to heaven. I just want the Lord to keep me by *His* side, and this song says, "Steer me on the righteous pathway—let my eyes be fixed on the righteous pathway—Let me walk, Lord, by *your* side" If we are following Jesus, then we've got nothing to fear. Listen, as Tammy sings.

Conclusion

The Sullivans' ministry is significant not only for its extremely high quality of music, but also for what it tells us about the need for considering local traditions in the analysis and interpretation of evangelical belief and behavior. This is especially important when considering the Sullivans' repertoire, an extensive collection of songs that embody meanings born of personal, familial, and congregational experience. The multiple meanings of "Brand New Church" can be understood in the context of a worship service at the Sullivans' home church combined with the intimacy of oral histories and observations at home and on the road. "Sing Daddy a Song" emerges as the charter for the family's ministry when Brother Arthur's role as "spiritual father" is affirmed in conversation and in testimony during church services and gospel singings. And "Steer Me On the Righteous Pathway" assumes an increased significance when heard against the background of Jerry's testimony and the history of Victory Grove's struggles for direction and control.

The Sullivans' antipathy toward restrictive dress codes runs counter to the beliefs of many Pentecostals, especially those who follow the teachings of Oneness Pentecostalism. One might assume that the Sullivans devised

their attitudes toward cosmetics and clothing to accommodate the requirements of performance. However, the interview with Elva Sullivan Powell shows that the Sullivans' liberal attitudes toward dress are a local (congregational) tradition that originated with the ministry of Brother Arthur Sullivan as early as the 1950s.

Ethnography is not the only approach to understanding culture. It does, however, lend itself to exposing the complexities of cultural systems in ways that other methods of research may overlook. One of its goals is to discover and represent local meanings. In that sense the work reported here represents one phase of my effort to understand the complex system of meanings and relationships that mark the Sullivans' ministry and the diverse community of believers it serves.

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- "Steer Me On the Righteous Pathway." Jerry and Tammy Sullivan, "At the Feet of God" (New Haven 84418–7569–2). [Written by Carter Stanley and recorded by the Stanley Brothers under the title "Let Me Walk, Lord, By Your Side." The original can be heard on The Stanley Brothers, *Angel Band: The Classic Mercury Recordings* (Mercury 314–528–191–2).]

Interviews by the Author

April 17, 1993. Jerry, Tammy, and Stephanie Sullivan, at Wagarville, Ala. On File at Southern Folklife Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
May 30, 1999. Elva Sullivan Powell, at Wagarville, Ala.

Performance Tapes

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“Oh, What a Life a Mess Can Be”

Uncle Tupelo, Bahktin, and the Dialogue of Alternative Country Music

S. Renee Dechert

The story of Uncle Tupelo is well known. In the mid-1980s, brothers Jay and Wade Farrar (guitars) and Mike Heidorn (drums), all high school friends, began playing in the Primitives, a punk band in Belleville, Illinois.¹ That all changed when Wade left the band to join the army in 1987 and former roadie Jeff Tweedy stepped in, leading to the formation of Uncle Tupelo. Jay Farrar and Tweedy shared songwriting and singing duties—Farrar’s material abstract and imagistic, Tweedy’s more straightforward but no less angry in describing the sense of small-town ennui that permeates Uncle Tupelo.² This group released three albums. *No Depression* (1990) and *Still Feel Gone* (1991) are the band’s most overtly punk material, probably because of the band’s classic punk composition and sound—a guitar, a bass, and some drums. *March 16–20, 1992* (1992), produced by REM’s Peter Buck, marked a stylistic shift as Uncle Tupelo worked with additional players and recorded an album that sounded like traditional country with acoustic treatments of classic songs in addition to Tweedy and Farrar originals that replicate traditional songs and themes.

Heidorn left in 1992, so Uncle Tupelo added drummer Ken Coomer (following interim drummer Bill Belzer) and, later, Max Johnston (dobro, fiddle, mandolin) and John Stirratt (bass). With *Anodyne* (1993), Uncle Tupelo’s first major-label disk (the other albums had been recorded on independent Rockville Records), the band returned to the country-rock blend

and released what many consider their best work. Richard Byrne Jr. has done better than most in describing the Uncle Tupelo sound:

It's the indigenous American folk and country music, dragged kicking and screaming to the doorstep of the 1990s. To call them a “folk-rock” or “country-rock” band does them serious injustice. Like its home turf, Uncle Tupelo is perched between the country and folk music to the south and west of Belleville, the urban blues that filtered down from Chicago, and the sizzling Rickenbacker power chords that came across the pond from the UK earlier on in this decade. What makes Uncle Tupelo special is that they've balanced their influences against their innovative songwriting with an enthralling dexterity. (Byrne 1989)

With *Anodyne*, Uncle Tupelo appeared poised for their major breakthrough when, without warning, Farrar left in May 1994. The band broke up, with Farrar starting Son Volt (after urging Heidorn out of retirement) and Tweedy and the others forming Wilco.³

The general critical consensus is that the final two albums represent Uncle Tupelo's best work, a refining of the band's early vision; indeed, there has been a tendency on the part of some critics to see *No Depression* as exciting but “confused.” For example, Mark Athitakis calls the album “a lousy way to start a musical revolution. . . . For all its youthful exuberance, the record was sick with sloppy hooks, clichés, and tentative vocals” (Athitakis 1998). Consider, too, Jeff Tweedy's view of the early material as “overrated.” He continues, “I think you can really hear a young band trying to decide whether or not it wants to be Dinosaur Jr. or Hüsker Dü, or whatever band you want to think of from the time—deciding whether we wanted to be that, or play this country stuff that we really just discovered on our own and came through us kind of naturally” (Blackstock 1996, 110).

In this chapter I would like to take issue with assessments like these and examine *No Depression* at length, exploring Uncle Tupelo's dialogue between country and punk that would take alt.country⁴ in new directions. David Goodman, author of *Modern Twang: An Alternative Country Music Guide and Directory*, has described the disk as “one of the key albums in alt.country history” (Goodman 1999, 309). The direction of Goodman's comment is doubtlessly correct. From *No Depression's* opening blitz, the listener can hear the excitement of a music that appropriates earlier musical forms—traditional country, folk, and punk—and melds them in a purely late twentieth century expression of frustration and rage. I begin by using

the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin to create a basis for considering the notion of “genre” and the dialogue inherent to any genre before applying these ideas to alt.country, a form created by the dialogues of country and punk. I then consider how that dynamic is apparent in the early music of Uncle Tupelo and its significance to alt.country.

Bakhtin, Genre, and Alt.country

Genre and Bakhtin

Traditionally, the tendency has been to think of genres as rigid, static, ahistorical accumulations of formal characteristics, or categories. Nowhere is this more obvious than at the local record store where consumers browse among categories such as country, gospel, heavy metal, rap, and rock. That is, an artist produces a “country” album with certain elements—an emphasis on vocal quality, specified thematic content, expectations of primarily stringed instruments, and so on. So a Dixie Chicks album is “country” because of its vocal timbre and Natalie Maines’s West Texas drawl, its thematic emphasis on relationships, and its reliance on traditional country instruments (e.g., guitar, banjo, fiddle). Similarly, a “punk” album, too, has content standards it must meet, as does a “rap” disk. According to this view, genres are simply a means for cataloging discourse based on similarities.

Initially, this all seems clear enough; however, finding materials to fit these molds is troubling from the start because such an exercise suggests the genre formula really exists when, instead, it is a critical construct, a definition to be superimposed on any text if it is to be classified as, say, a “country” album. The construct falls short because formalist attempts at classification are undercut by the very dynamism inherent in any genre. Discourse—*any* discourse—defies such easy attempts at rigid classification, for it is inherently social, always evolving and changing to reflect shifts in cultural values and norms, each new discourse in dialogue with its predecessors.

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin⁵ suggests an alternate approach to genre. For Bakhtin, genres are dynamic, not static, entities in which texts (e.g., music, books, film) are progressively rewritten and constantly remade in terms of a present reality, and he has pointed out the flexible nature of genres, boundaries that “are not laid up in heaven” (Bakhtin 1981, 33). Bakhtin sees genres as undergoing “novelization,” a process that introduces into accepted narrative patterns voices and themes previously

silenced or ignored, the themes of a new history and a liberalizing or radicalizing trend that challenges both the individual and the social order (30–40). Essential to this is one sense of parody, which Linda Hutcheon defines as “repetition with critical distance that signals similarity at the heart of difference” (Hutcheon 1988, 26). We usually think of a parody as something funny and ridiculing, perhaps a *Saturday Night Live* skit at the expense of a politician. But the parodic can create a much more complex—and not always humorous—relationship, for when artists choose to parody existing forms, they necessarily acknowledge the history of a given work but recast that tradition in a new light. Consider an example from *No Depression*. Here Uncle Tupelo covers the Carter Family classic “No Depression,” a rendition that is parodic in Hutcheon’s sense. It is a “repetition,” for the band is playing a song that has a lengthy history and that is associated with one of the cornerstones of country music; moreover, Uncle Tupelo’s version also has “critical distance” because the band cannot recreate the conditions (social, economic, cultural, personal) that the Carter Family experienced and expressed. That Uncle Tupelo names its album after a Carter Family song reinforces this parodic relationship.

When artists allude to texts that have preceded them, they do more than simply echo the ideas of earlier authors; they also call for a reinterpretation, both of the original work and their own, in light of those allusions, effectively opening a “dialogue” or conversation between their text and those that have preceded it.⁶ For Bakhtin, dialogue is “not a dialogue in the narrative sense, nor in the abstract sense; rather, it is a dialogue between points of view . . . as languages and styles actively and mutually illuminate one another” (Bakhtin 1981, 76–77). With this in mind, consider that when the Carter Family released “No Depression,” they were singing, foremost, about the economy, the Great Depression. But when Uncle Tupelo repeats these words in the early ’90s, “depression” immediately suggest the psychological state of mind rather than the economic situation—and, that is the source from which the power of dialogue radiates. Now the listener has new ways for hearing both the Carter Family version as well as Uncle Tupelo’s; that is, the two songs are engaged in a dialogue, revising each other.

Dialogue brings with it the notion of “voice,” and, indeed, modern art is characterized by its multitude of divergent voices, one constantly intruding on the other. For example, the Carter Family’s voice can be heard at a number of levels. The first is musical. Charles Wolfe has noted that the Carter Family “essentially invented the type of harmony singing used for

years in country music” (Wolfe, 1998, 84). They also moved the emphasis from hillbilly instrumentals to vocals and changed guitar playing. Thematically, as historian Bill C. Malone has written, the Carter Family symbolized an “emphasis on home and stability, a self-image that the country-music industry has carefully cultivated and to which it has resolutely clung (albeit with increasing difficulty)” (Malone 1995, 68). On another level, the voices heard in the Carter Family are those of rural, southern whites articulating the hopes and fears of their time. Present are the literal voices of two women and one man. Sara and Maybelle were the heart of the Carter Family, but their culture did not condone performance by women without the presence of a male, another voice present in this text. That Sara and A.P. ultimately divorced, undercutting the family fantasy demanded by their culture, is yet another voice. And at still another level, the song “No Depression” is the product of oral tradition, though A.P. copyrighted it. However, the very notion of the “oral” tradition underscores the many voices that participated in the construction of this song.

All of these voices emerge and enrich the song, and subsequent versions further complicate this dialogue. This multivocality is the key to the evolution of genres. For example, Jeff Tweedy hears chaos and indecision in early Uncle Tupelo; another way to view this, though, is as multivocality at its finest, the different musical styles engaged in a dialogue that reinterprets both the original texts and Uncle Tupelo’s work and extends to both traditional country and folk music as well as to rock and punk. As Jay Farrar has observed: “You learn from what has come before, but certainly you’re a product of your own time” (Himes, 1998).

To understand more fully the dialogue of Uncle Tupelo’s work, it is important to consider two of the most prominent voices in alt.country, traditional country music and punk rock—and, oddly enough, the shared values of these seemingly incompatible musics.

Country, Punk, and Alt.country— and Uncle Tupelo

Initially, country music and punk rock would appear to share little; after all, what do the twang of Hank Williams and the distortion of Iggy Pop have in common? However, at the philosophical core of country and punk lies genuine kinship. Alt.country provides for this and places these seemingly incompatible musics and attitudes in a dialogue to which Uncle Tupelo contributes.

Country Music

Populism has been a central component of country music (or what would become country music) since the 1890s, a point its founders were well aware of when that music began developing commercially in the 1920s. Although defining terms is an uneasy business at best and a lengthy discussion of populism is beyond the scope of this essay, some general characteristics of populism can be usefully listed: emphasis on individual independence, privileging of family and community, pride in home/region, and reverence for nature (Mackay 1993, 287). Populism's emphasis on the individual—or a “suspicion of so-called ‘experts,’” as Malone (1998) puts it—gave country music much of its appeal. Perhaps Hank Williams has put it best: “When a hillbilly sings . . . what he is singing is the hopes and prayers and dreams of . . . the common people” (Williams 272).

As country music became more popular, its foundations shifted. As a result, its trademark populism became diluted by market expansion, and the audience found it increasingly difficult to identify with this populist heritage. This is now reflected not only in the music but also in the economics of the “Nashville Machine,” which have been well documented: A few studio musicians play on albums, a few producers control the sound, and a few writers contribute much of the material.⁷ In justifying the Nashville tradition of “brisk record-marketing,” producer David Brown (1992) explains, “We’re just trying to make a good record as efficiently as possible.” But in the process, the voice of the individual is lost in the din of a corporate machine growing increasingly generic to meet the consumption needs of an expanding audience.⁸

One of the aims of alt.country is to reengage country music's populist heritage and traditional sound, no longer seen as market friendly, and Uncle Tupelo follows directly in this tradition. The band's connection to traditional country music has always been clear. Jay Farrar remembers, “Country was always around when we were growing up. . . . We'd hear it through our parents, at family gatherings and stuff. But the definition of country we're talking about is definitely not the contemporary Nashville sound” (Fine 1993). Like any teenager, though, Farrar at first rejected this music: “I guess initially you have a slight aversion to whatever your parents are listening to, just from a rebellion standpoint. But it's always been there peripherally, and eventually you kind of come back to it” (Cromelin 1993). That is, Farrar later found in country music not only an art form he had grown to appreciate but also a relationship to his personal past, and these

connections emerge in Uncle Tupelo's music. In a 1993 interview, Farrar explains that he and Tweedy identified with some of country's most well-known performers: "A lot of those guys were pretty subversive characters as far as their personal politics go. Also a lot of that music, the way it was recorded, it has a real quality that you just can't find anywhere else. And you'd be hard-pressed to find a more fucked-up character than Hank Williams. Merle Haggard, too. That's just the kind of music we respond to for some reason" (Durchholz 1993). Farrar's description here is significant in that it not only makes reference to country music's traditional sound that he describes as lost, but also re-interprets two of country music's cornerstones and most well-known populists as "subversive." His use of "fucked up" to describe Williams and Haggard also shows what outsiders they were, that they were real people as opposed to the physically perfect, clean-scrubbed icons that dominate country music today.

Punk Rock

While country music is linked with American populism, punk rock is the child of anarchy.⁹ It may seem a stretch to see similarities between populism and anarchism—and, certainly, they do not fit together with respect to a number of issues—but the central principle of each rests in valuing the individual and the local community's ability to care for its members as opposed to entrusting a larger organization. Consider this statement by the Anarchist Youth Federation, a punk organization: "All government is undesirable and unnecessary. There are no services provided by the state that the community could not provide itself. We don't need anyone telling us what to do, trying to run our lives, harassing us with taxes, rules, regulations, and living high on the hog off our labor" (O'Hara 1999, 71). That is, as John O'Hara writes in *The Philosophy of Punk*, "The faith that Punks . . . place in anarchy stems from a belief in the equality and rights of people" (O'Hara 1999, 100). There is, then, a shared tendency in country and punk to distrust governments and hierarchies.

The belief in the primacy of the individual and the local community manifests itself in a number of ways in punk music. First, in its purest form, the punk philosophy maintains that any group that knows three chords and has an electric guitar, bass, drums, an angry singer, and a do-it-yourself attitude can form a band. Second, the musician is not privileged and separated from the audience. Punk bands play smaller, more intimate ven-

ues and interact with the crowd by such physical actions as crowd surfing and moshing. The arrangement is an egalitarian one, and the expression of artist and audience is more important than slick production or promotion.

This attitude has been a cornerstone of punk since its birth in 1970s New York City, with bands such as the Velvet Underground and Iggy and the Stooges, before emerging in England with the Sex Pistols and the Clash. It then evolved into 1980s “post-punk,” a movement that saw American bands like the Replacements, Black Flag, Hüsker Dü, and the Minutemen taking punk in new directions and ignoring the mainstream rock world of Madonna and Michael Jackson. As a way of ensuring more autonomy, Black Flag, one of the central bands of that period, started the SST label, one of the most successful indie labels of the '80s. Additionally, punk bands toured incessantly, creating a grass-roots support system of devoted fans that further allowed the artists to maintain control over their music. *The Spin Alternative Record Guide* points to the populist tendencies of post-punk: “Hardcore spread all over the country, taking noise to a different, more populist endpoint. . . . [T]he dozens, possibly hundreds of independent labels [that cropped] up to promote this music of extremes made sales figures irrelevant: post-punk’s romantic ideas were free expression and institutional autonomy” (Weisbard 1995, ix). All of this was, effectively, a way for post-punks to flip off the establishment.

Punk has always been about breaking rules—including genre boundaries—and hard-core punk bands began experimenting with country early on. In the late '70s and early '80s, groups like X, the Blasters, the Mekons, and Rank & File explored country, while country bands like the Long Ryders and Green on Red leaned toward punk. The Mekons’ Jon Langford explains: “As I got older, country music started to make sense. . . . People pointed out similarities between country and what the Mekons were trying to do. We were doing angry songs, and it seemed that country and folk were angry, but they weren’t as preachy—instead, they were based on people’s lives. It really ended up seeming that Mekons were playing country music without knowing or liking country music” (Woodskou 1999). Langford is describing dialogue at its finest.

Even with its country heritage, Uncle Tupelo began as a typical post-punk band; then it began to change. Jeff Tweedy describes the evolution: “When Jay and I started playing it was '60s garage covers. After punk rock that was the thing we were really into. We kept tracing it back farther and farther. We thought, ‘punk rock’s okay, but man, this is the real punk rock.’”

But you know, Woody Guthrie was a lot more punk rock than that—he lived it. . . . Because of punk rock my mindset was to dismiss things for a long time” (Saah and Habibion 1994).¹⁰ Interestingly, Tweedy’s focus is on the country elements of punk while Farrar’s comments tend to emphasize the punk elements of country, a point that is apparent in their songwriting, in that Farrar’s contributions are more traditional country songs with punk tinges while Tweedy’s are faster, more pop, with a punk-country ethos. “It wasn’t like we were ever intentionally trying to merge punk and country or anything,” says Tweedy. “That’s just what came out” (Fine 1993).¹

Alt.country

Alt.country’s dialogue with traditional country and punk rock works in two ways jointly, on a philosophical and on a practical level. Philosophically, alt.country adopted the punk DIY (“Do It Yourself”) attitude, a close relative of traditional country’s populism. In addition, the loud, aggressive sound of punk revitalized and recontextualized traditional country themes. Practically, alt.country builds on the idea of indie labels and grassroots scenes, both long missing from country music. By doing this, alt.country artists retained control of their art and were able to make records that resurrected the twang that had come to be seen as unmarketable. This melding, in a truly Bakhtinian way, breaks down the imaginary genre boundaries separating country and punk, leading to a new music as well as a revitalization of traditional musical forms, both country and punk.

With this in mind, consider David Goodman’s definition of alt.country as an “umbrella term for a wide array of performers from the late 1960s to the present who, generally working outside of the Nashville country mainstream, have reinterpreted and enhanced traditional country music styles and themes by incorporating a variety of modern musical and non-musical influences” (Goodman 1999, ix). Goodman’s definition is satisfying for a number of reasons, especially because his understanding of alt.country sees this form as inclusive in terms of musical styles, attitudes, and history. Moreover, his use of “umbrella term” suggests an opening and accepting environment conducive to dialogue, a place where the “variety of modern musical and non-musical influences” engage and reinterpret each other. For Goodman, the primary criterion seems to be that an alt.country band be outside Nashville, though even that suggests a dialogue because when artists react *against* something they are, necessarily, engaging it.¹²

The variety of artists who fall under Goodman’s umbrella is staggering—and the following list only skims the surface. Gram Parsons is generally considered the father of alt.country because of his genre-defying work with the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers, as well as because of his solo material. As Parsons wrote in a 1972 letter, “My feeling is that there is no boundary between types of ‘music.’ . . . I see two types of sounds—good ones & bad ones” (Fong-Torres 1991, 5). Such a statement gets to the heart of alt.country and the artificial nature of genres. Parsons also discovered Emmylou Harris, who not only kept Parsons’s vision alive but also established herself as one of the most significant artists in country music. The ’70s saw the rise of the Flatlanders, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, New Riders of the Purple Sage, Asleep at the Wheel, as well as the Outlaws, who left Nashville’s “progressive country.” With the ’80s came Jason and the Scorchers, Joe Ely, Lone Justice, Steve Earle, Lucinda Williams, Lyle Lovett, k.d. lang, and the Jayhawks (whose style and thematic content were close to that of Uncle Tupelo). And, obviously, the movement continued strongly in the ’90s with artists such as the Derailers, Freakwater, Don Walser, Gillian Welch, Rosie Flores, Whiskeytown, the Backsliders, the Bad Livers, and the Bottle Rockets. And, of course, there are Farrar’s post-Uncle Tupelo project Son Volt and Tweedy’s Wilco.

All of this leads to the question What was so significant about Uncle Tupelo? After all, they were not the first band to fuse country and rock. There are a number of possible answers. The first stems from the band’s exciting and accessible sound as well as its clear positioning of itself in the dialogue of traditional country music and punk. The second answer has to do with timing. As David Goodman observes, Uncle Tupelo was emerging when “punk was declining and when country was becoming more and more dominated by tepid New Country artists. Uncle Tupelo was able to revitalize punk by incorporating traditional country themes, sounds, etc., and they injected new life into traditional country by drawing on punk. They became the most influential because at the time [early 1990s] a lot of punkers were getting older and wanted something a little rootsier/mellow but with an edge. And, for old guys like me, they were a reminder of my experience with country and rock back in the late 60s and early 70s” (Goodman 2000). Moreover, a support system of fans and venues was in place, learned from the post-punks. While the ’80s had seen bands like Rank & File and Green on Red doing similar things musically, these acts were unable to “gel together in a grassroots scene” (Perry 1998). Now, in-

dependent labels were available to record and distribute materials, and, of course, there was the emergence of the Internet. Suddenly fans were not limited to communication with local fans—the scene became global. (In fact, the abbreviation “alt.country” reflects this as does the fact that a central initial gathering place was the “No Depression” America Online folder.)

In an interview on National Public Radio Bill C. Malone has commented insightfully on alt.country’s relationship to contemporary country music: “I think we’re more likely to find dissenting voices and eccentric arguments outside the mainstream, in the—in the style or country music that some people call ‘insurgent’ or ‘no-depression’ music” (Malone 1998). Alt.country musicians and fans would consider this high praise indeed.

The Dialogue of Uncle Tupelo

Hometown, same town blues
 Same old walls closing in
 Oh, what a life a mess can be
 I’m sitting here, thinking of you once again.
 —“Graveyard Shift,” 1-4

Opening *No Depression* are these words from “Graveyard Shift,” sung by a world-weary but stoic Jay Farrar as he describes the despair of “working on that graveyard shift.” Home, that which should provide comfort and security, has instead become a cage with “walls closing in” while a twangy guitar opening moves to the chorus’s angry punk howl of frustration. When Farrar sings, “Oh, what a life a mess can be,” he sharpens the focus on the chaos that is his life, inverting the “life is messy” truism to reinforce the lack of order in his world. The music, swerving in and out of rock and twang, provides a means of escape—albeit a temporary one—from the bleakness and underscores the chaos.

So begins *No Depression*, a remarkably cohesive disk, both thematically and musically. Here Uncle Tupelo explores the themes of alienation and isolation, class, religion, and substance abuse—all standard in traditional country music—within a musical dialogue between country music and punk. Underscoring this is the do-it-yourself fact that the majority of the instruments are played by Farrar, Tweedy, and Heidorn.¹³

The voices heard on *No Depression* are those of the alienated, and their isolation works on two levels. The first source of isolation results from

failed personal relationships: No successful relationships, and not many attempts, are described in *No Depression*. In fact, lovers are only mentioned in a couple of songs. Farrar's persona in “Graveyard Shift” confesses, “I’m sitting here thinking of you once again / Won’t you talk to me?” His isolation is underscored by the nature of his job on the graveyard shift that necessarily separates him from others and gives him an atypical life. When Farrar adds, “There’s much you missed,” he is again showing how his job keeps him separate, apart. Similarly, in the next song, “That Year,” Tweedy asks an old lover who has come to control his personal history, “Give me back that year, good or bad / Give me back something that I never knew I had.” In this case, not only is the singer describing a failed connection, but he’s also admitting to his powerlessness as he asks for part of his life back—something he should, theoretically, already have. After these songs, personal relationships receive no direct attention on *No Depression*, reinforcing the isolation that permeates the album.

A second source of isolation stems from the frustrations of employees trapped in dead-end jobs that dehumanize and exploit. That *No Depression* opens on the graveyard shift is no coincidence; five songs later, Farrar describes his job in “Factory Belt,” a thematic and musical linchpin of *No Depression* and a bruising mix of rote guitar and punk rage. The sound is loud—guitars and drums obscure Farrar’s vocals. Later in the song, Farrar sings, “I’ve heard it said / That after seven years of factory belt / It gets in your head,” suggesting the dehumanizing threat the factory poses. Unlike the “walls closing in” from “Graveyard Shift,” here the trap works from within. Three times in the chorus, Farrar says he doesn’t “want to hurry to the grave without a sound.” That is, he would like the power to articulate his frustration, to be heard before it’s too late. Then he moves deeper into the chorus that concludes with his singing that he’d like to “[g]ive this whole place a rest / Not to ride on the factory belt / Not to ride on the factory belt.” The repetition of these lines is significant in that they, combined with the uninventive, singsong guitar, reinforce the roteness of the singer’s job on the assembly line and, by extension, of his life. But the fact that these lines are repeated six times during the course of the song—and, indeed, are the final lyrics—suggests the futility of protest. The final rote chorus leads into electric distortion and chaos, the noise of the factory, as the sound fades out. The singer cannot escape.

Reinforcing this sense of alienation are those who control the jobs and, by extension, the workers. In “Graveyard Shift” Farrar sings, “Well, a man

in a tie'll bum your dime / 'Fore he'll break his twenty-dollar bill." Clearly the tie can function as a metonymy, representing those who own the companies and whose greed leads them to exploit others. Similarly, in "Factory Belt," Farrar describes "Mad men in suits walking about" and adds, "I'd like to change their point of view someday." In both cases, though, the only power the singer has is in dehumanizing his subjects, reducing them to "ties" and "suits," symbols of wealth and power but also physical signs of how distant their lives are from those of the working class. The singer's lyrics reflect the rage of his music.¹⁴

Uncle Tupelo also criticizes industry with Tweedy's "Train," which finds a twenty-one-year-old man "scared as hell" at 2:15 in the morning, counting ninety-seven flatcars as a train passes. This train is "Loaded down with troop trucks and tanks rolling by"; meanwhile, the car radio plays the Byrds' "Turn! Turn! Turn!" The incongruity is clear as the speaker, who explains that he quit school and is "healthy as a horse," struggles with the fact that he will be one of the first sent off to war because of his social place and inability to hide in college. That is, he will be given the same value as the objects on the flatcars. The music reinforces the song's theme as moments of electric rock change when Tweedy begins singing; the music becomes faster, more rhythmic—literally, the sound of a train. Because the last verse repeats the first one with the train still passing, the singer reemphasizes not only how long the train is but also how likely he is to be drafted. Again, Uncle Tupelo comments on the working class's lack of power and, in the process, transforms the train, a stalwart of country music and, traditionally, a positive symbol of American industry and innovation, into nothing more than an unfeeling harbinger of death.

In the midst of such pervasive despair, Uncle Tupelo begins exploring means for dealing with the isolation and arrives at two options, both popular in country music: substance abuse and religion. As Farrar puts it in the acoustic, anthemic "Life Worth Livin',"

Looks like we're all looking for a life worth livin'
That's why we drink ourselves to sleep
We're all looking for a life worth livin'
That's why we pray for our souls to keep.

Uncle Tupelo takes both options and places them in the context of the late twentieth century.

Two songs, "No Depression" and "Whiskey Bottle," have overtly reli-

gious themes. “No Depression” hinges on the notion of an afterlife, a place where the just are rewarded:

I'm going where there's no depression
 To a better land that's free from care
 I'll leave this world of toil and trouble
 My home's in heaven, I'm going there.

While Uncle Tupelo's acoustic treatment of the Carter Family classic is, stylistically, very traditional, the context in which Farrar sings these old words is so different from that of the 1930s that the message of stoic hope is undercut by the reality of daily life. There is still no sign of the Rapture that will deliver the just, and the suffering continues unabated. Holding out that kind of hope seems little more than naive.

More realistic for Uncle Tupelo's world is “Whiskey Bottle”—and, significantly, the comfort of “Whiskey Bottle” follows the frustration of “Factory Belt.” The music has a soothing, acoustic opening until the singer confesses he's “got to find the closest path to the bar for awhile.” As Farrar speaks the last word, the music transforms, becoming electric and loud for the chorus before quieting again for the verses. In the chorus, Farrar sings, “Whiskey bottle over Jesus / Not forever, just for now / Not forever, just for now.” The lyrics, then, suggest that the speaker will return to the church—this fall off the wagon is a temporary one—but the subtext of the song says something quite different: that this lapse is more than temporary. And Farrar's repetition of the lyric suggests that he's trying to convince himself as well as his audience.

No Depression is soaked in alcohol. “Before I Break” is a vivid depiction of a drinking binge, complete with toast (“Here's to waking up at night / Drunk in a ditch by the side of the road”). It begins with the vow “On liquor I'll spend my last dime,” the words highlighted by the clear, solo guitar and Farrar's voice, before the electric violence kicks in for the rest of the song. The sentence's inversion is also significant, for in English syntax emphasis often favors materials that appear at the beginning of a sentence over words that appear later. Here, Farrar mentions the liquor before himself, illustrating how central it has become to his identity. The singer says that on this Sunday morning he is “[d]rinking like this one might be my last,” a clear indication that alcohol, not the church, provides the more useful salvation. He describes himself, then moves on to tell us that “A worried man drinks a healthy drink / But he drinks nine or ten until he's

done,” thus showing the intensity of the despair. Farrar then repeats half the first verse as well as the vow/chorus as the song moves to its close, reflecting the cycle of his life. Moreover, since the chorus is repeated three times in the course of the song, it is probably safe to assume that the singer and, by extension, the audience have shared three rounds before the song ends. The frenzied sound of the music underscores the singer’s rush to find some kind of comfort.

This theme continues throughout *No Depression*. “Life Worth Livin’” illustrates the universality of the misery as Farrar sings,

And there’s sorrow enough for all,
Just go in any bar and ask
With a beer in each hand and a smile in between
All around’s a world grown mean.

With “Factory Belt,” Farrar describes the “poison” that “You can see . . . on faces from the barstool to the door / You know there ain’t no chance / Our respect is no more.” “Flatness” paints a picture of alcohol as the only reliable companion: “Your hand holds a bottle / Which has become your last only friend.” And the song “So-called Friend” is all about alcohol. These three follow *No Depression*’s first two songs, “Graveyard Shift” and “That Year,” where relationships are shown to be risky and unfulfilling. Alcohol, however, remains faithful.

All these lead to *No Depression*’s final two songs, which bring together the rest of the disk. Tweedy’s “Screen door” suggests one form of salvation: music. The song is an acoustic number with guitar, harmonica, and fiddle, in effect a kind of community jam session among friends that takes place both on a literal and metaphoric front porch. Tweedy describes the seasons passing and then adds, “We don’t care what happens outside the screen door.” Friends come visit, but “down here everyone is equally poor,” so the kinds of power relationships that have so dominated *No Depression* take a backseat. There’s no mention of alcohol or religion; instead, community and music provide an answer. It is a peaceful respite before *No Depression* heads into its final movement.

With “John Hardy,” Uncle Tupelo again overtly taps into the dialogue of country music. “John Hardy” has a rich musical tradition, associated with musicians such as Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, and, again, the Carter Family. In fact, a number of versions circulated, but following the Carter Family’s treatment, everyone from Johnny Cash to Bob Dylan used this

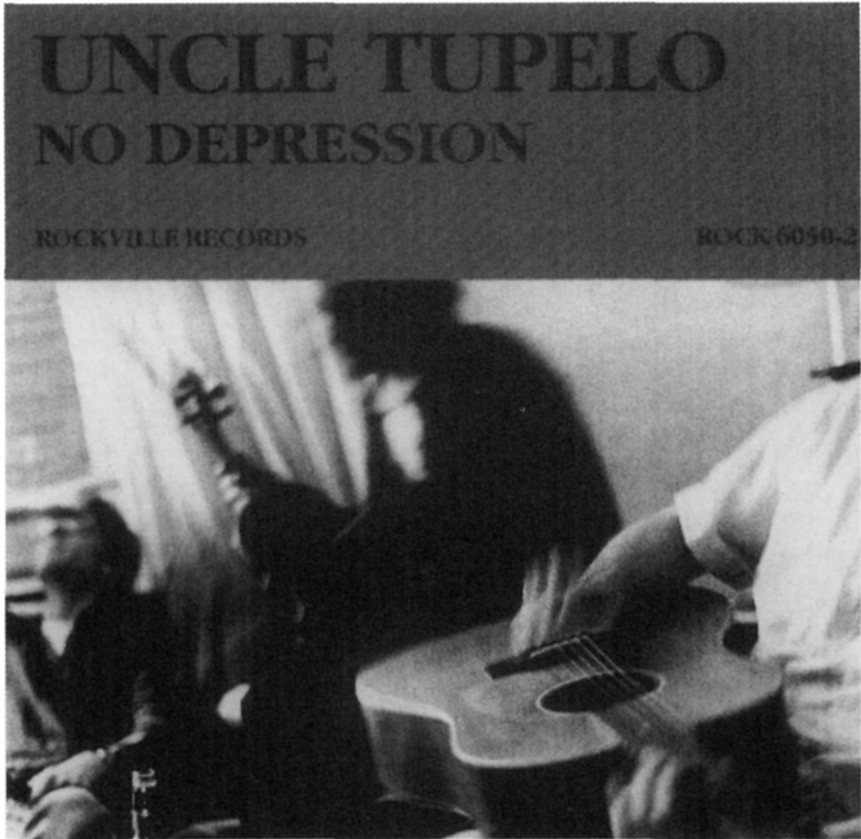
version. “John Hardy” is the story of a West Virginia outlaw who was hanged in 1894 for supposedly killing a man over a twenty-five-cent gambling debt. Uncle Tupelo’s cover, sung by Farrar, begins as a fairly standard country song but grows increasingly electric and punk as John Hardy briefly escapes. His death inevitable, he accepts his fate and prepares to die. On the one hand, this is Uncle Tupelo’s version of a song with a long history, but, on the other hand, the story increasingly becomes Uncle Tupelo’s, placed in the context of the desperation that permeates *No Depression* and of the punk distortion that is late twentieth century. In the context of *No Depression*, one way to see John Hardy is as symbolic of the working class. He is trapped by the authority of the sheriff and inevitably punished in the same way that the working class cannot escape exploitation, but the music points to the need to fight on, to keep trying.

In the world of *No Depression*, then, there is little light. The only hope lies in the music that is timeless, as seen in the history of the title song itself, and that gives anyone a voice, a very punk notion. But the album itself articulates voices often silenced in contemporary country music and stands as a testament to the need to keep fighting to be heard.

Disk Art

The cover art of *No Depression* reinforces Uncle Tupelo’s punk ethos. At a time when most country artists are clearly and flatteringly featured on their album covers, Uncle Tupelo’s cover is black and white, and distorted.¹⁵ The black and white allows for increased emphasis on the shadows or, symbolically, the ambiguity. Note how the center figure is shadowed and nearly indistinguishable, sandwiched between the white of the curtain and the musician in the foreground. Farrar, Tweedy, and Heidorn (presumably) are all featured, but none is distinguishable. The picture appears to be an amateur snapshot, and the images are blurred and distorted—nothing more than the hand in the foreground that plays the guitar. Such a picture decreases the emphasis on individuals and invests in the band and the music. This is clearly a picture that captures a moment of action—thematically consistent with the disk—and the shadows further distort the picture in the same way that *No Depression* offers no happy endings or easy answers. Only two objects—both in the foreground—are clear: a guitar and a beer bottle, two forms of comfort.

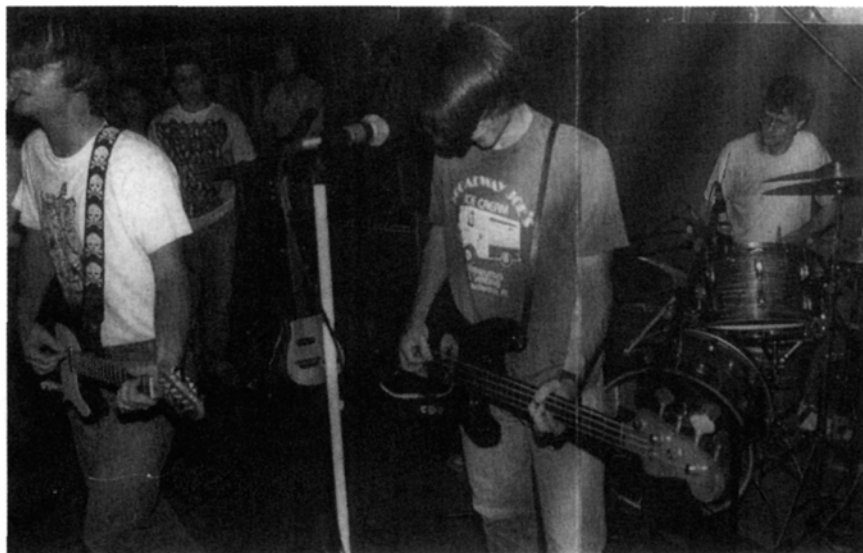
Further de-emphasizing the individual identities of the artists is the large,



Uncle Tupelo's *No Depression* cover. (S. Renee Dechert collection)

functional burnt-orange border that takes up, roughly, one-third of the cover. A plain font displays the disk's artists and title—a title that immediately foregrounds the voice of the Carter Family—against the punk ethos of the picture. But the world of the Carter Family as symbol of early country music is placed against the late twentieth century reality of distortion and chaos.

The disk's picture of Uncle Tupelo is equally DIY. It is a live snapshot of the band, and while it is clearer than the cover picture, Uncle Tupelo remains equally obscured. Again, the picture is black and white, and, again, none of the band members looks at the camera. Farrar's and Tweedy's hair hides their faces. Farrar, Heidorn, and Tweedy wear jeans and T-shirts, and there is no flashy set. Instead, Uncle Tupelo stands on a concrete floor amid



Farrar, Tweedy, Heidorn in concert. (S. Renee Dechert collection)

their fans, another punk element because punk is about abolishing distinctions between musician and audience. The central focal points are the microphone, drums, and guitar; again, the emphasis is not on the performers but the music.

Closing Thoughts

No Depression places the listener on the floor with the fans in the picture, close to Uncle Tupelo's music that brings together a myriad of voices: the Carter Family and Black Flag, Leadbelly and the Replacements, Hank Williams and Dinosaur Junior, Woody Guthrie and Gram Parsons, the Great Depression and Reaganomics, sin and salvation, thrash and twang. We are all, in effect, behind the screen door. Such is the nature of dialogue.

Notes

1. Belleville, a depressed, blue-collar suburb with a population of 40,000, is a half-hour southeast of St. Louis and has seen its share of hard times. In fact Farrar and Tweedy shared an apartment down the street from the closed Stag Brewery. Durchholz notes that an early Uncle Tupelo song was the very punk "I Drink Stag,"

a song with an entire lyrical content of “I drink Stag / I drink Stag / I drink Stag / Yaaaaahhhhh!”

2. Bill Wyman’s description bears repeating: “Each man brought a distinct sensibility to the band. Tweedy has the sweeter instincts. . . . But Farrar, with his big, indignant voice and pained tone, gives the early records their soul. His trademark move is a dead stop, a sharp intake of breath and a clenched-teeth bash at the nearest guitar; the move—part show, part genuine outrage—captures both his natural flair for drama and an implicit need for catharsis through rock” (Wyman 1997, 774).

3. When asked why the band broke up, Farrar says, “It just kind of ran out of gas,” while Tweedy answers, “Jay quit” (Pemberton 1999). It should also be noted that none of Uncle Tupelo’s albums sold more than 50,000 copies (Himes 1998).

4. What I will refer to throughout this essay as “alt.country” has been given a variety of labels such as “Americana,” “Insurgent Country,” “Cow-punk,” “No Depression,” and “Y’allalternative.” I have chosen *alt.country* for three reasons. First, it appears to be the most popular term; second, it underscores the evolving nature of dialogue; third, this abbreviated spelling reflects its use and popularity on the Internet.

5. While Bakhtin’s writing here focuses on the novel, his ideas are equally applicable to other forms of discourse, such as music.

6. This repetition is what Bakhtin describes as “heteroglossic dialogue.” “Heteroglossia” is “that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions” (Bakhtin 1981, 428). This idea is closely related to the “heterophonic,” the musical concept of multiple voices interpreting the same idea in various ways.

7. Jeff Tweedy has pointed out how this process, literally, silences voices: “The biggest tragedy in Nashville is that the same ten or twelve songwriters write all the songs. There’s no diversity. That’s music that’s stale; there’s no cross-pollination, no nothing, no outside influences. It’s like a vacuum” (Saah and Habibion 1994).

8. Indeed, Malone fears that populism has been lost in contemporary country: “I think we’re very much in danger of forgetting this older populist, radical tradition, and the fact that [it] really defines country music more than anything else, the fact that it was a working man’s music, and that it expressed the ideas of working people, their values, both good and bad, throughout their history” (Malone 1998). It is not my intention here to judge whether this is a positive or negative change; rather, it is a reflection of this genre’s evolution. Alt.country’s intent, at least in part, is to reclaim this populist voice.

9. This is not to imply that all punk rock has an overtly political agenda; however, this philosophy is common among punks.

10. Elsewhere, Tweedy notes, “Folk and country was more poetic than punk,

but it had the same spirit. It was saying the same thing” (Ali 1999). Similarly, Mike Heidorn has said, “We had bought every punk-rock record there was, and then all of a sudden we listened to Hank Williams sing, and that was like true punk rock. . . . He was a total loner, outsider” (Appleford 1996).

11. Uncle Tupelo’s cover of Iggy and the Stooges’ “I Wanna Be Your Dog” is an alt.country treat, as the punk classic is recast to feature a banjo.

12. While the label “alt.country” or “alternative country” suggests a dynamic hybrid of alternative rock and country, alt.country has been subject to attempts at formalist categorization. For example, Grant Alden, co-editor of *No Depression* magazine, generally considered the ex-officio publication of alt.country, recently wrote of the evolution of alt.country: “Many of the musicians whose work initially inspired us have followed their muse elsewhere; more than a few have felt unnecessarily hemmed in by the description we placed ironically beneath our first masthead, ‘alternative country.’ Some of them, as [Co-editor Peter Blackstock] reminds me, will drift back; some won’t” (Alden 2000, 2). What Alden suggests is an understanding of alt.country as a category with musicians “drifting” in and out—despite his comment that these artists may have felt “hemmed in by” the magazine’s own ironic definition. Similarly, John Brandon, *Alt-Country Pages* editor, sees genres as limited, even subject to exhaustion: “While Wilco and the Old 97s leave the genre, perhaps artists like Julie Miller and Peter Bruntnell will help re-define it for the next decade—before it comes to a final, bitter end” (Brandon 2000). Such comments suggest little understanding of dialogue. Alden and Brandon see genres as accumulations of static characteristics rather than as dynamic and constantly changing; so, for these critics, when Wilco makes a pop disk like *Summer Teeth*, they have left the alt.country fold. Unfortunately, they never consider how Wilco enriches and enlarges alt.country with such innovation. In effect, they ignore the heteroglossic dialogues that made alt.country so exciting to begin with and that keep it vital. While these critics, on the one hand, see genres as rigid, Goodman’s umbrella, on the other hand, invites and encourages artists, styles, and experimentation. Ironically, both Tweedy and Farrar have commented on how frustrating they find critics’ need to categorize their music.

13. The liner notes point out that Farrar plays guitars, banjo, harmonica, Nashville guitar, mandolin, and fiddle; Tweedy contributes bass and acoustic guitar. Heidorn adds drums and cymbals, and Rich Gilbert, Paul Kolderie, and Dean Slade also make minor musical contributions. This is clearly in contrast to Nashville’s use of studio musicians.

14. The academy fares no better. In “Outdone,” Farrar sings, “They say, ‘Take a look around’ from the college view / First take a look around past the college grounds / And be aware of more themselves than they care.” Uncle Tupelo, then, questions the intellectualization that seldom leads to practical change and that, instead, remains safe in the Ivory Tower—another form of elitism.

15. Compare this with Bruce Feiler’s description of a Wade Hayes album cover

shoot that required two months of planning, the work of numerous professionals, agonizing over whether or not Hayes should wear a hat, and more than \$10,000. This underscores Feiler's point that "in country music, it's all about identifying with the artist" (128). Clearly, *No Depression* ignores this standard.

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Come Prepared to Stay. Bring Fiddle

The Story of Sally Ann Forrester, the Original Bluegrass Girl

Murphy H. Henry

Sally Ann Forrester occupies a special place in the annals of country and bluegrass music. Because she played with Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys from 1943 until 1946, she is, by definition, the first woman in bluegrass, the original bluegrass girl. In addition to her long tenure with Monroe, she also played on his first Columbia recordings. Those eight sides, recorded in 1945, include “Kentucky Waltz,” Monroe’s first big hit “in terms of publicly documented sales”¹ on which the accordion, the instrument Sally Ann played, was prominently featured.

Yet, until now, there has been little interest in the “original bluegrass girl.” The history of bluegrass music has, for the most part, largely dwelt on the achievements of men. For example, almost all the men who played in Bill Monroe’s earliest bands have been studied in article and book²: Tommy Millard, Pete Pyle, Jim Shumate, Clyde Moody, Chubby Wise, Stringbean, Howdy Forrester, Art Wooten, Tommy Magness, and Cleo Davis, “the original Blue Grass Boy.” Cousin Wilbur has written a book. Tommy Millard and Cleo Davis make the list even though they were with Monroe for only short periods of time and did not record with him. Sally Ann Forrester was with Monroe for over three years and cut eight songs with him. Why no article, until now, on “the original Blue Grass Girl?”

I do not think I would be far off base if I answered this question by saying that until now nobody thought she was important. Not only was she

a woman; she was a wife, the wife of Howard “Howdy” Forrester, who played fiddle with Monroe, and she played a non-bluegrass instrument, the accordion. But she was there, playing not just with any band, but playing with the Father of Bluegrass, Bill Monroe, and his Blue Grass Boys—for three years.

Sherrie Tucker, who writes about “all-girl” jazz bands of the 1940s, says that jazz scholars are “critically reevaluating some of the timeworn patterns of how mainstream jazz histories have been written.” She says, “The conventional standards for what counts as jazz history make it very difficult to construct historical narratives which include all-women bands. . . . Because women who played instruments other than piano were seldom the ‘favored artists’ of the ‘superior genes,’ and because they were hardly ever recorded, they’ve had little access to the deceptive ‘coherence’ of mainstream histories.”³ Even though Sally Ann Forrester was a member of predominantly male band, not a marginalized female group, and did indeed record, the idea remains the same. Women have not generally been among the “favored artists” that bluegrass scholarship is devoted to exalting. Because women were often wives or girlfriends who played bass or guitar (instead of the flashier banjo, mandolin, or fiddle), their contributions to bluegrass have been largely overlooked by scholars, writers, amateur bluegrass historians, and fans. In fact, many people cling to the belief, perhaps unconsciously, that after its creation in the ’40s, “bluegrass music remained an almost completely male domain its first twenty-five years.”⁴ But is that true? Has anybody seriously looked? Margie Sullivan was there; Miggie, Janice, and Polly Lewis were there; Patsy, Donna, and Roni Stoneman were there; Peggy Brain was there, as were Wilma Lee Cooper, Gloria Belle, Bessie Lee Mauldin, Juanita Sheehan, Vivian Williams, and Vallie Cain. They were all there, even though no one until now has seen or looked for them. And these are the easy ones to find—the ones who recorded. Tucker also points out that “the jazz historical record is too reliant on the very small portion of music which gets made into jazz records.”⁵ Much the same could be said about bluegrass music. How many other women are out there about whom we still know nothing? How would knowing their stories change the historical record of bluegrass?

If the historical record has been ominously silent about the presence of women in the early days of bluegrass, no one could fail to notice the influx of female players into the music in the early ’70s. I was one of those women. I started playing bluegrass professionally in 1972, when I was in college, as

the bass player for Betty Fisher and the Dixie Bluegrass Band, one of the first bluegrass bands to be led by a woman. Eventually, I “graduated” (as I thought of it) to the banjo and started a band, Red and Murphy, with my husband Red. We continue to play together today, although we no longer travel as much. You can see from all this that my interest in women in bluegrass is deep-seated and of long duration, because, to borrow from an old joke, “I are one.”

In 1998, when I began researching Sally Ann’s life, I found almost nothing written about her. I nearly despaired before making contact with Bob Forrester, her son, who not only granted me an interview but also generously agreed to lend me his mother’s scrapbooks and photograph albums, two high school yearbooks with autographs, autograph books from grade school and high school, letters, and the briefcase she carried when she was handling the money for Bill Monroe and that contained some old pay stubbs. These materials proved an invaluable resource. In fact, unless otherwise noted, all biographical information comes from Bob Forrester and these memorabilia that his mother kept, which are still in Bob’s possession. Also, unless otherwise noted, all quotes from letters come from material in the possession of Bob Forrester and are quoted with his permission.

I was also extremely lucky that Joe Forrester, Bob’s uncle and Howdy’s brother, who played for years with Howdy and Sally Ann, was, at age eighty, still sharp as a tack and more than willing to answer any and all questions. Recently, I made contact with James Gilbert “Goober” Buchanan, ninety-two, who played with Sally Ann and Howdy on Jamup and Honey’s 1942 *Grand Ole Opry* tent show. Goober helped answer some questions about Sally Ann’s and Howdy’s roles in those performances. Unfortunately, by the time I began my quest for information, Sally Ann was in a nursing home in the advanced stages of Alzheimer’s disease. Because I was unable to talk with her, some important questions about her life remain unanswered: When did she start playing the accordion and why? When were she and Howdy hired by Bill Monroe? What was it like to be on the road for three years with the Blue Grass Boys?

If I had a private agenda for my research, it was to prove that Sally Ann was not hired by Bill Monroe simply because she was Howdy Forrester’s wife or, as rumor had it, to hold his place in the band when he was called away into military service. I found out that Sally Ann was a talented musician in her own right, a vivacious performer who, no doubt, was an enormous asset to Monroe’s show.

Historian Antoinette Burton has said about women's history that "chief among the tasks of the first generations of women's and feminist historians was to restore women to History (capital H) so that they could be seen to have been actors in the past, subjects of their own making. . . ."6 I believe that to understand the broad history of bluegrass, we must recover the stories of women players and add their voices to the mix. We must begin to view women not as wives or girlfriends but as bluegrass musicians who were "subjects of their own making." Once we know their stories, we can begin to evaluate their impact on the music. Then, perhaps, we can begin to understand that bluegrass was never exclusively a male province, that women have always been a part of bluegrass. As Sally Ann's life proves, we were there from the beginning.

Sally Ann Forrester

Like many bluegrass musicians, Goldie Sue Wilene Russell (known later as Sally Ann Forrester, "Sally Ann" a stage name Bill Monroe was to bestow on her) began playing music at a young age. Unlike many early bluegrass players, however, her musical background was western flavored. Born December 20, 1922, in Raton, New Mexico, Wilene, as she was called, was raised as an only child in Avant, Oklahoma, by her maternal grandparents, George and Sudie Robbins. As Charles Wolfe and Patricia Hall have pointed out, many women in old-time music were introduced to music by their fathers.⁷ Wilene's earliest musical influence was probably her grandfather, her "Daddy George," who played the fiddle. A photograph from her early teens shows her holding a ukulele and standing beside her grandfather, who is holding a fiddle. The women in Wilene's family were obviously encouraged to participate in music: her mother Vye (1905–1926) played piano and violin and her mother's sister Goldie (1903–1923) also played piano.

Because Avant was near Tulsa, her grandfather took Wilene to the dances that Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys put on at Cain's Academy in Tulsa, a mere thirty-mile bus ride away. Wilene loved those dances, and the Playboys became one of her favorite groups. In her high school autograph book a friend wrote, "Kid, I'll always like the 'Play-boys' because they mean so much to you." Another jokingly refers to them as "those grand fellows the Plowboys."

Wilene's grade school autograph books testify to the place of music in her life. In her sixth grade autograph book (1933–1934), on the page for "Social Activities" under the heading "music" she wrote "piano, guitar, vio-



Sally Ann Forrester (right) when she was still known as Wilene “Billie” Russell. The two women on the left were probably part of “The Young Maids” from the *Saddle Mountain Roundup*. (Joe Forrester collection)

lin.” In the category “favorites,” she wrote “piano.” By seventh grade, the guitar was her favorite. She also participated in the school orchestra and was proficient enough on the violin to play a solo, “Humoreske” [sic], at her eighth grade graduation.

Bob Forrester emphasizes the fact that his mother “came from very humble beginnings.” But in spite of being poor, her grandmother Sudie somehow managed to send Wilene to the high school academy at Southwest Baptist College (SWBC—now Southwest Baptist University) in Bolivar, Missouri, for two years of high school. It remains unclear, however, why Wilene went out of state to high school or from where the money came to send her. Wilene entered SWBC in September 1937 when she was fourteen. In addition to her regular high school courses, each semester she also participated in either glee club, orchestra, or piano lessons.⁸ She also took voice lessons. While at SWBC she began to call herself Billie, the name her family and friends would know her by. At the risk of some confusion, we will now begin to refer to Wilene/Sally Ann as Billie.

From the fifty-eight people who signed her autograph book, we begin to get a real sense of Billie's love for music and of her ability to entertain her friends with her playing and singing. The phrase "I like to hear you sing" comes up so many times it sounds like a broken record. "Dear Billy," reads one entry, "Even if everybody says so too, I must say that I love to hear you play guitar and sing. Of course . . . your piano playing is marvelous, too." Another signer wrote, "I'll always remember you as the Hillbilly singer of Southwest." Music seemed to be a natural part of her everyday life. The 1939 yearbook includes a picture of Billie and a girlfriend with their guitars. She was also part of a violin quartet that played mostly classical music and traveled the area giving performances at high schools to encourage students to attend SWBC.

One of the most intriguing autographs indicates that Billie may have been on the radio before she entered SWBC. On April 17, 1938, Margaret Wise wrote, "Please don't forget to let me know when you go back on the radio." Another autograph reads, "I'll be expecting to hear you on the radio sometime this summer." One cannot help but wonder what these tantalizing remarks refer to. Was Billie already playing on the radio? Bob Forrester thinks that Billie might have had her own solo spot on a radio program.

Interestingly enough, one of the artist courses offered at SWBC during the 1937–1938 school year featured a five-piece ensemble called the Continental Gypsy Ensemble, which included a piano accordion played by a woman, Gloria Romano. Romano not only played with the whole ensemble; she had two solos on the program, one of which was "Gypsy Folk Songs." Undoubtedly, Wilene saw this production and possibly tucked this performance away in her mind.

Billie was apparently planning to return to SWBC in the fall of 1939 because many autographs mention "looking forward to seeing you next year." But, as often happens, fate had other plans. In May 1939, after Billie had completed two years at the SWBC academy, she returned home to Tulsa, where Sudie was now living. She was sixteen. Soon she would be meeting her future husband, Howard "Howdy" Forrester, seventeen, a fiddling farm boy from Tennessee. He and his brother Joe, twenty, had just arrived in Tulsa with Herald Goodman and the Tennessee Valley Boys (which included Georgia Slim Rutland, Fiddling Arthur Smith, and Curt Poulton) to play on radio station KVOO and start a barn dance.

The *Saddle Mountain Roundup*, which was Herald Goodman's idea, officially began on April 1, 1939.⁹ Obviously, when the show began, Billie was

still at SWBC. At some point, however, she auditioned and won a spot on the show playing her guitar and singing with the Tennessee Valley Boys backing her up. By June 17, 1939, Billie was a regular member of the Saddle Mountain Roundup.¹⁰ She was billed as the “Little Orphan Girl,” a stage persona created by Goodman who drew on the fact that she was “really and truly an Orphan Girl.”¹¹ Our first glimpse of Billie in her new profession is from the *KVOO Lariat*, June 1939, a newsletter devoted to the *Saddle Mountain Roundup*. In a column titled “With the Round-up Folks,” which provides a listing of all the *Saddle Mountain Roundup* players, we find her listed fourth: “The Orphan Girl and the three Fiddlers, a new act, Singer and Yodeler. She is Wilena [sic] Russell a member of the Famous Russell Family.” When asked about the “Famous Russell Family,” Joe Forrester says that was probably some of Herald Goodman’s inventive publicity. Two of the three fiddlers were Howdy and Slim. From a publicity photo, we know that the third fiddler mentioned in the column was Billie and not Arthur Smith, who was no longer listed with the band or the *Roundup*.

A publicity photo of the Little Orphan Girl taken at the same time shows her in a cowgirl outfit, complete with a light-colored western hat, a knotted neckerchief, a fringed cowgirl skirt, and western boots. She is playing a small-bodied arch-top Gibson guitar with a celluloid fingerboard. Her outfit hardly bespeaks “orphan girl.” It was, however, in keeping with the western that country music was adopting. In Oklahoma, this outfit was perhaps not as outlandish as it would have been back in the hills of Tennessee.

According to Charles Wolfe and Patricia Hall, singer/guitarist Billie Maxwell, billed as the Cow Girl singer, may have been the “first female recording artist to utilize the cowgirl image which was to become so dominant in the 1930s.” Billie Maxwell recorded in El Paso, Texas, in 1929 and may have been from New Mexico.¹² It was Patsy Montana, however, who popularized the cowgirl image in 1935 with her hit “I Want to Be a Cowboy’s Sweetheart,” county music’s first million seller by a female artist¹³ (and a song in the Orphan Girl’s repertoire). As Bufwack and Oermann note, with this “cowgirl image—the strong, good-humored saddle pal—Patsy Montana gave female country performers their first new solo style. The cowgirl was an alternative to the shy country sweetheart. . . . This . . . image was soon adopted by dozens of other Depression-era females.”¹⁴ Of course, the cowgirl outfit does not seem to fit the stereotypical image of a Depression-era orphan girl, but it must have worked because Billie carried this stage persona with her to her next several jobs.



Left to right, Chester “Chuck” Penn, Paul “Red” Penn, Sally Ann Forrester, Howdy Forrester, and Joe Forrester dressed as “Lespedeza,” circa 1940. (Joe Forrester collection)

It is interesting to contrast the stage attire of the Little Orphan Girl with that of Rachel Veach, who played the banjo with Roy Acuff and the Smoky Mountain Boys and Girls. (Rachel would become a close friend of Billie’s later on.) Interestingly enough, Rachel joined Roy’s group on April 1, 1939, the same day the Saddle Mountain Roundup started. She wore a “typical country dress” of “red and white checked gingham” complete with high button shoes, white stockings, and bloomers showing beneath her dress. (They matched her dress in one picture). She also blacked out one tooth.¹⁵ The hayseed, hillbilly image was certainly in keeping with how George D. Hay had envisioned (and re-dressed and renamed) all the performers, both men and women, on WSM’s *Grand Ole Opry*.¹⁶ When Rachel finally got a new costume, a “pretty blue dress that is perfection with her red hair,” it got a big mention in *Minnie Pearl’s Grinders Switch Gazette*.¹⁷

The *Saddle Mountain Roundup* lasted only a year. For whatever reason, Herald Goodman was starting to play theaters, not big barn dance-type venues, and, according to Joe Forrester, he was “trimming the show down.” By March of 1940, he had let the Tennessee Valley Boys go, but he allowed them to keep the name. The boys headed down to Wichita Falls, Texas, to try to find work. Billie did not go with them; she remained in Tulsa, possibly still performing on KVOO.

By the time Howdy left, he and Billie already had an “understanding.” As he said in a letter, “. . . don’t you tell anyone I’m homesick or don’t say anything about our setup.” On May 31, 1940, Howdy sent a telegram from Wichita Falls to Miss Wilene Russell: “Come prepared to stay. Bring fiddle. Howard Forrester KWFT.” “And she did,” Bob Forrester said, “for forty-seven years.”

On June 29, 1940, Billie and Howdy were married by a justice of the peace in Walters, Oklahoma, just across the line from Wichita Falls. Billie was seventeen; Howdy was eighteen. Billie then joined the Tennessee Valley Boys at KWFT in Wichita Falls, performing once again as the Little Orphan Girl. For the next year, Howdy, Billie, and Joe played together at several different radio stations, including WDZ in Tuscola, Illinois, and WFAA in Dallas. Joe received his draft notice in May 1941 and moved back to Nashville. Howdy and Billie continued to play music in Texas until Pearl Harbor was bombed, when they, too, moved back to Nashville, where they lived with Howdy’s mother, Emmie, and his brother Clyde. There Howdy signed up with the navy, contingent on receiving his draft notice. That came on August 8, 1942.¹⁸ Howdy went into service in the spring of 1943.¹⁹

It has been difficult to figure out exactly what Billie and Howdy were doing musically from December 1941 until the spring of 1943. Two extant postcards mention Howdy and the *Grand Ole Opry* (the second reference by implication). Writing on one card Joe Forrester asks, “Is Howard going to be on the *Grand Ole Opry* Saturday night?” On the other card friends in Tulsa say, “Hi, Howdy, We heard you Saturday night. . . .” Originally, I thought this meant Howdy was playing with Bill Monroe. But Goober Buchanan (who was there) says that Art Wooten was playing fiddle with Monroe on Jamup and Honey’s 1942 *Opry* tent show. So Howdy could have been playing with someone else on the *Opry* or perhaps just filling in for a missing Art Wooten. We simply do not know.

Based on Goober’s recollections, I think that it is likely that both Billie and Howdy worked the winter months of 1942 on the schoolhouse circuit

with Jamup and Honey. I can only assume that they performed in much the same fashion as they had on radio stations in Texas—Howdy with his fiddle, Billie with her guitar, both singing. During the rest of 1942 they worked on Jamup and Honey's *Grand Ole Opry* tent show, which started around the end of March.²⁰ According to Goober, interestingly enough, "They [Jamup and Honey] took Howdy to get Billie." This statement bears closer examination, being the opposite of what most people believe about Howdy's and Billie's hiring, that is, that Billie was hired because of Howdy.

Goober says that he and his wife, Dixie Belle, were performing on WHOP in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, when Jamup and Honey and Howdy and Billie were on the road to the Princeton Theater.²¹ Apparently, they were listening to WHOP on the radio because when Billie heard Dixie Belle sing, she started singing along and said, "We could make a good duet." Jamup and Honey had been looking for a female duet for their upcoming tent show (which currently had no women) to replace the Williams Sisters (Mildred and Velma), who had toured with them in 1941 but were not available for 1942. So Jamup and Honey stopped by the radio station and, as Goober said, "hired both of us," meaning that they took him, too, even though it was Dixie Belle they wanted.

Bill Monroe was also a part of Jamup and Honey's 1942 tent show, but, according to Goober Buchanan, Art Wooten, not Howdy, was playing fiddle with Monroe at the time. Goober remembers that "Art had built an outfit to play three instruments at once. He built a box with guitar and banjo that he worked with his feet." Goober said Art would play a number on this contraption and fiddle during Monroe's portion of the program. On the one hand, therefore, Howdy was not playing with the Blue Grass Boys at the start of the tent show season. On the other hand, if Howdy and Billie had both worked with Jamup and Honey through the winter months, it would make sense that Jamup and Honey would have wanted to hire both of them.

According to Goober, though, it was Billie and Dixie Belle who performed on the main show, attired in matching dresses and billed as the Kentucky Sweethearts. Billie played guitar and sang harmony; Dixie Belle played bass and sang the lead. Goober says they sang with the Blue Grass Boys, so I assume this means that the Blue Grass Boys backed them up. Goober and Howdy played on what Goober called the "after show," a short, thirty-minute performance held right after the main show. The audience paid an extra 25 cents to see this show. Howdy played fiddle and sang with Tommy Thompson, and Goober did his Grandpappy comedy routine. The

players from the main show also appeared again on the after show, doing a different selection of songs. But clearly, if this was the arrangement, Billie had a higher billing than Howdy.

So when did Howdy join the Blue Grass Boys? My guess is that sometime in 1942 Art Wooten left Monroe's band to go into service and that Howdy, who was already on hand, was tapped to take his place. The pictures of Howdy with the Blue Grass Boys all include Stringbean, who did not join the band until April or July of 1942.²²

Dixie Belle and Goober left the tent show around the first of June when Goober was called into service. Billie, however, remained with the show. Goober imagines that she continued to sing with Monroe's band as a solo performer. In a letter in which Uncle Dave Macon tells Dixie Belle and Goober he is sorry they missed seeing the tent show in Little Rock (November 1942), he says, "Billy, Howdy, and I worked on two more weeks with the show, after Jamup and Honey's time was out. Then I worked on with Bill Monroe until the close of the season, which was December 18th."²³ Howdy continued to work with Bill Monroe until he went into the navy in the spring of 1943. Although Billie was working with "the show," she is not included in the publicity pictures of Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys, so we have to assume she was not yet a member of the band. (At this point, we will begin to refer to Billie by the stage name Bill Monroe preferred, Sally Ann.)

Bluegrass fans and historians have for a long time speculated about why she was in the band. Is this speculation provoked by the presence of an accordion (not now considered a bluegrass instrument) or by the presence of a woman in the band? Would this speculation occur if the accordion player had been a man? No questions of this sort seem to arise concerning the harmonica player, Curley Bradshaw, who was with the band in 1944 and 1945. Today, the harmonica is not considered a bluegrass instrument, but no one questions (or smirks about) Curley Bradshaw's appearance in the band.

Behind this question of why Sally Ann was in the band seems to lurk the larger question, Why would Bill Monroe hire a woman? This question is rooted in the belief by some that bluegrass is "man's music," as one recent author put it "a ferocious, hell-bent man's music."²⁴ But in 1943 a number of women performed what was still being called "hillbilly" music, which is what Monroe was playing at the time. (The designation *bluegrass* for his music had not yet been coined.)

In fact, there had always been women in "hillbilly music"—in both the

public and private spheres. Roy Acuff went out of his way to find a woman to play in his band. Roy “believed that a girl was needed in his act—men in the audience like to see a girl on stage.”²⁵ There were also other women on the *Opry*, which was a barn dance that was not particularly friendly to women. As Bufwack and Oermann point out, “No radio barn dance was as resistant to female performers as [the] *Opry*.”²⁶ *Minnie Pearl’s Grinder’s Switch Gazette* noted in March 1945 that “we have so few girls on the Grand Ole Opry.” Those few “girls” included, in addition to Sally Ann, Rachel Veach, and Minnie Pearl, Becky Barfield, with Pee Wee King; the Poe Sisters; Little Evie, with the Bailes Brothers; the Cackle Sisters; Alcyon Beasley, with the Possum Hunters; Judy Dean with Paul Howard and his Arkansas Cotton Pickers; and Texas Ruby, who played in a band with her husband, Curly Fox. When the *Grinder’s Switch Gazette* listed their band as “Curly Fox and His Fox Hunters,” the newspaper was forced to issue a correction in the next issue saying the name should have read “Curly Fox, *Texas Ruby*, and *the Fox Hunters*” (my italics).²⁷

As Charles Wolfe puts it, “One of the sillier myths being bandied about these days . . . involves the role of women in the history of country music. It is said . . . that before the advent of Kitty Wells in the late 1940s, women had little to do with country music’s development, they were cast as pretty faces only, along to dress up the act. This is, of course, nonsense, and an account of the significant women artists who contributed to the development of the music would take up the rest of this issue.”²⁸ Bufwack and Oermann have documented the presence and impact of many women in country music in their book *Finding Her Voice: The Saga of Women in Country Music*.

Mark Humphrey manages to dismiss both Sally Ann Forrester and the accordion in one fell swoop. In talking about Monroe’s first recording session for Columbia (February 1945), in which Sally Ann participated, Humphrey says, “The anachronism of this session, given the later direction of bluegrass, is the presence of both a woman and an accordion. Neither were much heard in classic bluegrass thereafter. The woman [notice the lack of name] arrived as part of a package deal with fiddler Howdy Forrester, and it’s been suggested Monroe kept her on as a favor to Howdy when he entered the Navy.”²⁹

To suggest that Monroe might have kept Sally Ann on as a part of the show—for three years!—as a favor to her husband is generally insulting and a specific insult to Sally Ann. It seems to imply that “the woman” is not

worthy of playing with Bill Monroe, the creator of the “ferocious, hell-bent man’s music.” The statement also suggests that Sally Ann was not musician enough to be hired on her own; that Monroe would never have hired a woman unless he were doing a favor for a man. From all I have read about Monroe, I think it unlikely that he ever hired musicians unless they were an asset to the show and could pull their own weight. And to think that Monroe, who was running a business, would pay a side musician unnecessarily—as a favor to a friend—makes no sense.

Bill Monroe hired Sally Ann because of her musical background. In 1943 Monroe was preparing to go on the road with his own tent show for the first time and would have wanted a strong ensemble with a lot of variety.³⁰ Having worked with Sally Ann on the 1942 tent show, Monroe would have known her for an excellent musician and entertainer. And as Bob Forrester points out, his mother was a trouper: “You know nowadays, the term ‘show girl’ has sort of a negative connotation. But in those days, I heard my father talk about it, the show girls were people like Wilma Lee Cooper and Mama. They were just really sports. They were hard-working girls on the road that sang and got along and didn’t ask for any special quarter, and were really an asset to the show. When you were a ‘show girl,’ that was the ultimate compliment—‘She’s a real show girl.’” Even though Howdy was called into service before the tent show season began, there was no reason for Monroe not to hire Sally Ann, who was a professional musician *in her own right*. To the casual observer this connection of events may have given the appearance that Sally Ann was hired as a “favor” to Howdy, but Monroe no doubt hired Sally Ann simply because he knew she would be an asset to his tent show.

And there is no question that Sally Ann was with the tent show from the beginning of the season. A letter from Howdy to Sally Ann, dated May 15, 1943, reads, “I suppose you are counting money and tickets for the tent show by now. . . . Tell Bill and all the boys hello for me.” But being a member of the tent show did not mean Sally Ann was a member of the Blue Grass Boys. Another letter from Howdy to Sally Ann, postmarked September 4, 1943, indicates that Sally Ann was originally hired only for the tent show season. She and Howdy did not know if Monroe would keep her on any longer. Howdy writes, “I hope you can keep on with Bill and the boys throughout the winter as it will keep you busy and your mind free from worry. Nobody could worry around that outfit. . . .”

When Sally Ann first joined the tent show in 1943, I think she was

probably being featured as a vocalist, and she may or may not have played her guitar. The earliest publicity picture of her with Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys (with Chubby Wise, Curley Bradshaw, Clyde Moody, and Stringbean) does not show her with an instrument. All the other band members are holding their instruments, but Sally Ann is positioned, without an instrument, in front of the microphone, as if she were a featured singer.

The accordion poses another question. When did Sally Ann begin to play the accordion and why? Joe Forrester thinks that it was Sally Ann herself who suggested to Bill Monroe that she play the accordion on the show. This makes a certain amount of sense because if Sally Ann had never played accordion before—and we have no record or indication that she had—how could Monroe have known that she played? Likely, Sally Ann herself put it together that because she played piano she could make the switch to the more portable accordion with little trouble. And recall Gloria Romano, the woman who played folk songs on the accordion at SWBC.³¹ Perhaps—and I think this is important—Sally Ann thought that as a member of the band she should be playing an instrument. Perhaps she did not want to be simply the “girl singer.” Perhaps, as Joe Forrester mentioned, she wanted to “pull her weight” and to be on an equal footing with the other members of the band. Perhaps, as musician and music lover, she simply wanted to be playing an instrument.

By October Sally Ann had begun to appear on the *Opry*. In a postcard from Tulsa, Oklahoma, dated November 2, 1943, Cornora McGee writes, “Dear Billie, We enjoyed hearing you sing the last two Sat. nights. Hope to hear you every Sat. night. . . .” The “last two Saturday nights” would have been October 23 and 30. I think this postcard provides clear evidence that Monroe had decided to keep Sally Ann on “throughout the winter.”

The fact that Sally Ann begins to appear on the *Opry* so close to the end of the tent show season is worth noting. I think Monroe’s decision to use her through the winter perhaps coincided with his decision to use her on the accordion. I also find it significant that Roy Acuff had added Jimmy Riddle on accordion (and harmonica) in September 1943.³² Perhaps it was the addition of the accordion to Acuff’s band that gave Sally Ann (or Monroe) the idea to try the accordion in the Blue Grass Boys.

But why the accordion? The answer may be as simple as the scenario outlined above: Roy Acuff’s use of the instrument suggested to Sally Ann or to Monroe that they try it. But when Bill Monroe himself was asked about the use of the accordion, he said it was “directly traceable to his memory of

his mother's playing."³³ I find this answer, whatever truth it may contain, unhelpful in locating the final answer. I think Monroe fed his image makers a convenient line, and they fell for it: there was a woman playing the accordion, his mother played accordion, therefore he used the accordion because of his mother. Earl Spielman has pointed out that during informal interviews "social and cultural differences between the interviewer and the informant . . . may prove detrimental in terms of . . . the reliability of the information elicited. For example, the informant may give the interviewer an answer that the informant thinks is acceptable to or desired by the interviewer rather than one that is factual."³⁴ I think when confronted with the question, "Why the accordion?" Bill Monroe gave a ready, plausible answer, an answer that would satisfy everyone. A more germane and fundamental answer might have revealed that, at the time, he was trying anything that would work. And, as I have speculated, maybe it was not Monroe's idea at all.

Mark Humphrey says a "less sentimental explanation might be that, in the time of Pee Wee King on the *Opry* and hordes of popular radio accordi-onists (Roy Acuff even employed one at this time), Monroe was simply keeping current." More to the point, Humphrey says that in an "unguarded moment" Monroe "is said to have remarked of the accordion, 'I tried anything to get something that would sell.'"³⁵ That Monroe would add an accordion for its commercial appeal is entirely believable. Remember, at this time Monroe did not have a clear vision of what his music should or was going to sound like. He was still experimenting. And that Monroe would not want to admit in later years that he was experimenting is also entirely believable.

No matter whose idea it was, Sally Ann was already traveling and singing with the show, making this a perfect, almost risk-free, inexpensive opportunity for Monroe to experiment with the accordion. Already having a player—he did not need to go look for somebody new—what could be easier? At any rate, the experiment obviously proved successful—Sally Ann stayed with the band on into the early part of 1946.

What was it like to work, travel, and, in essence, live in this practically all-male environment? Historian Norm Cohen asked Patsy Montana "about the problems she faced" touring as "the only girl in an all-male band." Montana could recall "little evidence of discrimination or difficulty in being a woman performer."³⁶ Robert Coltman thinks that the country music audiences in the '30s and '40s were inclined to "tolerate, even welcome, a woman singer." He adds that had anyone in the audience tried to take

advantage of Patsy Montana, “her four healthy male escorts” would have taken care of matters.³⁷ I think Coltman misses an essential point when he speaks only about the audience taking advantage of women musicians. As he points out, and as we will see below, male musicians could handle members of the audience who got out of line, but it was frequently the musicians themselves who posed the biggest problems.

Jim Shumate, who played fiddle with the Blue Grass Boys in 1945, occasionally helped Sally Ann deal with unwanted attention from fans. He says that they were often mistaken for brother and sister. “Wherever we went, old boys would get to aggravating us and she’d say, ‘I’ll call my brother and straighten you out.’ I remember walking into a café one night and some old guy was harassing her, and she said, ‘Here comes my brother, and you better level off, hear?’ He came running over, and man, you should have heard him apologize. I said, ‘I suggest you stay just as far away from her as you can, old friend,’ and that was the end of it.”³⁸

Bob Forrester said his mother told him that “there was not a nicer bunch of guys in the world to travel with than Chubby and Clyde Moody and String and those guys. They were just perfect gentlemen, and they treated her just like a sister, just like one of the guys. She used to comment on how nice they were to her. They were all just very respectful and there was never any problem. And that includes Bill. Bill was always very respectful of her and was never in any way untoward or anything.”

If the band members could protect Sally Ann from the fans, the fact that Sally Ann was married no doubt afforded her some protection from the band members and other players. And the fact that Howard was a highly respected fiddle player who had known and played with many of the musicians probably helped. But if she had been a single girl, things might have been different. Lulu Belle, star of Chicago’s *WLS National Barn Dance*, said that one thing she did not like about the *Barn Dance* was that “all these fellows, and these men on the show were always trying to get around you—you know, young girl, free—trying to get you somewhere in a bed.” Long-time musicians at the station “recall that almost everyone in the cast was embroiled in some romance or affair with another member of the ‘family.’” Or as Zeke Clements aptly but crudely put it, “Oh, they were all screwin’ each other left and right up there. You didn’t dare bend over.”³⁹ Minnie Pearl, who spent seven years traveling as a single girl, was thankful she finally got married so she could travel with her husband. She said, “If I had lived the road life alone for 27 years, I doubt seriously that I would be here to write this book!”⁴⁰

In February 1945, Sally Ann went with Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys to Chicago to record eight sides for Columbia Records. The eight numbers the band cut, all in one day, were “Rocky Road Blues,” “Kentucky Waltz,” “True Life Blues,” “Nobody Loves Me,” “Goodbye Old Pal,” “Footprints in the Snow,” “Blue Grass Special,” and “Come Back to Me in My Dreams.” Besides Sally Ann and Bill Monroe, the others included Tex Willis on guitar, Chubby Wise on fiddle, Stringbean on banjo, Howard Watts (Cedric Rainwater) on bass, and possibly Curley Bradshaw on second guitar.⁴¹

The historical detail about these songs has been well covered by Neil Rosenberg in his fine *History of Bluegrass* as well as in his *Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys: An Illustrated Discography*. Also, Mark Humphrey has done a short analysis of the music and performance in his notes to the Columbia Boxed Set *The Essential Bill Monroe, 1945–1949*. I will, however, comment briefly on the presence of the accordion. “Kentucky Waltz” was released in January 1946. A previously unissued alternate take is now available on CD.⁴² In both versions of the song, the accordion is prominent and provides most of the backup behind the Monroe’s mandolin introduction and solo vocal. The instrumental break between verses comes very close to being a fiddle-accordion duet. Sally Ann follows Chubby Wise’s fiddle lead-in almost note for note with the accordion before she breaks into a harmony that continues throughout the break. The accordion also provides the “color” chords (called “off chords” by many bluegrass musicians)—such as sevenths, sixths, and minors—which the guitar does not play. In the intro and break, one can clearly hear the accordion hitting an E in the G chord (the song is in the key of D), transforming the chord from the basic IV chord into a G-sixth, adding considerable flavor to the tune. In the released version, the accordion frequently provides an off-beat chordal backup rhythm, playing on beats two and three, while in the unreleased version, Sally Ann sticks mainly to flowing chords and chromatic runs for backup.

“Rocky Road Blues” was issued on the flip side of “Kentucky Waltz.”⁴³ It, too, features the accordion prominently. Here, the accordion and the fiddle share the backup, the accordion being particularly up front during the second mandolin break. As in “Kentucky Waltz,” the accordion provides seventh-chord transitions (from the I chord to the IV), this time following Monroe’s voice which often goes to the seventh note. Jim Shumate, who was the fiddler in the band later in 1945, noted that Sally Ann was “good at following her voice with the accordion.”⁴⁴ The accordion also plays off-beat chordal backup through much of the song. Interestingly, although

the mandolin, the fiddle, and the bass get instrumental breaks on this song, the banjo, the accordion, and the guitar do not.⁴⁵ The accordion does, however, get in the last note (literally), playing a clearly audible six note (F[#]) in the final A chord. Again, this note adds a tonal color not normally heard in bluegrass.

On October 28, 1946, Columbia released the second record from this session, "Footprints in the Snow," backed by "True Life Blues."⁴⁶ "Footprints," the "A" side of the record, which went on to reach the number five slot in the *Billboard* jukebox chart, has little audible accordion.⁴⁷ This is another solo vocal number by Monroe, and one must listen closely to hear the accordion playing chords at the ends of the lines. Two versions of "True Life Blues" are available now, the one that was released and a previously unissued alternate take. In the alternate take, the accordion is quite prominent. As soon as the mandolin begins the introduction to the song, one can hear the accordion playing some rather insistent chords on the off beat. It is almost as if Sally Ann is trying to help the rest of the band find the rhythmic groove. She, of course, along with Chubby Wise and Stringbean, were veterans in the band by now, while Howard Watts and Tex Willis were new members. She continues to add color to the sound, this time frequently adding the seventh note to the V chord. In the version that was released, the fiddle of Chubby Wise is much more out front, and he is the one who provides the seventh notes in backup. This difference in the two versions could have been due to something as simple as proximity to the microphone during the recording. The mandolin, fiddle, and banjo all take breaks; the accordion does not.

"Goodbye Old Pal," a Monroe vocal released September 22, 1947, has no audible accordion, but the accordion gets a chance to shine on the instrumental "Blue Grass Special," released on November 3, 1947.⁴⁸ This number allows for instrumental solos featuring all the instruments, including the guitar and bass. Rosenberg says that by showcasing each band member, the tune "stress[ed] a balance of individual personalities with the togetherness of the band."⁴⁹ This tune, more than any other, indicates that Sally Ann was not "cast as a pretty face only, along to dress up the act."⁵⁰ She was a capable instrumentalist and a full-fledged contributing member of the Blue Grass Boys. Her solos were substantially the same on both the released version and the alternate take, issued in 1992, while Monroe and Chubby Wise played somewhat different solos on each version. Mark Humphrey states that "this underlines the obvious: All the band members

had prearranged solos, but only two of them (Wise and Monroe) could improvise.”⁵¹ I cannot let this implied slight to Sally Ann’s musical capabilities go unchallenged. Bluegrass music is, by its very nature, improvisational. No one learns to play these tunes by reading notes—each player makes up his or her own solos as well as the backup to every song. Sally Ann certainly could improvise on the accordion.⁵² If she chose to play the same solo on both takes of “Blue Grass Special,” perhaps she was only being the “consummate pro” that Humphrey earlier called Chubby Wise for “playing the same break each time” on “True Life Blues.”⁵³

The two vocal trios from this session, on which Sally Ann sings tenor, were not released until years later: “Come Back to Me in My Dreams” in 1980 and “Nobody Loves Me” in 1984. (An alternate take of “Nobody Loves Me” was released in 1992.) No accordion is audible on either song, but Sally Ann’s tenor line is pleasant and smooth, blending nicely with Monroe’s lead and Tex Willis’s baritone. Neither trio is spectacular, which is, perhaps, why Columbia chose not to release the two songs. These two numbers indicate that Sally Ann was not only a featured solo vocalist with the band but also a part of their overall vocal sound. Her participation in the trio adds an extra layer of “legitimacy” to her work with the band. She didn’t “just” sing solos; she sang with the other band members. Of particular interest is the fact that these were the first trios Monroe ever recorded, and, more importantly, they stand out from what would come to be the stereotypical bluegrass trio composed of three men, one of whom sang tenor. Monroe himself established this template with his own high tenor singing—one of the trademarks of bluegrass, the “high lonesome” sound. But here, Sally Ann, with her higher voice, sings tenor to Monroe. I can think of no other recorded instance of anyone singing tenor to Monroe. What a shame that these recordings remained unissued until the 1980s. If these numbers had been issued back in the ’40s or even the ’50s, people would have heard a woman singing bluegrass right from the beginning—with none other than Bill Monroe himself. It would have been considerably more difficult to define bluegrass as “man’s music” knowing that the Father of Bluegrass had used a woman to tenor him on the first trios he recorded.

On November 13, 1945, Howard sent a telegram from San Francisco to his mother Emmie saying, “Back in the states at last. Should be home within twelve days. Love, Howard.” Of more interest is the November 19 telegram he sent from Center, Tennessee, to his wife, who was in Tulsa: “Billie, be at Chisca Hotel Wednesday [November 21]. Have room reserved.

Will be there in afternoon or night. Love, Howard.” Obviously (and also noted by Bob Forrester), Howard wanted to spend some time alone with his wife before he moved back in with his mother and returning brothers in Nashville.

Howdy rejoined Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys in December 1945. He replaced Jim Shumate, who had just brought Earl Scruggs to the band, but never got to play with him. Sally Ann was still with the band, as was Lester Flatt. Howard’s brother, Joe, now joined on bass. Sally Ann, Howard, and Joe stayed with Monroe through the end of March 1946. They all handed in their notices at the same time and worked one week into tent-show season, then left. This era of Sally Ann’s life was over. She was twenty-three. However, a new era of her life was just beginning; she was newly pregnant.

Even though Sally Ann was pregnant, she continued to work for a while. She and Howdy and Joe worked at KTUL in Tulsa for a few months and then headed to Dallas to work with Georgia Slim Rutland, who had reorganized the *Texas Roundup* on KRLD. Sally Ann, however, was not a part of this version of the *Texas Roundup*, which included Slim, Howdy, Joe, Dewey Groom, and Dub Hendrix. According to Joe, the group had to stay small because there was simply not enough money to pay any other musicians, but he agrees that Sally Ann’s pregnancy might have had something to do with her not playing. My guess is that while she could not play because she was pregnant, being pregnant made it easier for her to accept not playing.

On January 4, 1947, Sally Ann and Howdy’s only child, Bob, was born. Fortunately, Sally Ann never had to deal with the bane of most working women, child care. Her grandmother, Sudie, now sixty-one, had come to live with them in Dallas even before Bob was born. As Joe Forrester put it, “She was a godsend.”

Around the middle of 1947, Slim and Howdy and Joe leased a club in Dallas and started playing dances on Saturday night. Bob’s Barn, as they called it, provided them with an opportunity to make more money and to do less traveling. Playing for dances required a bigger band, so the Roundup now added three new members: Sally Ann on accordion, Ludie Harris on bass or guitar, and Felipe Sanchez on drums.

In November of 1947, Sally Ann Forrester signed a contract with Rambling Tommy Scott, of medicine show fame, to record “thirteen, three-minute motion picture subjects, complete with sound, action, costume, and music.”⁵⁴ These short clips give us our only chance to see Sally Ann perform

on the accordion.⁵⁵ She is a stunning performer. These black and white movie “shorts” were made to be shown in movie theaters before or in between main features. Shot on 35mm film, these same shorts were later edited together and broadcast on some of the first television shows. Nine of these three-minute movie shorts featuring Sally Ann on accordion have been converted to video format. (These are probably the TV versions, having been edited together to form three complete shows.)

Tommy Scott had known Sally Ann from her days with Bill Monroe. Because he was in the Dallas area when he made these shorts, it was only natural for him to call on Sally Ann to play the accordion and sing on these productions. He also volunteered, without prompting, that Sally Ann was a “terrific musician.”⁵⁶

Watching these shows makes it obvious that Sally Ann is a terrific musician. Her accordion playing is the instrumental foundation of the music—it carries the band. She plays most of the introductions as well as most of the leads, and her backup holds the music together like glue. After watching this video, one can see that Sally Ann’s photographs do not do her justice. She was quite the show person. She comes alive on stage and simply exudes personality and a sense of fun. She always has a big smile on her face and appears to be enjoying herself. Unlike the other players, she and Tommy look totally comfortable with what they are doing—entertaining the audience. They come across as the consummate professionals that they were.

The camera was friendly to Sally Ann. When she takes a solo on the accordion, she always looks right at the camera and flashes a big smile. As she plays, her body moves just slightly to the rhythm of the song, and she seems completely normal and at ease. She looks like a 1940s-era movie star. She was a dark-haired beauty who wore her shoulder-length hair pulled back from her face with a bow on one side and curled in a typical 1940s style. She had dark, prominent, well-shaped eyebrows, a curvy figure, and a brilliant smile. She reminds me just a bit of Rosalind Russell. Her cowgirl days were long gone, and she wore several different light-colored, summery dresses on the shows.

The other performers include Tommy Scott on guitar and lead vocals; Tommy’s wife, Frankie, who sings, holds one chord on the mandolin and pretends to play, and buck dances on “Buffalo Gals”; Tommy’s daughter, Sandra, who is about eight and doesn’t play anything but joins the entire group in singing on the choruses; Jenny Vance, who plays the rhythm guitar and sings on the choruses but does not have a major part in the show;

Jimmy Vance, Jenny's husband, who plays mandolin (and once pretends to play fiddle); and an unidentified male bass fiddle player.⁵⁷

The three-minute movie shorts were filmed so they could be shown separately, or perhaps back-to-back. When they were edited together for TV, Tommy Scott added introductions before each song as well as the theme song "We're Rolling On." Each segment includes three songs and has the same format. As the show opens, we see the band standing in front of a white stage barn, its big doors wide open and its empty interior visible. Hay bales are thoughtfully provided for some of the band members to sit on. Tommy Scott stands at the center with the band members loosely gathered around. Sally Ann and her accordion are stage left. In this configuration, Tommy sings the first number. He does all of the lead singing on the show but is joined by the entire band, including Sally Ann, on the choruses. Frankie and Tommy alternate solo verses on the one duet, the old folk song "Paper of Pins." All the songs are either Tommy Scott originals or in public domain. Tommy says this was done to avoid problems with copyrights. On one of the opening numbers, "Buffalo Gals," Frankie gets up from her hay bale and buck dances to a fiddle breakdown.

For the second number, the scene always changes to a living-room setting. Tommy, with his guitar, and Frankie, with her mandolin, and/or Sandra are seated on a plaid couch in front of a picture window covered with venetian blinds pulled down but open. The other musicians are gathered round. Here Tommy croons a slow heartfelt number, such as "You Are the Rainbow in My Dreams," to his wife or daughter.

The third number finds the group back in front of the barn amid the hay bales for a rousing finale featuring an up-tempo familiar old-time public domain number, such as "She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain," "Hand Me Down My Walking Cane," or "Little Liza Jane." Again, Tommy sings the lead and everyone joins in enthusiastically on the chorus.

When these numbers were filmed, the audio and video portions were recorded separately because the sound that was possible using audio recording equipment was far superior to the sound that was then possible in the movie studio. This meant the group had to record the music beforehand and then lip-synch and pretend to play to the previously recorded music when the picture was being filmed. (I suspect from watching the video that they were actually singing and playing their instruments again.) This discrepancy would not be noticed by the average listener; the lip-synching is quite good. Only careful attention reveals that the musicians'

hands are not always playing the music we are hearing. Sally Ann and Tommy are especially adept at making their performances seem “live.”

Howard and Sally Ann worked in Dallas from 1946 until 1949, when they, along with Joe (and Sudie), returned to Tennessee. Back in Nashville, Joe went to work for the Post Office, and in October 1951 Howard went to work for Roy Acuff.

On their return to Nashville, Sally Ann, whom we will now revert to calling Billie, got out of show business entirely. And this was not because she did not have anyone to help her look after Bob. As always, Sudie was right there. We do not really know what Billie’s reasons were for getting out of the music business. Perhaps she wanted something more stable, more secure, and more lucrative than the music business. Perhaps she just got tired of the grind of traveling and playing the same songs over and over.

In 1949 or 1950, she took the Civil Service Exam and went to work for the Social Security Administration. She was with them for thirty years, and retired a mid-level manager. She performed in a few public appearances, but mostly she continued to play her music at home with Howdy and their friends. As Bob said, “Mama loved to play because we’d play around the house you know, and we’d play at family gatherings. It was a standard thing to play at family gatherings, and we had a lot of family gatherings.”

Bob also said, “I don’t ever remember Mama talking about the money, or maybe in a joking way talking about how little money there was at times. Not that she ever regretted it. I don’t think for a minute she would have done it different. Her and Daddy would talk about their experiences all the time up until Daddy died. They’d sit up at night, and I’d go over, and they’d sit and talk. They had so much to talk about. They wouldn’t trade anything for their experiences.” Howdy died of cancer on August 1, 1987. Billie died on November 17, 1999, in a Nashville nursing home with Bob at her side.

The details that have surfaced about Sally Ann’s life give us an in-depth look at the life of a woman in early country music. That she became the “original bluegrass girl” was probably due, in part, to her being in the right place at the right time. But that is often the case with many of life’s activities. We know now that she was hired not as a “favor” to Howdy but because she was a talented entertainer in her own right. That her singing was not heard on record until the 1980s, obscuring the fact that women had a “voice” in bluegrass music from the beginning, is simply one of history’s little ironies.

As this chapter shows, women who entered the fields of old-time country music or early bluegrass, particularly women who played in bands with their husbands, have their own individual histories, apart from the lives of their spouses. Billie was someone who loved music all her life. She became a musician because she was driven to play by something inside, just as male musicians are driven to play. That Billie quit the music business while Howdy continued to play does not seem to be particularly gender related. After all, Joe Forrester also gave up a career in music for the security of a day job. As Robert Coltman points out, it is “rather typical for a country artist to quit performing after five or six years, to settle down, raise a family, and go to working steadily at something near home.”⁵⁸

Billie’s life provides a unique opportunity to look at a professional musician who played with a non-family band before she was married, played in several bands with her husband before the war, played in an otherwise all-male band when her husband was in service, played again with her husband in two different bands after the war, took some musical jobs that did not include her husband, then finally quit the business entirely. Except for the year of her pregnancy, her musical career, in many respects, was not remarkably different from that of her male contemporaries.

Still, in spite of all that Billie accomplished, I as a female instrumentalist cannot help wishing that Billie had developed into a “hot” fiddle player like Howard or Slim. This wish is certainly not fair to Billie, but it does point to the fact that the history of early country music is replete with extraordinary male fiddlers but is woefully lacking in outstanding female instrumentalists. My guess is that we may yet discover a few other women unfairly obscured, and we may come to appreciate more fully the talents of women already known to us. Nevertheless, country music is an arena where men have dominated. The question is, of course, Why? The answer requires a (much-needed) book, but Robert Coltman has noted that “interesting rural instrumental music was a closed book to most women” because they were “encouraged in all sorts of subtle ways to shun music perceived as ‘wild,’ ‘loud,’ [and] ‘rowdy,’ just as they were encouraged to shun the wild living” associated with this music.⁵⁹ I would also point interested researchers to Linda Nochlin’s 1971 article “Why Are There No Great Women Artists?”⁶⁰

Clearly there are numerous other female musicians in bluegrass and early country music whose lives ought to be documented, explored, and examined. When we know enough facts about the lives of these women,

then perhaps we can start to answer questions such as Why did these women go into country music to begin with? Why did they remain? Why did they quit? What were their contributions to country music? How did they perceive other women in the business—as comrades or as threats? How were these women alike? How were they different? How did pregnancy affect their careers?

My research into Sally Ann's life makes plain that this work cannot be pursued wearing blinders. We have to learn to read the evidence, not as we were taught—"bluegrass is man's music"; "There were no women in early country music"—but with a constant reminder to ourselves not to overlook the women who were there—on the radio, on the stage, on the road, in the studio—making music right along with the men. In the history of bluegrass music, Sally Ann was there all along. Her life shows us that women have always been a part of bluegrass. All we have to do is open our eyes.

Notes

1. Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1985), 72.

2. Following is a list publications devoted to these men. Most appear in *Bluegrass Unlimited* (BU): Wayne Erbsen, "Tommy Millard, Blackface Comedian/Blue Grass Boy," BU, May 1986, 23–25; Douglas B. Green, "Pete Pyle: Bluegrass Pioneer," BU, March 1978, 22–25; Wayne Erbsen, "Jim Shumate: Bluegrass Fiddler Supreme," BU, April 1979, 14–23; Ivan M. Tribe and John W. Morris, "Clyde Moody: Old-Time, Bluegrass and Country Musician," BU, July 1975, 28–33; Lance LeRoy, "'Master of Bluegrass Fiddle Soul': Chubby Wise," BU, March 1996, 11–15; Charles Wolfe, "String," BU, June 1982, 45–51; James Lindsay, "Art Wooten Remembered," BU, April 1988, 55; Charles Wolfe, "Fiddler in the Shadows: The Story of Tommy Magness," BU, May 1997, 52–59; Wayne Erbsen, "Cleo Davis: The Original Blue Grass Boy," BU, February 1982, 28–30 and March 1982, 59–62. See also Howdy Forrester and Tex Logan, "Big Howdy!: Howdy Forrester, Fiddler," *Muleskinner News*, September 1973, 12–19; Cousin Wilbur [Wesbrooks] with Barbara M. McLean and Sandra S. Grafton, *Everybody's Cousin* (New York: Manor, 1979).

3. Sherrie Tucker, "Telling Performances: Jazz History Remembered and Remade by the Women in the Band," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 1 (1997): 12–23.

4. Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: The Saga of Women in Country Music* (New York: Crown, 1993), 456.

5. Tucker, "Telling Performances" 12.

6. Antionette Burton, "Optical Illusions," *The Women's Review of Books*, Feb. 2000, 21–22.

7. Charles K. Wolfe and Patricia A. Hall, liner notes to *Banjo Pickin' Girl* (Rounder Records 1029, 1978), [3].

8. Email to author from Steve Whisler, Alumni Director, SBU, January 12, 1999.

9. Claymon Foster, "To The Editor," *Mountain Broadcast and Prairie Recorder*, Jan. 1940, 7. Foster was the business manager of the KVOO Artist's Service.

10. *KVOO Lariat*, June 17, 1939.

11. "The Orphan Girl Radio's Latest Find," *Chelsea (Okla.) Reporter*, Sept. 7, 1939, no page number evident.

12. Wolfe and Hall, liner notes.

13. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 85.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Elizabeth Schlappi, *Roy Acuff: The Smoky Mountain Boy*, 2d. ed. (Gretna: Pelican, 1993), 74. The picture of Rachel is on an unnumbered page between pages 148 and 149. "Red and white checked gingham" is from *The Grinder's Switch Gazette*, May 1945, 7.

16. Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997), 75.

17. *Grinder's Switch Gazette*, May 1945.

18. Notice of Classification from the Selective Service System to [Howard] Forrester.

19. Several sources support this date. Bob, Joe, and Clyde Forrester all mention spring or March 1943. Tax forms show that in 1943 Howdy made just \$405 working with Monroe. He was gone for sure by April 17, 1943, as Clayton Forrester now addresses his postcard to Mrs. Howard Forrester alone.

20. According to a carefully typed list of dates in Goober Buchanan's scrapbook, he and Dixie Belle joined the tent show on March 30, 1942, in Colquit, Georgia. The last date they played was June 2, 1942, in Oakdale, Louisiana.

21. Hatch Show Print records confirm that Jamup and Honey played in Princeton, Kentucky, not far from Hopkinsville, on March 17, 1942.

22. Goober Buchanan says Stringbean joined the tent show (and Monroe's band) in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, which would have been on April 22 or 23, 1942. In an article entitled "String" in *Bluegrass Unlimited* (June 1982), Charles Wolfe says Stringbean joined Monroe on the *Opry* in July 1942. Stringbean could have joined the tent show in April yet not appeared on the *Opry* until July.

23. Uncle Dave Macon, letter to "Friends," [Dixie Belle and Goober Buchanan], December 31, 1941. This letter is in Goober Buchanan's file at the Country Music Foundation.

24. Mark A. Humphrey, liner notes to *The Essential Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys, 1945–1949*, Columbia Records Boxed Set C2K 52478, 1992.

25. Schlappi, *Roy Acuff*, 73.

26. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 180.

27. The reference to "so few girls" is in an article (no author given) welcoming "a new act with a girl singer" to the *Opry*. The act was the Bailes Brothers, and the girl singer was Little Evie. The list of women performers is gleaned from various issues of the *Gazette*, which was published from September 1944 through June 1946. It was volume 1 of the *Gazette* that incorrectly listed the name of Curly Fox and Texas Ruby's band. Volume 2 issued a correction.

28. Charles Wolfe, "Samantha Bumgarner: The Original Banjo Pickin' Girl," *The Old-Time Herald* (Winter 1987-88): 6-9.

29. Humphrey, liner notes, 15.

30. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 57. Hatch Show Print accounts list "Bill Monroe and His Grand Ole Opry Tent Show, 1943 Season" right before a large April 29 order for 200 lot and license contracts. The accounts indicate the season started in mid-May.

31. It is worth mentioning that Sally Ann kept a program in her scrapbook for a "Radio Party and Jamboree" on March 7, 1943, sponsored by WSIX at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville. I assume that she and probably Howard went to the show. The possible relevance to Sally Ann's musical career is that one of the performers was Irene Hunter, "The Queen of the Accordion."

32. Schlappi, *Roy Acuff*, 87; *Billboard*, October 9, 1943, 63.

33. Ralph Rinzler, "Bill Monroe," in *Stars of Country Music*, ed. Bill C. Malone and Judith McCulloh (New York: Da Capo, 1975), 206.

34. Earl V. Spielman, "Traditional North American Fiddling: A Methodology for the Historical and Comparative Analytical Style Study of Instrumental Musical Traditions" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Wisconsin, 1975), 160.

35. Humphrey, liner notes, 15.

36. Norm Cohen quoted in Bob Coltman, "Sweethearts of the Hills: Women in Early Country Music," *JEMF Quarterly* (Winter 1978): 161-80.

37. Coltman, 177.

38. Jim Shumate, quoted in Wayne Erbsen, "Jim Shumate: Bluegrass Fiddler Supreme," *Bluegrass Unlimited*, April 1979, 14-23.

39. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 95.

40. Minnie Pearl with Joan Dew, *Minnie Pearl: An Autobiography*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980), 145.

41. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 62.; Humphrey lists Bill Westbrook [sic] on string bass, but this is almost certainly incorrect. According to his autobiography, Cousin Wilbur left Bill in 1944 [134]. Humphrey does not list Curley Williams. Neil Rosenberg told me that the Columbia logs list Curley Williams on second guitar, although it certainly is hard to tell that there is a second guitar from listening to the recordings.

42. Complete discographical information is included in the discography. Al-

ternate takes of “Kentucky Waltz,” “True Life Blues,” “Nobody Loves Me,” “Goodbye Old Pal,” and “Blue Grass Special” are on “The Essential Bill Monroe,” along with the original cuts of “Rocky Road Blues,” “Footprints in the Snow,” and “Come Back to Me in My Dreams.” The original cuts of “True Life Blues,” “Kentucky Waltz,” “Blue Grass Special,” and “Good Bye Old Pal” are on *The Classic Bluegrass Recordings Volume 1*. The original cut of “Nobody Loves Me” is on *Bill Monroe*.

43. Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys: An Illustrated Discography* (Nashville: Country Music Foundation Press, 1974), 42.

44. Jim Shumate, phone interview with author, September 23, 1998.

45. The reason that not all the instruments are featured in a solo may be simple. “Blue Grass Special” was used to showcase all the individual instruments. There would have been little point in recording (or having in the performance repertoire) two numbers on which all the instruments took breaks. Also, “Rocky Road Blues,” unlike “Blue Grass Special,” included singing—several verses and choruses. To add extra instrumental breaks to this number might have made it too long to record.

46. Rosenberg, *Discography*, 42.

47. Rosenberg, *Discography*, 73.

48. Rosenberg, *Discography*, 42.

49. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass*, 62.

50. Wolfe, “Samantha Bumgarner,” 6.

51. Humphrey, liner notes, 19.

52. My assertion that Sally Ann could improvise on the accordion was confirmed in a phone conversation with Joe Forrester on February 28, 1999.

53. Humphrey, liner notes, 17.

54. This contract is in the Howdy Forrester file in the Library of the Country Music Foundation in Nashville.

55. These clips are now in video format, on file at the Country Music Foundation and available from Tommy Scott. The title on the video box that I have is “Doc” Ramblin’ Tommy Scott Presents Hillbilly Music and Western Swing: Volumes 1 and 2. No label, no number.

56. Phone conversations with Tommy Scott on September 23, 1998 and October 1, 1998.

57. Tommy Scott provided me with the names of the players. Only Tommy and Frankie are named on the video box.

58. Coltman, 176.

59. Coltman, 166.

60. Linda Nochlin, “Why Are There No Great Women Artists?” in *Women in Sexist Society*, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Signet, 1971), 480–510.

Discography

- Monroe, Bill. *Bill Monroe*. Columbia Historic Edition, vinyl album FC 388904. 1984.
- Monroe, Bill, and His Blue Grass Boys. *The Essential Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys: 1945-1949*. Columbia, CD C2K 52478. 1992.
- . *The Classic Bluegrass Recordings Volume 1*. Country Records, vinyl album CCS-104. 1980.
- Scott, Ramblin' Tommy. *Hillbilly and Western Music Volumes 1 and Volume 2*. No label, no number, no date.

There's a Little Bit of Everything in Texas

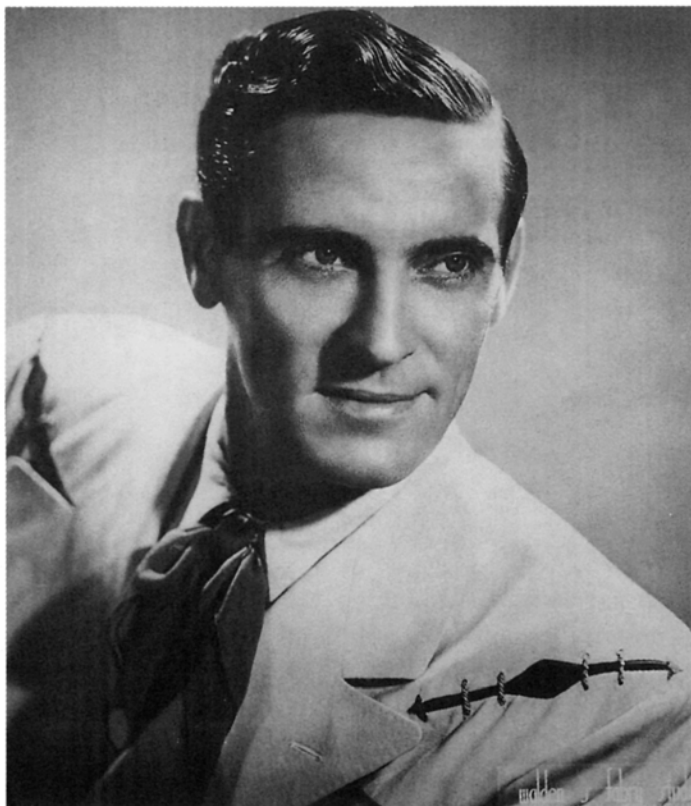
The Texas Musical Roots of Ernest Tubb

Ronnie Pugh

Country music star Ernest Tubb grew up a Texan through and through, knowing most of the state firsthand. Born February 9, 1914, at tiny Crisp in Ellis County near Dallas, he also lived during his first thirty years in West Texas (Knox County, later in San Angelo) and in some of the big cities (San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and Fort Worth). I have found no indication that Tubb ever left Texas before becoming a professional country singer and journeying to Hollywood for an October 1940 recording session. We should not, therefore, be surprised to discover the variety of ways in which Texas music of different types played an important role as a shaping influence on the Texas Troubadour.

Young Tubb was, of course, exposed to music from around the world via radio and phonograph records, though his tastes were always fairly local or regional. Tubb told Peter Guralnick that he listened to blues records by the likes of Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith and cowboy records by Jules Verne Allen.¹ But the man who became his bar-none, far-and-away favorite recording artist moved to Texas (Kerrville) in 1929 shortly after Tubb fell in love with his music—the great Mississippi Blue Yodeler, Jimmie Rodgers.

A previous International Country Music Conference paper (1985), and, of course, my biography of Ernest Tubb, explored in some depth how Jimmie Rodgers influenced the young Ernest Tubb, the many ways Mrs. Jimmie Rodgers helped launch his career, and the ways he “paid her back” by helping to memorialize the Blue Yodeler and his legacy. And since it would be a



Ernest Tubb, circa 1946. (Charles Wolfe collection)

stretch to call Jimmie Rodgers a “Texas” influence anyway, I will focus here, instead, on how Tubb was influenced by other, younger yodelers.

The Jimmie Rodgers Yodelers

Beyond a certain point in time and with public remembrance of the Blue Yodeler fading, Tubb may have found it easier to “imitate the imitators,” the *newer* Rodgers yodelers. Several examples for which we have some evidence come to mind. I suspect that the Jimmie Davis/Buddy Jones tandem (Davis singing, Jones yodeling) on mid-1930s Decca Records held quite an attraction for Tubb. His own “Mean Old Bed Bug Blues” (October 27, 1936) may have owed something to their “Bed Bug Blues” (Decca 5206, issued

April 7, 1936), and from the later Davis repertory came several of Tubb's mid-1940s radio recordings for World Broadcasting Service, and even the much later Decca release "I Love Everything You Do."

Yodelers and fellow Rodgers disciples Rex Griffin (another early Decca artist) and Tommy Duncan (Bob Wills's vocalist, 1933–1947) were admired specifically for their yodeling proficiency. As Texas connections, Duncan was a native of Hillsboro, Texas, though based at KVOO in Tulsa; Griffin, a Gadsden, Alabama, native, starred in the early 1940s on Gus Foster's *Roundup* over KRLD, Dallas, and Tubb stayed close to Griffin for the rest of Griffin's somewhat checkered life.

Two verses from one of Tubb's most autobiographical songs express his fondness for their yodeling, as well as the frustrating fact that his love for the yodel lasted beyond his own ability to vocalize in that manner. The song survived only on a home demo, so we cannot even be sure of the title, but the collectors who taped it from Tubb's home recording library gave it the wonderful title "He Took Fifty Bucks and My Yodeling Too When He Took My Tonsils Out." It chronicles the effects of Tubb's 1939 tonsillectomy in San Angelo, which ultimately distanced him from the Rodgers style by lowering his voice to the point where yodeling became uncomfortable. Without the yodel, Rodgers's songs just never sounded right to Tubb, so he dropped the songs with one or two exceptions, began energetically writing his own songs, and developed a style that was not yodel dependent.

The late Jimmie Rodgers, the yodeling king, was the greatest of all time.
My friend Rex Griffin can yodel too, and really does it fine.
Tommy Duncan can yodel so smooth, boy I think he's good.
I'd like to yodel for you right now, Lawd, if I only could!"

Now of course I like to sing, I've done it all my life.
But my yodeling was my greatest pride, why it even won my wife.
Now when I sing a yodeling song, where a yodel should come in,
I twist and squirm and grit my teeth as the next verse I begin."

(Full lyrics on page 50 of my book; these are verses 1 and 2)

Gene Autry and the Cowboys

Ernest Tubb's love of cowboy songs predates the success of Tioga, Texas, native Gene Autry and may even predate his idolatrous love of Jimmie

Rodgers. He once mentioned Jules Verne Allen as an early favorite, probably during the years both men worked in San Antonio. But Gene Autry, a Rodgers disciple whose success as a singing cowboy in Hollywood was surely fascinating for just about any country singer coming along in the 1930s, clearly exercised some musical influence on Tubb.

At just about the time he was making a name for himself as a box office sensation, Autry was the cause of a huge personal disappointment for Tubb and Mrs. Rodgers. The following account is from a letter Jim Evans of the Rodgers Fan Club wrote in 1968:

After Jimmie's death . . . [Gene] made a personal appearance in San Antonio. Mrs. R planned to introduce Ernest Tubb to him and ask Autry to listen to him, and to help him if he could. Something came up and Mrs. R. was call[ed] out of town—so she wrote Autry a letter for ET to give him. Ernest introduced himself and handed him the letter. Autry didn't offer his hand, say hello, or anything. Just took the letter, read it over, turned around and walked off as he tore the letter up and tossed it aside—not saying a word, good bye, go to hell, or anything else. Mrs. R. never got a dime royalty from any of the JR songs recorded by Autry, and he probably recorded more of them than anyone else.²

In spite of this incident, it must have impressed Tubb that Autry found his real success leaving the Rodgers mold and carving a niche of his own in cowboy music, on records and the silver screen. Tubb soon tried the same route. After what I might call his Rodgers years in San Antonio, roughly 1933–1937, came the years in San Angelo and Fort Worth, 1938–1942, during which he became a radio and then motion picture cowboy singer—calling himself “Texas’ OWN Cowboy Singer,” a name that was in part aimed critically at Autry and Tex Ritter for leaving Texas to make their fame, though of course Tubb would do the same in 1943.

His KGKL (San Angelo) and KGKO (Fort Worth) radio shows were heavy with cowboy music. Niece Anna Ruth Collier remembers “Ridin’ Old Paint and Leadin’ Old Ball” as her favorite song from his Fort Worth days. From the aforementioned stock of Tubb home recordings an early, unpublished Tubb cowboy song survives, “It’s Hard to Ride After the Fall.” And his earliest published song, featured in two of his four 1940s movie roles, was the cowboy tune “Ridin’ That Dusty Trail.”

But it is interesting that Tubb never released a cowboy song on record;

in 1947, he did cut an unissued version of producer Dave Kapp's "160 Acres," which we can now hear courtesy of Bear Family's comprehensive boxed sets. This raises two questions: Was his Decca producer the key factor in his not recording other cowboy songs? and Did both men know that except for Autry's, cowboy records did not sell all that well? After his first success with jukebox love songs in the early 1940s (more about that at the end of this chapter), Tubb got the chance to play the singing sidekick in two Charles Starrett westerns for Columbia Pictures (both filmed in 1942). In the first of these he did feature his own "Ridin' That Dusty Trail," as I have already said, but whatever love for cowboy music lingered in Tubb's heart was clearly overshadowed by a fondness for his new style, its popularity, and the chance to enhance that further by making movies. As the following quotation makes clear, on screen he wanted to sing his own record hits, not the P.D. cowboy favorites of yesterday: "Then they tried to get me to sing some song Autry had recorded four or five years before—it was one of those old cowboy songs like Jule Verne Allen used to sing. I told them, 'I used to sing 'em, but those kind of songs are dead. Why bring me out here in the first place, if it wasn't to sing "Walking the Floor Over You"?' That's the reason you brought me out here, and that's what my fans are going to expect."³

Letters Tubb wrote home to Fort Worth friends and neighbors prove that he loved rubbing elbows with the man who had once snubbed him: Tubb attended Gene Autry's last Melody Ranch network radio broadcast prior to Autry's Army induction in July 1942. He also met Roy Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers while they were making one of their films, spending "half a day on the set with Roy." Tex Ritter, Bob Wills, and Tommy Duncan visited the Tubb set on his second Hollywood trip four months later, though he expressed disappointment that this time he did not see Roy Rogers. "But I heard that Republic has planned to spend \$100,000 on publicity for Roy next year. Not bad, eh?"⁴ Many years later Tubb recalled this distastefully as "the politics" of Hollywood, against which a newcomer like himself had very little chance to succeed, hopeful though he was at the time that he could find a radio/movie career there. But by that time Tubb was only weeks away from his move to a city more than two thousand miles to the east—Nashville.

Returning to his Texas roots, I will now consider the more modest but nevertheless important influence of western swing as a shaping factor in Tubb's life.



Fiddler Cliff Gross and the Light Crust Doughboys, circa 1936. (Charles Wolfe collection)

Two Texas Bands

Far less influential on Ernest Tubb than Rodgers yodelers or singing cowboys—the stand-alone, solo singers—were the 1930s Texas radio and dance bands, the founders and pioneers of western swing. Tubb was aware of them, admired them, and envied their success, but as Fort Worth friend Vernon Young remembers, Tubb was intent on forging an individual identity: “He told me if he ever made it big, it was just going to be Ernest Tubb, not the somebodies, or even Ernest Tubb and the somebodies.”⁵ He never incorporated the numerous instruments and danceable rhythms of these bands into his own sound, but certain songs and mannerisms from these groups did find their way as an influence on Tubb.

One of the bands Tubb envied was the Light Crust Doughboys, western swing’s original band, until he found out what they were being paid. “God love ’em, the Doughboys, I used to listen to them and thought, ‘They’ve

got it made.' I discovered they were making—the vocalist, Leon Huff, was getting \$25 a week, the other boys was getting \$20 a week, and the leader was only getting \$27.50 a week. . . . I wound up making \$75 a week by myself, just me and Jimmie Rodgers's guitar."⁶ Soon they were envying Tubb: Marvin "Smokey" Montgomery recalls their group (responsored and called the Coffee Grinders) with a nice bus and state-of-the-art sound system being outdrawn by Tubb, singing for Gold Chain Flour and traveling in a single white Plymouth with one portable speaker, a development Montgomery was at a loss to understand or explain.

At an October 1941 package show in Shreveport, Ernest Tubb first met Bob Wills, Tommy Duncan, and Eldon Shamblin, flown down from Tulsa by Oscar Davis to headline the *Sunday Hillbilly Jamboree*. Backstage Tubb forged a lasting friendship with Duncan as each man shared memories of their love for Jimmie Rodgers.⁷ Tubb no doubt took from Wills himself his habit of naming the lead guitarist during instrumental breaks. Wills, of course, named almost the entire Texas Playboys lineup during the course of many of his recordings, and while Tubb never named all of the Texas Troubadours (and there were never more than five), on most recordings he named his Eldon Shamblin equivalent, the lead guitarist, whoever it might be: "Aw, come in, Butterball;" "Aw, Billy Byrd, now!" "Aw, Pete Mitchell—our little one!"

The Western Swing/Honky-Tonk Artists

More influential for Tubb in the long run than the western swing bands themselves were those musicians who came out of the dance bands to become Tubb's fellow "honky-tonk" pioneers—those following or blazing the same path Tubb did. These were generally either band leaders who shrank their bands and began featuring songs about lost love, drink, divorce, loneliness, and pain (such as Cliff Bruner or Ted Daffan), or vocalists who left western swing bands to pursue solo careers (Floyd Tillman, Moon Mullican). We can benefit from a moment with each one.

Tubb joined Decca Records in 1940, by which time fellow Texan Cliff Bruner, former fiddling member of Milton Brown's Brownies, was leading "Cliff Bruner & His Boys" on that label. One of Tubb's favorite recordings from the previous year (while Bruner was leader of the Texas Wanderers) was the Wanderers' recording of "Truck Driver's Blues," a song written by Ted Daffan and capably sung on Bruner's record by pianist Aubrey "Moon"

Mullican. “Truck Driver’s Blues” (the first of the trucking songs) was a song Tubb would sing for many years, though he never recorded it. Bruner claims to have personally introduced Tubb to Decca’s country talent scout/producer Dave Kapp, probably on April 3, 1940, the day before Tubb’s first Decca session in Houston. For World Broadcasting Service in 1944–1945, Tubb recorded three of Bruner’s compositions, and in late 1949 for Decca, Tubb covered Bruner’s fine recording of “Unfaithful One.”

Ted Daffan, the writer of “Truck Driver’s Blues,” got his break as a recording artist in his own right as leader of “Ted Daffan and the Texans,” for Okeh Records in the same year Tubb joined Decca. “We both had first records to hit about the same time, me with ‘Worried Mind’ and Ernest with ‘Walking the Floor.’ We never worked together or on the same show but we sometimes were able to drop in where the other one was playing.”⁸ But after “Truck Driver’s Blues,” Tubb fell in love with other Ted Daffan songs as well—the aforementioned “Worried Mind” and five others he recorded for World in the mid-1940s. He recorded three more in later years, including covers of Daffan’s great honky-tonk anthems “Heading Down the Wrong Highway” (1947) and “Born to Lose” (1965).

Moon Mullican, the Corrigan, Texas, beer-joint singer and pianist from Bruner’s band, later linked up with songwriter Lou Wayne around Beaumont when Mullican started his own band, the Showboys, in the middle 1940s. Mullican and Wayne wrote (and Mullican first recorded, for King) a song Tubb featured for a full decade before finally recording in 1956 “When a Soldier Knocks and Finds Nobody Home.” After huge hits with “New Jole Blon” and “Sweeter Than The Flowers,” Mullican joined Tubb on Nashville’s *Grand Ole Opry* in the early 1950s—among Tubb’s fellow Texans discussed here, the only one to do so, even briefly. Tubb’s admiration for “Moon” Mullican’s piano style led him to nickname Owen Bradley, his pop-piano-playing producer, “Half Moon,” because Tubb felt that future Country Music Hall of Fame member Bradley was, at his best, only half the pianist Mullican was. The self-effacing Bradley was inclined to agree: “I took it as a compliment.” In 1966, the last full year of his life, Mullican finally recorded with Tubb as pianist on Tubb’s album *Country Hits Old and New*, a memorable event for both veteran performers.

Floyd Tillman—born the same year as Tubb and raised in Post, Texas, to the music of Jimmie Rodgers—probably impressed Tubb and most other people first as the songwriter of “It Makes No Difference Now,” the 1938 Jimmie Davis smash. Tubb loved Tillman’s wartime recording of “Each Night

at Nine,” performing it himself for World and years later on a Decca LP. He covered Tillman’s first big Columbia hit, “Drivin’ Nails in My Coffin,” and he also had Decca’s big cover version of Tillman’s “Slipping Around” in 1949, these last two becoming genuine honky-tonk anthems.

Vocal similarities between the two men invite comparisons. Both singers developed an idiosyncratic yet similar way of falling off of a note once hit, but the question Who influenced whom? is an interesting one. Tillman certainly sang on records prior to Tubb, but one can argue that he changed his earliest, straight-ahead singing style into one closer to Tubb’s—an exaggerated version, we might say—after about 1946, by which time Tubb was the hottest thing in country music. But whatever the similarities or the direction of influence, *they* never thought they sounded alike, as this anecdote from Tillman illustrates: “My piano player Ralph Claude ‘Smitty’ Smith wrote a song, ‘Honky Tonk Heart,’ and he and I cowrote ‘The Honeymoon Is Over,’ and I thought they’d both be good for Ernest Tubb. Smitty had the ideas, and I sang them on the demo recordings, and I sang them like I thought Tubb would have and sent them to him. Tubb liked them, and told me, ‘Hey, you sound good on those demos. You oughta sing like that all the time.’ I told him, ‘Heck no, that’s too much like you—I’ll stick to my own style.’”⁹

Though the two men could not be called close, their ties remained in place almost until the end of Tubb’s career. One of Tubb’s last recordings was an overdubbed part on Tillman’s “One Way Love” for Gilley’s Records in 1981.

Al Dexter

Perhaps a more kindred spirit to Tubb than any of those in or from western swing—a figure paramount in this discussion—was a fellow East Texan who actually went from Jimmie Rodgers disciple to honky-tonk pioneer and only later to the larger orchestras, when everyone else was trimming back—the enigmatic Clarence Albert Poindexter, “Al Dexter.”

Dexter, a native of Troup, Texas, and Tubb first met at Dexter’s initial session for Brunswick Records in November 1936 in San Antonio, only weeks after Tubb’s first Bluebird session, as a Jimmie Rodgers clone, in the same city. Two songs Dexter polished for recording on the drive down to the Alamo city were “Honky Tonk Blues” (first song title to use the term) and one very much from the Jimmie Davis raunchy blues tradition, “Jelly Roll Blues.” Practicing them in his Gunter Hotel room before the session,

Dexter had an admiring listener: "We were practicing for the record and it was hot and all the windows were open. Ernest Tubb was in a neighboring hotel and heard me, and he stuck his head out the window and yelled, 'Play that again, I like it!'"¹⁰ From the same 1980 newspaper interview (he died in 1984, as did Tubb), Dexter says the birth of "honky-tonk" music came as his producer's preference. Rodgers had enough imitators, and Dexter needed something different if he was going to make it to the big time: "Art Satherley, who was my manager at Columbia Records, told me to write honky-tonk songs. When I told him I liked pretty songs, he said, 'My lad, do you want to sing pretty songs, or do you want to make money?' . . . after that, all they wanted from me was honky-tonk."¹¹ Thereafter, songs in this new vein for post-Prohibition America kept coming from the pen of Al Dexter and his cohort James Paris: "Car Hoppin' Mama," "Honky Tonk Baby," "Answer to Honky Tonk Blues," "Bar Hotel," "When We Go a Honky Tonkin'," "Wine Women and Song," "Down at the Roadside Inn," "Meet Me Down in Honky Tonk Town," "Honky Tonk Chinese Dime," all between 1936 and 1941, predating his career-maker, "Pistol Packin' Mama." Clearly Tubb drew upon Dexter's themes and titles for his own "I Ain't Going Honky Tonkin' Anymore" (late 1941), his first of many on the new subject.

Tubb and Dexter shared a common burden—the scorn of western-swing musicians, most of whom wrote off the popularity of Dexter and Tubb to blind luck and unbelievable perseverance. It is understandable that men who could play jazz-style improvisational solos might feel that way about simple guitar strummers, though, of course, they held no high opinion of either man's singing ability either. We have noted Tubb's competition "feud" with the Coffee Grinders, and even his good friend Vernon Young owned up to early doubts about Tubb's abilities: "He wanted to play with our dance band some, the Rhythm Wranglers, but we didn't think he was good enough for that! . . . We were hot shots. We just didn't realize what a crowd appeal he had."¹² And with regard to Al Dexter, Texas music historian Kevin Coffey could no doubt write a paper based on the negative comments he has heard from western-swing musicians about Dexter's nasal voice, his maddening tendency to break meter, and the ostracism he suffered as a consequence. At one early point, Dexter helped break country music's color barrier, but for this simple reason: he was forced to use black musicians because the whites refused play for him!

Nevertheless, for all their musical ability, the dance men (like many others) could not read the signs of the times. After World War II the real

heyday of western swing had passed, and in country music (as in pop, by the way) the solo vocalist was back, supported by a few of western swing's instruments (electric guitar, steel guitar, fiddle) but played in a much more straightforward, melody-driven style. And in large part because of the war's dislocations and upheavals, the favorite subject of country songs then and for years to come became a newer, franker treatment of the realities of heartbreak—drink, infidelity, divorce, child custody, and such—the very themes toward which Tubb, Dexter, Tillman, Daffan, and others had already moved. Give Dexter and Tubb the credit they deserve for persevering through years of adversity and scorn, and for finding their own commercial sound in the very heartland of country music's version of the big bands, western swing.

Why, then, did Ernest Tubb become a household name and Al Dexter an interesting footnote to country history, mainly remembered for "Pistol Packin' Mama"? I do not want to downplay Dexter's stardom: between 1943 and 1946 he was a star with several big hits: "Guitar Polka," "Rosalita," "Too Late to Worry, Too Blue to Cry." But Dexter's nasal voice made all his songs sound like novelty hits, and that was the vein he was content to mine. Tubb was the more believable, sincere, and serious of the two great early honky-tonk singers. Dexter once admitted that he got song ideas by buying his beers and just "kissing the bottles" as he listened to the barflies around him: "Pistol Packin' Mama" is a case in point. Tubb drank much more deeply from that Pierian spring: his own alcoholism, explored at some depth in my book, hurt his performance dependability but clearly gave his songs and recordings a sincerity Dexter's never had.

Summary/Appraisal

One cannot find Ernest Tubb's musical roots without looking long and hard at the Texas scene of the 1930s and 1940s. Having failed to establish his own career in the form of a Jimmie Rodgers disciple and finding only moderate success as a cowboy singer, Tubb, by the time he left Texas at the end of 1942, had found his basic, pared-down, electric lead-guitar sound and had recorded the first examples of his love-gone-wrong, honky-tonk song themes. He electrified the early twin guitar sound of "I'll Get Along Somehow" and "Blue Eyed Elaine" for the first time successfully on "Walking the Floor Over You," cut in Dallas in April 1941. (He had tried but failed to find an amp for his substitute guitarist on a 1940 Hollywood session.)

Tubb tried this effect on the advice of an area jukebox operator, to attract more nickels from the jukebox market. The popular western-swing jukebox hits had used electric instruments for several years by that point and were easy to hear over a noisy barroom crowd. "Walking" subsequently became a smash hit, and his songs after that point not only featured electric guitar but increasingly dealt with what we might call the honky-tonk lifestyle: drink, infidelity, and divorce.

Tubb's relationship to his home state after stardom came his way might be summarized this way: Ernest Tubb did not so much find success outside of Texas as his success took him away from the state—first to Hollywood for the two Charles Starrett movies just after "Walking the Floor Over You" and then to Nashville in February 1943 and the *Grand Ole Opry*, a move engineered through a chain of circumstances proving permanent. Outside of Texas, like Gene Autry and Tex Ritter, Tubb found more long-term success than those Texans who for the most part stayed home—Daffan, Dexter, Tillman, and Bruner among them. Even Moon Mullican went back to Beaumont after a few years on the Opry.

Although he never moved back to the state, Texas continued to have a huge influence on Tubb. He kept the state in his nickname, dropping "Texas' Own Cowboy Singer" (since he was no longer Texas' own OR a cowboy singer) for "The Texas Troubadour," after which he named his first real band in 1943. He had been the "Gold Chain Troubadour" in Fort Worth, and now with the alliteration, "Texas Troubadour" was a natural. Of course there remained family ties to Texas: his father, mother, brother, sisters, nephews, nieces mostly stayed in the Lone Star State, so a large part of his heart stayed there as well. As you would expect of an expatriate Texan, Tubb began to sing of Texas more and more living outside the state, beginning with this chapter's title song, "There's a Little Bit of Everything in Texas." He wrote this song in Austin's Stephen F. Austin Hotel in 1945 on a dare from the Poe Sisters ("Put your bragging into a song"), and it became so popular that it was eventually cited by the Texas Legislature for special commendation (though I note that one legislator facing reelection preferred to commend Tubb's earlier "Take Me Back and Try Me One More Time"). Briefly, at its peak, this "Take Me Back" was a serious contender with "Walking the Floor Over You" for Tubb's theme song—he even put it to his fan club's vote.

The year 1946 brought "I've Got Texas in My Soul," cowritten with guitarist Zeb Turner. Later there was "Texas vs. Kentucky," a Cindy Walker romp Tubb recorded with Red Foley in 1950; "Merry Texas Christmas You

All!" a Bob Miller song for the 1952 holiday season; one of the best covers of "The Yellow Rose of Texas" during its huge 1955 popularity; and best of all, what became his most requested song by the end of his career—nephew Talmadge Tubb's "Waltz Across Texas" (1965). Afterward, in the same vein but anticlimactic, were Porter Wagoner's "The Texas Troubadour" in 1973 and Linda Hargrove's "Half My Heart's in Texas" in 1977.

Tubb died in 1984, and lies buried in Hermitage Memorial Gardens just east of Nashville. Tennessee has his body, as it got forty-one of his seventy earthly years. But *at least* half of Ernest Tubb's heart was always in his native Texas soil, the state that held for him these many and varied strands of musical roots.

Notes

1. Peter Guralnick, *Lost Highway: Journeys and Arrivals of American Musicians*, ed. David R. Godine (Boston: 1979), 27. In all likelihood, Jules Allen's influence on Tubb came less through records (his Victor career encompassed only two sessions, 1928–1929, after Rodgers's was well underway) and more through personal or radio contact in San Antonio, where both men performed in the middle 1930s. My thanks for this tidbit to Kevin Coffey, who has a photo of Allen with a San Antonio band in 1934.

2. Jim Evans to Clenton Sanders, January 1968.

3. Guralnick, *Lost Highway*, 31.

4. Ernest Tubb to Floy and J.C. Case, December 6, 1942.

5. Vernon Young, in telephone interview by the author, June 23, 1994.

6. Ernest Tubb, interview by the author, October 4, 1977.

7. As noted earlier, Tubb's admiration for Duncan is expressed in the lyric from his never-recorded autobiographical tune "He Took Fifty Bucks and My Yodeling Too When He Took My Tonsils Out."

8. Letter to the author from Ted Daffan, undated but postmarked December 8, 1993.

9. Floyd Tillman, in telephone interview by the author, January 2, 1994.

10. Donna Fielder, "Honky-tonk Melody Brought Dexter Fame," *Denton Record-Chronicle*, June 27, 1980, D4.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Vernon Young, interview.

How a Salvation Army Hymn Became a Gospel Standard

The Story of “The Great Judgment Morning”

Wayne W. Daniel

In April 1941 Roy Acuff recorded a gospel song titled “The Great Judgment Morning,” thereby introducing it to a wide audience of country music aficionados.¹ That was not the first time the song had been recorded, but it was the first by a country artist. Earlier, the song had been recorded by several gospel acts—most notably by the evangelistic singer and gospel music entrepreneur Homer Rodeheaver, first for the Victor label and later, in the 1920s, on his Rainbow label.²

“The Great Judgment Morning” has appeared in more than sixty different hymnals, most of which employ the seven-shape musical notation.³ The earliest copyright date found for the music to the song is 1893. The copyright holder for this date is listed as Charlie D. Tillman, an Atlanta-based gospel music composer and publisher, who subsequently featured the song in at least two song books.⁴ (Two printings of the song bearing copyright dates of 1884 are extant, but these dates are assumed to be the result of a typographical error that got repeated.) For the text credit the Tillman versions of “The Great Judgment Morning” list *War Cry*, which many singers would have correctly recognized as the name of a popular Salvation Army publication.

An archivist at the Salvation Army’s National Archives and Research Center recently found a poem titled “A Dream” published in the August 27, 1892, issue of *War Cry*.⁵ The words of the poem are essentially the same

as those sung by Roy Acuff, Homer Rodeheaver, and most others who have recorded the song. The author of the poem is identified as “Nomad, Hannibal, Mo.” Hannibal is a town better known as the boyhood home of the author of the *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* than as the residence of a composer of gospel songs. A note accompanying the poem suggests that the words be sung to the tune of “Brooklyn Theatre.”⁶ Not until 1901 did William Booth, founder and then head of the Salvation Army, allow members of the organization to compose original music. Prior to that date texts of Salvationist songs had to be set to existing melodies. A common practice among Salvation Army song writers was to choose for their musical settings familiar tunes from secular sources. Booth, in words reminiscent of those of another English clergyman, once said that he “rather enjoy[ed] robbing the devil of his choicest tunes. It is like taking the enemy’s guns and turning them against him.”⁷ The suggested tune, “Brooklyn Fire,” refers to one of at least three songs written about an 1876 fire in the Brooklyn Theatre in Brooklyn, New York, in which 295 people died and hundreds were injured.

The name Nomad appeared in conjunction with the *War Cry* poem at a time when the use of pen names was in vogue—Mark Twain, O. Henry, and Saki were all contemporaries of Nomad. A number of “Nomads” appear in several books designed to unmask those of the past who have sought to hide their identity behind an alias, but none of those showed signs of ever having had any particular interest in the day of judgment. Further research by the Salvation Army archivist, however, revealed that Nomad of Hannibal, Missouri, was Bertram H(enry) Shadduck.

Shadduck, who also went by the names Bert and B.H., was born April 14, 1869, in Erie County, Pennsylvania, on what he once described as “one of the beautiful green hills that overlook Lake Erie. It was an out-of-the-way place. . . .”⁸ Bert, the son of Henry Shadduck and Lucy Davis Shadduck, was one of nine children born to his father’s two wives.⁹ The Shadducks of Erie County were descended from Puritan stock of England, where they spelled their name *Shattuck*.¹⁰ Bert’s father was a successful farmer who owned four hundred acres of land “located in that part of North East [Pennsylvania] known as Shadduck’s Corners.”¹¹ Shadduck once stated that his father was an infidel.¹² “I didn’t know what church or Sunday school was,” he once wrote. “With no one to teach me of the way of God, I naturally grew up wild. My first trip to church was to satisfy curiosity, and if I went afterward it was to escape some disagreeable work that father always had for us on Sunday.”¹³



Bertram H. Shadduck, author of the poem "A Dream," which became "The Great Judgment Morning." (Wayne W. Daniel collection)

Of his early formal education Shadduck wrote, "I commenced going to school very early in life, and kept it up, partly through a desire to learn and partly because of a certain pile of logs which father kept in the back yard to be sawed up by any of the boys who became disinterested in school. This had the desired effect. I didn't care to stay out of school on such conditions."¹⁴

During his youth Shadduck was fond of music and singing and was a voracious reader, particularly of books that he described as cheap novels. At the age of sixteen he joined a literary society and developed into what he

called “a second class comedian. My greatest hit,” he stated, “was to blacken my face, don female attire and impersonate an aged negress.”¹⁵ He also wrote plays, was active in a debate club, and cultivated an interest in temperance and politics.

As a teenager, Shadduck developed a religious conviction and was on the verge of joining a church but became disillusioned when the ministers became involved in a quarrel about baptism that “entirely unsettled” him. On turning eighteen, Shadduck “packed a few things in a hand satchel and left home” to visit distant relatives. He never returned, “except as a visitor.” During this trip he became acquainted with members of the Salvation Army, attended several of their meetings, and, over the objections of his family, “conceived a desire to become an officer” in the organization. In Shadduck’s own account, he was undeterred by parental opposition: “I secured employment, bought [a] uniform, and settled down for a long battle with the devil.”¹⁶

On February 6, 1888, after four months as a soldier, eighteen-year-old Bertram H. Shadduck was accepted as an officer in the Salvation Army at Ashtabula, Ohio, bringing to the cause little more than remarkable resilience, a small talent for the concertina,¹⁷ and a potential knack for writing songs. Shadduck’s commitment came not quite twenty-three years after William Booth and his wife Catherine, in the east end of London in July 1865, had, as their son-in-law asserted, “planted the standard of salvation as near the gates of hell as they could reach” to commence “their work of spiritual and social reform.”¹⁸ Their efforts marked the beginning of the Salvation Army. A scant eight years before Shadduck took up the cause, Booth’s first missionary had arrived in New York City to “claim America for God.”¹⁹

Shadduck would soon learn that life as a Salvation Army officer was not for the socially reticent, the spiritually weak, or the physically fragile. Within weeks of his commission he wrote, “I was waylaid and badly used up once or twice.” In grimy, unheated, makeshift meeting halls he “slept on pine boards at night, used them for a table in the daytime, and seated unruly boys on them during the meetings.” He admitted, “My friends marked me down as crazy.”²⁰

On June 8, 1892—after four years of service in the Salvation Army in eighteen different locations in Ohio, West Virginia, and Missouri—Shadduck was assigned to duty in Hannibal, Missouri, from whence he would send forth into the world his best known literary endeavor. Upon his arrival at this town on the west bank of the Mississippi River, he found a municipality of some 13,000 residents who, along with uncounted transients depos-

ited by train and boat, supported forty saloons, two major houses of prostitution, twelve blacksmith shops, and one opera house.²¹ Shadduck wrote later that he “found the [Salvation Army] hall in the second story of an old building, and that about forty window lights had been knocked out. I was informed that this same hall was once used as an auction room where slaves were sold.”²² The hall, located near the boat landing and railroad station, was the scene of religious services at 3 and 8 P.M. on Sundays and of meetings every evening except Wednesday. The Salvation Army had had a presence in Hannibal since 1888, about four years prior to Shadduck’s arriving on the scene. During his stay in Hannibal, he organized the city’s first official Salvation Army band, consisting of about fifteen musicians presumably led by Shadduck, playing his concertina. The band conducted many street meetings and outdoor concerts, for which its members were arrested several times on charges of disturbing the peace.²³

After four months at Hannibal, he was placed on assignment in another city and remained an officer in the Salvation Army until at least near the end of 1894. His last known appointment was at Chariton, Missouri. Meanwhile, on June 27, 1893, he married Emelie Sheldon of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. They subsequently had two daughters.

After leaving the Salvation Army, Shadduck commenced an affiliation with the Methodist Church. In 1900 he was “admitted on trial into the West Virginia Conference [of the Methodist Church] taking the course of study and receiving a notation on his certificate announcing that he was graduating with, ‘highest honors ever granted for entire course.’” He was received into “full connection” and ordained a deacon in 1902 and ordained an elder in 1904.²⁴ Shadduck’s name appears on the roster of summer-term students taking postgraduate work in the School of Philosophy at Grove City (Pennsylvania) College in 1909, 1910, and 1911. At the annual meeting of the Board of Trustees on June 11, 1912, the degree Doctor of Philosophy, *pro merito*, was conferred on Shadduck. Throughout this period of academic activity, Shadduck was living in West Virginia.²⁵ As a Methodist pastor Shadduck served churches in West Virginia and Ohio until his retirement in 1942 while pastor of the Lake Avenue Methodist Church in Ashtabula, Ohio.²⁶

“The Great Judgment Morning” was not the only song that Bert Shadduck wrote. Several of his poems were printed in *The War Cry* during his stint with the Salvation Army. The February 4 issue of the newspaper included several of his songs preceded by the following introduction: “Few

men in The Salvation Army have done better service in song writing than Capt. B.H. Shadduck, better known as 'Nomad,' his songs not only being written to very familiar airs, but are also of a very solid and oftentimes extremely pathetic character. The columns of the *War Cry* have always extended a hearty welcome to Bro. Nomad, and we trust he will contribute in the future. We insert below a few specimens of his composition."

The songs included in the article were "Promises" (tune: "Rock-a-Bye, Baby"); "Going to the Throne" (tune: "I'm Going Back to Dixie"), "The Baptism of Fire" (tune: "Ring, Ching, Ching"), "Profit and Loss" (tune: "Maggie Murphy's Home"), and "Nailed to the Cross" (tune: "Norine Morine").²⁷

Shadduck's creative output was not limited to songwriting. Between 1924 and 1940 he turned out some dozen extended essays published separately under titles like *Buzzard Eggs in the Eagle's Nest*, *Dust & Deity*, and *The Toadstool among the Tombs*. Mostly self-published in soft-cover booklet form averaging about thirty pages, these fundamentalist tracts took an adversarial stance on such subjects as evolution and Jehovah's Witnesses. Bertram H. Shadduck died on March 2, 1950, at his home in Ashtabula, Ohio. He was eighty years old.²⁸

But nothing Shadduck wrote, neither poetry nor prose, has endured or reached as large an audience as "The Great Judgment Morning." The poem seems to have been a favorite among late nineteenth and early twentieth century evangelists, as well as composers and publishers of shape-note gospel songs. In 1894, one year after Charlie Tillman copyrighted his tune, another tune was copyrighted by one L.L. Pickett and published with Pickett himself listed as music composer and, as in the case of Tillman's copyright, with *War Cry* receiving credit for the text. Pickett (1859–1928) was a clergyman, evangelist, author, and songbook publisher.²⁹ His version of the song thus credited appeared in several different songbooks through 1912. In 1913 the Rodeheaver Company published a songbook titled *Great Revival Hymns No. 2*. "The Great Judgment Morning" appeared as selection 133 in this book—copyright date 1894, L.L. Pickett as music composer, and Rev. Bert Shadduck as author of the text. The first edition of this book, published in 1911, had credited the text of this hymn to *War Cry*.³⁰ It would appear that sometime around 1912 the identity of Nomad somehow became known, and, for the most part, from then on Shadduck was duly credited for writing the song text.

But it seems that not all members of the gospel music community were aware of this development. Tillman's songbook, *The Highway Hymnal*, pub-

lished in 1915, for example, featured the song with music composer/text attributions to himself and *War Cry*. Three decades after Shadduck was identified as the author, a Stamps-Baxter songbook, published in the early 1940s to be sold by a country music radio act, still carried the song with Tillman's 1893 copyright and credits.³¹ In 1939, when Virgil O. Stamps decided to copyright a new musical setting for Shadduck's poem, he acted as though unaware of the text writer's existence by giving *War Cry* the credit. Stamps's version of the tune and the credits he assigned were published in a songbook in the mid-1940s.³² In 1957 Stamps-Baxter published Shadduck's poem set to yet another musical arrangement composed by one Renus E. Rich. This version appeared under a new title, "I Dreamed of the Last Judgment," and cited "Anonymous" as the author of the text, which, incidentally, had been substantially altered.³³ This was not the first time that "Anonymous" had been credited as the author. As early as 1898, the poem, attributed to an anonymous writer, was published in at least two songbooks. Composer of the music in both cases was listed as F.L. Eiland, a name frequently found in gospel songbooks from around the turn of the century. The copyright holder of this version was gospel music publisher John C.F. Kyger. Although the poem was just six years out of the pen of Capt. B.H. Shadduck, the collaborators on this endeavor took the liberty of making small alterations in the text, in one instance to the detriment of the rhyme scheme. In another a new chorus was written.³⁴ Gospel music composer, teacher, and publisher R.E. Winsett, in 1934, copyrighted and subsequently published Shadduck's poem set to a tune credited to Winsett with text credit given to "Anonymous." Winsett's version appeared in several songbooks in succeeding years. As late as 1955 it was included in a book published by the John T. Benson Company.³⁵ Winsett's name is listed as composer on Roy Acuff's 1941 recording of the song. In 1973 "The Great Judgment Morning" achieved yet another milestone in musical endurance when it was published as an elaborate musical score with the single credit "traditional."³⁶

"The Great Judgment Morning" enjoyed popularity both within and outside the gospel music arena. In 1903 a one-time street singing evangelist named Lucius B. Compton wrote in his memoirs that sometime earlier he had sung the song on a street in Asheville, North Carolina. "By the time I had completed the song," he wrote, "I had a congregation of from two to three hundred people gathered around me, with questioning looks upon their faces. . . ." ³⁷ As we have seen, Roy Acuff's recording helped make "The Great Judgment Morning" a country gospel standard. The Bailes Brothers,

a popular country/gospel act of the '30s, '40s, and '50s, included the song in one of their songbooks.³⁸ Indeed, the poem was not neglected by the organization that had introduced it to the world. The publishing arm of the Salvation Army included it in several songbooks published around the turn of the century. Suggested tunes to which the words could be sung included the pre-Civil War ballad "Do They Miss Me at Home" and "Over the Hill To the Poor House." And in 1907 the version with music by L.L. Pickett appeared in a book titled *A Peerless Collection of Temperance Songs and Hymns for The Women's Christian Temperance Union, Loyal Temperance Legion, Prohibitionists, Temperance Praise Meetings, Medal Contests, Etc.*³⁹

By 1925 "The Great Judgment Morning" had entered oral tradition. That year folklorist Vance Randolph collected the song from a woman in Pineville, Missouri, and published it under the title "The Great Judgment." In 1938 he heard additional verses sung by a woman in Springfield, Missouri.⁴⁰ The song surfaced again in Missouri in 1938 when the *Aurora Advertiser* published the poem, without music notation or author credit, in a column titled "Songs and Ballads of Yester Years." This version is almost identical to Shadduck's original poem.⁴¹

On Friday and Saturday evenings, March 20 and 21, 1998, the Faith Church of God, also known as the Family Worship Center, near Oak Ridge, Tennessee, presented a drama titled "The Great Judgment Morning." The cast consisted of church members who also provided the music. Although I cannot say with certainty whether the song of the same name was part of the music, good reason exists to believe that it was; the pastor of the church believes that his wife sang it in the drama.⁴² Gospel music publisher and songwriter Charles Towler remembers seeing a drama titled "The Great Judgment Morning" at a Pentecostal church in North Georgia in the early 1950s. He recalls that as each stanza of the song was sung it was dramatized.⁴³ I have been unable to obtain additional concrete information on such dramas, despite the fact that the pastor of Faith Church of God states that the drama has "been around" for at least twenty years and is presented by other churches in his area.

Finally, "The Great Judgment Morning" entered the third century of which it has been a part as a selection on the Internet's "Cyber Hymnal." By pointing their browser at the appropriate site on the World Wide Web, computer users can read Shadduck's poem while listening to a piano rendition of L.L. Pickett's score.⁴⁴

Most of the readily available recordings of "The Great Judgment Morn-

ing” are straight readings of the lyrics and music. A couple of recordings, however, are of interest because of their drastic departure from the standard arrangements of the song as usually delivered by Caucasian performers. Doyle Lawson and his bluegrass group Quicksilver, for example, give the song a rich spiritual flavor, reflecting Lawson’s admitted stylistic debt to the African American gospel tradition.⁴⁵ More specifically, Lawson states that his arrangement of the song was directly inspired by a group that he recalls as the Dunham Jubilee Quartet.⁴⁶

Though never intended to be a work of musical artistry, the recording by Leonard Emanuel is of interest as something of a gospel music oddity. Leonard Emanuel, now deceased, was the 1971 hollerin’ champion, a title conferred at the annual hollerin’ contest held at Spivey’s Corner in eastern North Carolina. His recording of “The Great Judgment Morning,” which he chants rather than sings, is sandwiched between examples of his hollering expertise. The recording was made on site at either the 1975 or the 1976 contest and is available on a compact disc featuring selections from the two events.⁴⁷ Leonard Emanuel, who was from Samson County, North Carolina, learned “The Great Judgment Morning” from his family who, according to a Rounder Records spokesperson, had known it “for a long time.”⁴⁸

“The Great Judgment Morning” has had a long and varied history and has been in the repertoires of performers noted primarily for sacred music as well as those whose forte has been mostly secular material. Since the poem received its first musical setting from Charlie D. Tillman, it has entered oral tradition and has surfaced in a variety of contexts, including a hollering contest. In musical form it may be the only gospel song with a Salvation Army genesis to have some half-dozen composers eventually set its lyrics, to have artists specializing in southern gospel, country gospel, and bluegrass gospel music embrace it, and to have an audience spread across three centuries enjoy it.

The longevity of “The Great Judgment Morning” may be attributable to its basic theme: the end of the world. The end of time and the judgment of individual human beings by an almighty god are subjects of contemplation and creative endeavor as old as monotheism. The Bible has given us the book of Revelation, and doomsday cults and second-coming prophets have been with us ever since, attracting obedience from lemming-like disciples and incredulity from fascinated, but scornful, skeptics. It seems unlikely that “The Great Judgment Morning” will suffer from a lack of future performers or enthusiastic audiences.

Notes

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1. Elizabeth Schlappi, *Roy Acuff and His Smoky Mountain Boys Discography*, Country Research Series Disc Collector #23 (Cheswold, Del.: Disc Collector Publications, 1966) 14.

2. Thomas Henry Porter, "Homer Alvan Rodeheaver (1880–1955); Evangelistic Musician and Publisher" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981), 288.

3. Mary Louise VanDyke (Dictionary of American Hymnology Project Librarian/Coordinator, Oberlin College Library), letter to the author, May 13, 1998.

4. Charlie D. Tillman, *The Revival No. 2* (Atlanta: Charlie D. Tillman, 1896), 4; *The Highway Hymnal* (Atlanta: Charlie D. Tillman, 1915), 305.

5. Connie Hagood, letter to the author, January 14, 1998.

6. "A Dream." *The War Cry*, no. 569, August 27, 1892, 16.

7. Ronald W. Holz, "The Story Behind Salvation Army Music," *Christian History*, issue 26 (vol. 9, no. 2): 30–32.

8. "Life of Capt. B.H. Shadduck," *The War Cry*, October 18, 1890, 14.

9. John Miller, *History of Erie County*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Lewis Publ. Co., 1909), 123.

10. B.H. Shadduck, letter to Mrs. J.C. Shadduck. March 23, 1937.

11. Miller, *History of Erie County*.

12. Capt. (B.H.) Shadduck, "How I Became an Officer," *The Conqueror* (1893): 340–42.

13. "Life of Capt. B.H. Shadduck."

14. Ibid.

15. Shadduck, letter.

16. Ibid.

17. Connie Hagood, untitled, undated document provided to the author.

18. Frederick Booth-Tucker, "Social Relief Work of the Salvation Army in the United States," *The Salvation Army in America: Selected Reports, 1899–1903* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 3.

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23. Lt. Ronald Key, The Salvation Army, Hannibal, Missouri, letter to the author, August 19, 1999.

24. William Drown (historian), East Ohio Conference/United Methodist Church, e-mail to the author, August 30, 1999 (Drown cites as his source memoirs in the North-East Ohio Conference, 1950, pp. 523–24).

25. Robert Smith, Registrar, Grove City College, e-mail to the author, September 2, 1999.

26. Drown, e-mail.

27. "Our Song Writers: 'Nomad,'" *The War Cry*, February 4, 1893, 14.

28. Thomas A. Letzler, Treasurer, East Ohio Conference/United Methodist Church, letter to Mrs. Melvin Shadduck, August 1, 1985.

29. *Who Was Who among North American Authors, 1921–1939* (Detroit, Michigan: Gale research Company, 1976. 2:1150.

30. VanDyke, letter.

31. *Bob and Jim's Radio Favorites, No. 2* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music & Printing Company [ca. 1943]), selection 38.

32. *Fred and Bunny's Book of Radio Favorites* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music & Printing Company [ca. 1945]), selection 68.

33. *Crowning Joy* (Dallas: Stamps-Baxter Music & Printing Company, 1957), selection 104.

34. John C.F. Kyger, comp., *Happy Voices, No. 1* (Waco, Tex.: John C.F. Kyger, 1898), selection 90; John C.F. Kyger, ed., *Bells of Heaven* (Chattanooga, Tenn., and Waco, Texas: Brown-Franklin Company, 1898), selection 90.

35. *New Songs of Inspiration, No. 2* (Nashville: John T. Benson Company, 1955), selection 189.

36. *Régeneration . . . Beautiful* (Waco, Texas: Rodeheaver/Word, 1973) 45–50.

37. Compton, Lucius B. *Life of Lucius B. Compton, The Mountain Evangelist; or From the Depths of Sin to the Heights of Holiness* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Office of God's Revivalist, 1903), 69–70, available in electronic format at <http://metalab.unc.edu/docsouth/compton/compton.html> and in digital form at Academic Affairs Library, Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

38. *The Bailes Brothers Book of Old Time and Mountain Ballads* (ca. 1940s).

39. Emmet G. Coleman, *The Temperance Songbook* (1907; reprint, ed. David Hoffman, New York: American Heritage Press, 1971).

40. Vance Randolph, comp. and ed., *Ozark Folksongs*, rev. ed. (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1980), 4:53–55.

41. "Songs and Ballads of Yester Year." *The Aurora* (Ill.) *Advertiser*, March 3, 1938.
42. *The Oak Ridger Online*, March 13, 1998; Rev. Frank Price, telephone conversation with the author, April 8, 1998.
43. Charles Towler, telephone conversation with the author, October 1, 1999.
44. www.tch.simplenet.com/htm/i/iddreamed.htm
45. Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver, *Heavenly Treasures*, Sugar Hill CD-3735, 1985.
46. Doyle Lawson, conversation with the author, May 4, 2000. Lawson's recollection supports the view, expressed in the introductory, that the song was recorded as a spiritual as early as 1930.
47. *Hollerin'*, Rounder CD 0071 and accompanying booklet, Rounder Records, 1995.
48. Kerry Murphy, telephone conversation with the author, July 15, 1999.

"The Great Judgment Morning": A List of Known Recordings

(Title included only when different from above.)

78 RPM Records

- Acuff, Roy. Apr. 29, 1941. Okeh 06512, Columbia 37429, Columbia 20156, Conqueror 9888.
- Dunham Jazz/Jubilee Singers. May 29, 1930. Columbia 14540, Clanka-Lanka 144001/002. "I Dreamed of the Judgment Morning."
- Rodeheaver, Homer. Victor 35326, Rainbow 1014.
- Senior Chapel Quartette. 1929. Vocalion 1475. "The Great Judgment."

Compact Discs

- Acuff, Roy. *The King of Country Music*. TVCD-6001. Sony Music Special Products.
- Emanuel, Leonard. *Hollerin'* Rounder 0071.
- Lawson, Doyle, and Quicksilver. *Heavenly Treasures*. Sugar Hill. "I Dreamed of a Great Judgment Morning."
- Louvin Brothers. *Close Harmony*. BCD 15561. Bear Family Records, 8 CD Boxed Set.
- Whitman, Slim. *Rose Marie (1949–59)*. BCD 15768, CD-5. Bear Family Records.

Cassettes

- Acuff, Roy. *The Best of Roy Acuff*. C4 91621. Capitol.
 ———. *The Voice of Country Music*. S44–56964. Cema Special Markets.
 Hawtree, Dan, and Pat Hawtree. *God's Miracles in Melody*. Dan Hawtree Evangelical Association.
 Lawson, Doyle, and Quicksilver. *Heavenly Treasures*. Sugar Hill. "I Dreamed of a Great Judgment Morning."
 Regal, Robert. *Thanking Him with Music*. RR 12930. Regal Recordings.

Long Play Albums

- Acuff, Roy. *Songs of the Smoky Mountains*. T-617. Capitol.
 ———. *The Best of Roy Acuff*. SM-1870. Capitol/DT-1870. Capitol.
 ———. *Capitol's Country Faith*. Various Artists. SQ-91655. Capitol.
 Adams, J. T., and the Men of Texas. *We've Come This Far by Faith*. WST 8350. Word.
 Holcombe, Jack. *It Took a Miracle*. Word 3057M
 Kelly, Marshall, and John Handy. *It Takes Everything to Serve the Lord*. S-5176. Chapel Records.
 Lawson, Doyle, and Quicksilver. *Heavenly Treasures*. SH 3735. Sugar Hill. "I Dreamed of a Great Judgment Morning."
 Liu, Sunny. *Sunny Liu Sings How Big Is God*. ST-094. Chapel Records.
 Moore, Lee. *Lee Moore a Living Legend*. LP 61. Cattle Records.
 Musical Vanns. *Sing About Him*. 1007. M.V.
 RéGeneration. *RéGeneration . . . Beautiful*. WST 8582. Word.
 Stover, Don. *Don Stover and the White Mountain Boys*. RR 0039. Rounder.
 Whitman, Slim. *I'll Walk with God*. LP 9088 (LP-12032). Imperial.

Video

- Jackson, Clarence. *Clarence Jackson's Learn to Play Dobro by Ear*. Video Series: Video no. 13. All Dobro Music Store.

World Wide Web

- The Cyber Hymnal* (Piano Solo). www.tch.simplenet.com/index.htm

Radio and the Blue Ridge

Joe Wilson

When we got the first radio that had a speaker, we'd set it out here on the porch and people would come listen to it with us. Sometimes the yard was full. Not long after we got it, an old man from over in Beaver Dams was here listening to a boxing match. When the fight heated up, he began to get real nervous. He said, "Tip, if you don't turn that thing off, he's going to kill that man."

Tipton Madron, Trade, Tennessee, December 25, 1961

It seemed like magic, this box that could grab voices from the wind and reproduce them on headphones or speakers. Here were the words, songs, and tunes of people who stood hundreds of miles away, words heard instantly as they were spoken—the modulations of voice perfectly audible, the intake of breath heard as if inches away. It was magic, a form of transporting, ancient witchcraft made science, the future had arrived. Nowadays, it is common to equate early radio with early television in assessing impact. This is an error. Nothing like radio had happened before. Radio came before sound films and ignited what was called "a craze." That is an apt term because one has to go back to the ancient manias in Europe to find anything with the intensity of excitement that radio generated.¹

Radio was made possible by the superheterodyne, the so-called "tuning circuit" invented during World War I by Edwin Armstrong. That new development brought startling clarity to voices carried by radio. Before the superheterodyne (the etymological components of which roughly translate

as super = above [the sonic], hetero = other, dyne = force) radio had primarily been a medium for wireless telegraphy—messages sent point-to-point in code, the wireless companies decoding and delivering them by messenger boys. Hundreds of amateur radio fans owned receiving and sending equipment before this invention, but the idea of “broadcasting” was unthinkable before the superheterodyne. Point-to-point messages might be overheard, but they were individual communications, not news, not entertainment.

Change came with amazing rapidity. The first event that could be called a broadcast happened on July 2, 1921, the heavyweight boxing championship match between American Jack Dempsey and French challenger Georges Carpentier. An estimated 300,000 people heard a blow-by-blow description of this fight, the largest audience that had ever simultaneously heard a single speaker.² Corporations began building radio stations as part of their advertising and public relations gambits. Some selected call letters that reflected their business. Radio station WLS was owned by Sears, and its call letters were an acronym for “World’s Largest Store.” Nashville’s WSM was owned by the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, and its call letters reflected the company slogan, “We Shield Millions.”³ The number of Americans owning a radio soared: a handful in early 1921, 100,000 in 1922, and 500,000 in 1923. There was one station in 1920, thirty in 1922, and 556 in 1923.⁴

The technology of popular entertainment may greatly accelerate the presentation of older art forms and even “use them up” (for example, the use of older films by television). Among older forms taken up by early radio was blackface comedy. This was a popular form that presented racist caricatures derived from the minstrel stage. Such presentations began around 1840, developed into an internationally popular form, and continued to television and the early 1960s, when the early civil rights movement finally pushed it into obscurity.⁵ Though the form was old, tired, and as unrelentingly racist on radio as it was at its nineteenth-century beginnings, such radio presentations as *Amos and Andy* became hugely popular. Beginning in 1925 as a serialized story of various black stereotypes performed by white actors, the show was syndicated to scores of radio stations. *Amos and Andy* became so popular that restaurants had to put the show on speakers to keep customers when it was on the air. Nothing could compete with it, and the country almost shut down during its weekly broadcast. President Coolidge made plain that he was not to be disturbed during the time it was on the air. The claim was so often made that most of the nation listened

that it must be given some credence. The audience grew until the mid 1930s—unprecedented popularity, escapism on a grand, even national, scale.⁶

Blackface comedy was not the only older entertainment form adopted by radio. Sopranos and other classical vocalists, violinists and orchestras, pianists, and poetry reading were heard. At first virtually all performance was live. Early radio avoided recordings, seeing the recording industry as competition; likewise, some recording companies did not allow the use of their recordings on radio.

At first stations were on the air for limited periods. As it became evident that people would listen all day, however, stations scrambled to find programming to fill the hours. Exactly when and where older, rural forms of music took to the air is disputed, but it had certainly happened by 1922. Atlanta's WSB put Fiddlin' John Carson on the radio that year, and other fiddlers and singers of traditional American musical forms were soon heard on stations across the country.⁷

Consumers of the arts are often interested in the context in which arts arise, and this is especially true of folk arts. Typically, the intensity of a sports fan's interest in where an important athlete was reared cannot compare with the importance the devotee of fiddle music places on the background of a great fiddler. If, as with folk art, the art arises in a community and reflects it, the audience craves to know that community. This was as true of early radio fans as other audiences, and the producers made much of the origins of the performers of older music forms. An interest in the "other world" qualities of the southern Appalachians had been growing for more than a half century before radio became a craze. This interest seems to have had origins in the North at the time of the Civil War, when major portions of the mountain South opposed the Confederacy and sent many thousands of "Mountain Yankee" troops into Union armies. President Lincoln praised those loyal citizens, and after the war this national interest was fed by the fundraising appeals of home missionaries and by local-color writers.⁸

The "other world" attitude toward small Appalachian communities may continue to serve a continuing function in this regard. In our own time people continue to demonstrate a need for an apparently remote, rustic place that is, nevertheless, relatively nearby and where all the good and vanishing things of the past are being kept alive, a living museum. In Poland the rural folk of the Tatra Mountains near Zakopane perform this service. In Ukraine the keepers of culture are the Hutzels in the Carpathian Mountains. In South America villagers high in the Peruvian Andes do the

same. Evidence abounds to support the view that having remote rural keepers of the best of ancient cultures may be a human universal need. After all, poor shepherds were the first community to welcome Jesus, while wise men had to travel for days to bring their gifts.⁹

That the southern Appalachians have long been viewed as a place where older forms are preserved can be demonstrated by reviewing the history of bluegrass, a form of country music that began in 1945.¹⁰ Though a contemporary of rock-n-roll, bluegrass was based on a dance-band instrumentation that had been utilized from the end of the last century. The influence of break-taking jazzmen and western swing groups clearly helped create bluegrass, but it was microphone technology that enabled all bluegrass band members to take solo instrumental “breaks.” Because some instruments were not as loud as others, the microphone was necessary, making the instruments audible and “in front” of the rest of the band. Bluegrass was, of course, also created by many innovators in the form. Their major innovation was in using electronics to convert a nineteenth-century dance music to a twentieth-century concert music.

Bluegrass was performed on acoustic instruments and thus sounded older than most other modern forms and was instantly assigned to the southern Appalachians. The founding father of bluegrass was Bill Monroe, reared in central Kentucky, “the bluegrass state.” Monroe had been a resident of the Nashville area since the late 1930s and was never a resident of any community in the mountain South. Bluegrass takes its name from “The Blue Grass Boys,” Monroe’s band. The first of his bands with this name was formed in 1939, but the critical band, the one that created the “bluegrass” sound, was created in 1945, and no member of the group had ever lived in any of the southern mountain ranges. But when the first film was made about bluegrass some twenty-four years later, it was entitled *Old As the Hills*.¹¹

Why was this new form instantly assigned to antiquity and to the mountains? One answer lies in the powerful precedents, many of them derived from radio in the previous two decades. Fiddlin’ John Carson had been performing in and around Atlanta for a quarter century before he took to the microphone of WSB in 1922. Where Carson was born and exactly when is not clear, but in his biography of Carson, scholar Gene Wiggins takes note of various attempts to assign the exuberant fiddler to the Blue Ridge Mountains. This began, according to Wiggins, as early as 1914 in vaudeville publicity.¹² Wiggins notes, “Naturally newspapers of the period when John was a good story wanted to think he was born near Blue Ridge,” a



Two Atlanta area old-time music pioneers, Fiddlin' John Carson (left) and Gid Tanner. (Charles Wolfe collection)

community in Fannin County in northern Georgia. Wiggins reports doubts that Carson actually was born there, and one informant said that when his father corrected Carson, pointing out that he was born elsewhere, Carson replied, "That's right, Joe, but I always say Fannin County. It sounds better." In a September 10, 1933, article in the *Atlanta Journal* about Carson and other old-time musicians performing on WSB, he is called "the Fannin County mountaineer," the article going on to extol the popularity of the radio shows. The newspaper owned the radio station.

A November 7, 1925, article in the nationally circulated *Radio Digest* magazine about Carson's radio success describes John as a "Blue Ridge Mountain and eight times Champion of Dixie" in its first paragraph. The second paragraph begins, "Fiddlin' John was born and 'jerked up' in the moonshine fastnesses of Fannin County in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains." The writer says that Carson was "one of the most popular radio entertainers in these United States" and notes that he had "given hun-

dreds of concerts at WSB's studio."¹³ The unnamed writer also notes that Carson's radio broadcasts led to his invitation to record phonograph records and to unprecedented record sales during the mid and late 1920s. This period has been called a "golden age" of early country recording, and the Nashville-based country music industry traces its origins to Fiddlin' John's 1923 recordings.¹⁴ This nine-hundred-word *Radio Digest* article contains twelve references to the supposed mountain origins of the fiddler. Fiddlin' John is pictured with his instrument in a natty and stylish business suit, but a photograph of a log cabin appears adjacent to this portrait, accompanied by the following comment: "Below, Fiddlin' John's wistful look was probably brought on by a flash back in his mind to the days spent in his mountain cabin."

The ability of *Radio Digest* editors to read the minds of persons depicted in photographs and to rusticate vaudeville performers is also demonstrated in an article the magazine published in its March 6, 1926, issue. The subject is the Hill Billies, a string band then broadcasting from station WRC in Washington, D.C. (and at about the same time on Washington's WMAL and New York's WJZ).¹⁵ The prime movers in this ensemble were the Hopkins brothers: Al, Joe, John, Elmer, and Bill. Elmer and Bill floated in and out of the group, but there were always three or more of the brothers in the band. They were from Gap Creek, North Carolina, in Ashe County, between Boone and West Jefferson, and distant relatives of the nineteenth-century western railway magnate Mark Hopkins. Their father had moved to Washington in 1904 to work for the Census Bureau. Al led the band and was a professional musician all his life. He organized his brothers into a vocal quartet and began working in Washington vaudeville theaters in 1910.¹⁶

In 1922 an older Hopkins brother, Jacob, a physician, opened a clinic in Galax, Virginia. Jacob was not in good health, and during the vaudeville "off season" of 1922, 1923 and 1924, Al Hopkins came to Galax to help his brother manage the clinic. Brother Joe Hopkins worked for the Norfolk & Western Railway on its nearby line between West Jefferson, North Carolina, and Abingdon, Virginia. Dr. Jacob was as musical as his brothers, and they occasionally had a jam session in Galax. There in April 1924 they formed a band with two Galax area men, John Rector and A.E. "Tony" Alderman. Alderman is the source of most of what is known about this band, and he recalled broadcasting on WRC in 1925.¹⁷ But in a telephone conversation in December 1973 John Hopkins said groups organized by his brother Al began broadcasts earlier, "a couple of years before Tony Al-



fiddlin' John Carson

Does "It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo'" for Okeh

WHEN good old Fiddlin' John Carson rosins his bow and tucks his violin under chin you're going to hear real mountain music. For Fiddlin' John does well. And "It Ain't

Gonna Rain No Mo'" is done in his own quaint way only for Okeh. Here's a record that's as different from the rest as Fiddlin' John is. And that's some. It's an Okeh that's peak high in the enjoyment line!

Okeh Record, the Records of Quality

Here are Six Records you will enjoy

60701 10 in. 75c	IT AIN'T GONNA RAIN NO MO' Fiddling and Singing. FIDDLIN' JOHN CARSON AND HIS VIRGINIA REELERS*	60197 10 in. 75c	MISSOURI WALTZ Harmonica Solo. E. F. "POSSY" ACREE.
60199 10 in. 75c	ALABAMA GAL Fiddling and Singing. FIDDLIN' JOHN CARSON AND HIS VIRGINIA REELERS*	48198 10 in. 75c	CHICKEN REEL Harmonica Solo. E. F. "POSSY" ACREE.
60201 10 in. 75c	BESSIE COULDN'T HELP IT For The WARNER'S SEVEN ACES*	48714 10 in. 75c	I'M NINE HUNDRED MILES FROM HOME Fiddling Solo-Vocal Chorus FIDDLIN' JOHN CARSON*
	LONGING FOR YOU For The WARNER'S SEVEN ACES*		I'M GLAD MY WIFE'S IN EU-ROPE Fiddling Solo-Vocal Chorus FIDDLIN' JOHN CARSON*
	ROCK-A-BYE Mr. Fiddie Johnson-Waltz WARNER'S SEVEN ACES (P. H. WARNER, Director)		THE CHURCH IN THE WILD-WOOD Barred Vocal JAY JENKINS FAMILY.
	LOVE TIME —Fox Trot WARNER'S SEVEN ACES (P. H. WARNER, Director)		IF I COULD HEAR MY MOTHER PRAY AGAIN Barred Vocal JENKINS FAMILY.

*Exclusive Okeh Artists.

Ask Your Nearest Dealer for These Records

ATLANTA PHONOGRAPH CO.
14 N. Pryor St.
RAMER, INC.
107 Peachtree St.
FIVE POINTS MUSIC STORE
4 Edgewood Ave. (At Five Points)

NEY PHARMACY CO.
110 Decatur St. (Open Nights)
ROBY MUSIC COMPANY
Two Stores
183 Peters St. and 23 Decatur St.
LEROY WEBB & CO.
61 N. Pryor St.

ODEON RECORDS bring you the world's best music, played by European artists of international fame. These imported recordings are the favorite records of European music lovers. Odeon Records for European folk songs and dances, Okeh records for dancing, song hits and old time pieces — an unbeatable combination.

Okeh ODEON RECORDS

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65 West 45th Street, New York City

Advertisement for records featuring Fiddlin' John Carson and others. (Charles Wolfe collection)

derman came up here.” That puts their radio beginnings in 1922, the same year that John Carson began broadcasting.

Hopkins said that radio brought their music to the attention of recording companies. “I doubt that Brunswick [record company] had heard us on the radio, but the radio thing came first. The record companies got interested after radio showed that a lot of people liked this music enough to pay money to see it played. Don’t let anybody tell you that some record man woke up one morning and believed that this music would sell. They were listening to the radio. They knew people were buying tickets. They didn’t rush into it. We were on the radio for at least two years before records of music like ours came out. We had a barbershop quartet with Al playing the piano for a long time before we got into the Hill Billie business, . . . you know, records had been around for a long time. My father bought an old ‘talking machine’ before I was born. Radio showed the record companies they could make money and they were interested in that.”¹⁸

The Hopkins family lived in a large house in an upper middle class Washington neighborhood. They were relatively well educated and held business, professional, and bureaucratic jobs. One of the Galax men, Tony Alderman, had moved north with Al Hopkins who had left Galax in 1924 after the death of brother Jacob. Alderman was a bright young man with much technical expertise, building radio receivers and transmitting units and working as an X-ray technician part-time.

It is instructive to note how these rather sophisticated musicians are depicted in the 1926 *Radio Digest* article. A vaudeville-style photograph shows them with musical instruments and in costumes: Alderman wears a rube clown getup; Al Hopkins wears a fake goatee, horn rim glasses, and what appears to be a railway conductor’s uniform; John Hopkins wears a college-boy straw boater and a gentlemen’s evening jacket; Joe Hopkins wears a World War I Army dress uniform; and Charlie Bowman wears a country costume including rolled-up sleeves, suspenders, and floppy hat.¹⁹ The following caption accompanies this photograph: “Below is the famous gang of Hill Billies who took the nation’s capital by storm. They are, from the left: A.E. Alderman of Carroll County, Virginia; Al, John and Joe Hopkins of ‘No’t h Ca’lina;’ and ‘Fox-Hunt’ Charlie Bowman of Tennessee. Every one of ‘em from the ‘mountings’ and born with the lingo.” An individual photograph of Bowman still in his country-man’s costume has the following caption: “Behold here a real Hill Billy, ‘Fox-Hunt’ Charlie Bowman (above) who lives in a log cabin back in the hills ten miles from Mountain City,

Tenn. Charlie came to town for a fiddlers' contest and the Hopkins boys from North Carolina were so pleased with his performance they induced him to join the Hill Billies gang."

Bowman had, in fact, met the brothers at the May 1925 Mountain City fiddlers' convention, and he did live in a log house, but some sixty miles away in Gray, in the Tennessee Valley, rather than in the mountains. Fox hunting by chasing foxes with dogs (the fox is never caught) was then more a Blue Ridge sport than a Tennessee Valley one, a hint that Al Hopkins's promotional skills were in use in tacking the "Fox-Hunt" tag onto the skinny and brilliant fiddler. That Charlie is called "a real Hill Billie" indicates that the *Radio Digest* writer realized that he was more involved in the actual culture than the rest of the band and not just another vaudeville performer.²⁰

The full-width head for the *Radio Digest* article is "'Hill Billies' Capture WRC." A subhead follows: "Boys from Blue Ridge Mountains Take Washington with Guitars, Fiddles and Banjos; Open New Line of American Airs." The first five paragraphs of the article sets forth many of the stereotypes about the effect of radio upon the mountain South that are still current. They are as follows:

Modern improvements make slow progress in the hill country of the South. During the World war it was discovered that some of the more remote communities were living much as they did a century ago.

But radio has taken hold of the primitive inhabitants with amazing alacrity. Its effect on the development of their education and communication with the outside world promises benefits untold. They are learning a new language. They are discovering America as it is today. To some who were born and have grown old within a few miles of the homes of their fathers it is a revelation. They scarcely associate it as being in reality apart of their own world. They do not all have receiving sets but there is one in the general store and they come from far and near for the concerts. The storekeeper in many instances has made it possible for individual families to own their own receiving sets.

A few weeks ago Radio Station WRC at Washington, D.C. broadcast a concert by an organization called "The Hill Billies." The response was astounding.

Letters and postcards arrived from the mountains of Tennessee, from the hills of Kentucky and the Carolina and the Blue Ridge counties of Maryland and Virginia. Phone calls, local and long distance, demanded favorite numbers, and repeats and what not.

A voice with a distinct Georgia drawl asked that they play "Long Eared Mule," and added the significant remark: "You-all caint fool me, ah know where them boys come from. They's Hill Billies for suah. They ain't nobody kin play that music 'thout they is bawn in the hills and brung up thar."

The article goes on in a similar vein at length. The process of pretending that sophisticated persons are rustics has since been dubbed *rusticating*, and mountain residents who take on some of the attributes expected of them are called "feedback hillbillies."

This unnamed writer of this *Radio Digest* article makes two particularly interesting assumptions: first, that readers of this magazine would find it believable that the mountain South was isolated from the "outside world" and was, in fact, a century out of date; second, that radio was having a greater effect in the mountains than in the rest of the country. The latter assumption is contrary to the findings of Myer Horowitz in his 1931 analysis, *America Listens*. Addressed mainly to advertisers, this statistical work shows that radio had its greatest effect where there was more leisure time. Horowitz noted that the effect of radio was lessened where there were daylight-to-dark work traditions and where lower incomes restricted the numbers of radios owned. "Purchasing power aside, you simply cannot assume the people in Iowa or eastern Kentucky listen as much or heed what they hear when compared to listeners in Philadelphia, Boston or Chicago."²¹ The point bears mentioning because early radio's signal blanketed an enormous area, making radio enormously attractive to advertisers. In the early static-free days of radio, the night Dx (distance unknown) signal of larger radio stations reached far across the country. Tony Alderman said that letters and postcards from Canada to Florida were common and that many listeners were in the Midwest. He said that he could predict the size of the evening audience in any city or town by the number of radio antennae that were evident.

While 1920s radio producers were skilled in the rustication of rural and small town performers, the greatest rusticators seem to have appeared in the 1930s. Among them was John Lair, first the director of the WLS (Chicago) *National Barn Dance* and later the founder of the *Renfro Valley Barn Dance* in Kentucky. He gave flower names to the women in one all-female group and dubbed others with such rusticated titles as "Arkie, the Arkansas Woodchopper."²²

Such tactics did not endear radio to all who loved Appalachian music. In 1982 octogenarian fiddler Inez Osborne told why her all-woman band had performed at home and at a few annual pie suppers. "I never liked playing for drunks, and I never gave a toot for contests, either . . . the first ones here were run by the Ku Klux Klan and they were a trashy set. . . . People thought you ought to go play on the radio, but I never could tell that the radio people liked music. They wanted you to talk silly talk or pop your gum and show your bloomers like Lulu Belle [Wiseman]. Now what on earth does that kind of stuff have to do with good music?"²³ What indeed? But the rustication of performers on radio was to continue until the mid 1950s.

At a later date I intend to deal with the regional stations that grew up along the Blue Ridge, influencing it with daily programming. I will also give attention to local stations, greatly expanding what I have only touched on here. I will at this point summarize what I have learned and hint at what is yet to come.

First, it is clear that radio had a huge effect upon Americans, but it is equally clear that it had no more effect in the Blue Ridge than elsewhere. That some wish to believe it had a greater effect in the mountains is nothing more than a new application of an old myth.

Second, the assigning of what was conceived to be older musical forms to Appalachia was a part of popular culture when radio arose—and it still is.

Third, the producers and artists who engaged in this rustication knew what they were doing and saw it as a show-business tactic. This is as true of some who came from the culture, such as John Carson and Al Hopkins, as it was of vaudeville types.

Fourth—and much of this conclusion is from material I still have in preparation—relatively little of the musical arts of the Blue Ridge were ever heard on radio. Concert musics were heard but very little dance music. Radio was the major factor in converting one form of dance music to bluegrass, a concert form. The a cappella ballads and most of the religious music, the two most prevalent forms, were almost never heard on radio. And because it was never put to radio or commercial recordings, even knowledgeable fans of Appalachian music have difficulty believing that a form as fine as Cherokee fiddling ever existed.

Fifth, local stations—for instance, WPAQ in Mt. Airy, North Carolina—have a long tradition of presenting excellent local artists.

Notes

Tipton "Tip" Madron, interview with the author, Christmas day 1961. "Uncle Tip" had the first radio, automobile, bathroom, electricity, telephone, and refrigerator in Trade, Tennessee, a community eleven miles from the Blue Ridge summit as the crow flies.

1. Tom Lewis, *Empire of the Air: The Men Who Made Radio* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1993). This is by far the best analysis and the best narrative I have read that is concerned with early radio, its makers, and its amazing effects.

2. H.L. Mencken, "Dempsey vs. Carpentier," *New York World and Baltimore Sun*, July 3, 1921. Mencken initially ignored the broadcast but took note of it later when this piece was reprinted in such collections as *A Mencken Chrestomathy* (New York: Knopf, 1949).

3. Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, USA* 2d ed. (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1985). First published in 1968, this is a good introduction to country music and how it evolved from folk musics, although even the second edition incorporates a number of small errors involving names and locations.

4. Lewis, *Empire of the Air*.

5. There are several books concerned with the history of the minstrel business. The best known is Robert C. Toll's *Blacking Up* (New York: Oxford, 1974). But Toll is a fan and his work is as much apology as analysis. Nathan provides a great deal about the massive business and how it grew, but relatively little about where it came from and why. The role of free northern blacks in creating material and models for the form has been ignored until recently. Howard and Judy Sacks's book about Ohio's Snowden family, *Way Up North in Dixie* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1993), will help fill this gap.

6. Lewis, *Empire of the Air*.

7. *Atlanta Journal*, September 10, 1922. WSB is called a "radiophone," and there is an individual photo of Carson along with a band photograph. This is reproduced in Gene Wiggins, *Fiddling Georgia Crazy*, cited below.

8. How the Blue Ridge and the rest of the southern Appalachian Mountains became a unique place in the minds of Americans is a fascinating and complicated topic. The "blue mountains" as a barrier or distancing place first appear in colonial and early American writing. See *The Memoir of John Durang, American Actor, 1785–1816* and Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

But the southern mountains first became important and different from the rest of the South when the Union garnered strong support during the Civil War from Southerners who felt no abiding connection to the Confederacy or its cause. This was especially the case in eastern Tennessee and western Virginia, but "Mountain Yankees" were also a major factor in keeping Kentucky in the Union, and they also came from North Carolina and Georgia in considerable numbers. Northern

writers sometimes attributed this to the “old American” stock living in the mountains. Moreover, such Union leaders as Knoxville’s famed “Parson” Brownlow and Oliver Temple pointed to traditions rooted in the Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Mexican War to explain this zest for the Union.

Later writers turned to economic explanations, with the slave seen as competition to small mountain farmers, but such explanations ignore the fact that many Union leaders from the mountains were slave holders also. The writings of the participants in these matters are a rich source of information often ignored by retrospective sociologist historians. See W.G. Brownlow, *Sketches of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Secession* (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1862). This wartime book incorporates many of the fiery parson’s editorials in the *Knoxville Whig* about the “hell-deserving rebels,” written during years prior to the war, and offers an arresting glimpse of cultural antagonisms between the cotton-states aristocrats and successful slave-owning businessmen like Brownlow. See also Steve Humphrey, *That D——d Brownlow* (Boone, N.C.: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978), a good biography of the parson.

Another excellent participant source is by the Tennessee Whig politician Oliver P. Temple. His book, *East Tennessee and the Civil War* (Cincinnati: Robert Clark Company, 1899), also offers important cultural information.

A part of the credit (or discredit) for the rise of Appalachia as a habitation or birthplace for traditional music should also be accorded to increased literacy and the boom of popular-press magazines in the post-Civil War period. These new readers were not satisfied by the gossip, poetry, and classics-imitating rhetorical analysis that was the stock of earlier newspapers. They wanted action and drama, and they were willing to pay for it. The Texas cowboys who showed up at the Kansas railheads with new words in Spanish and a new workman’s gear were even more exotic than the mountaineers and attracted considerably more attention. It seems obvious that cowboys and hillbillies both became popular because they were needed in the publishing market place, a functional and very rich source for the popular press.

The writer who has given most attention to the Appalachia-as-another-place phenomenon in recent years is Henry D. Shapiro, and his book, *Appalachia on Our Minds: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870–1920* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1978), is highly recommended. Shapiro is very good with the details of the rise of the idea among various popularizers after 1870. Why he chose 1870 is not clear, but he places the entire phenomenon after that date. It is a neat solution that avoids messy and confusing details, but some of those details seem critical to any real understanding of how this situation arose.

9. Extrapolated from New Testament accounts in the Bible.

10. There are two excellent histories of bluegrass: Neil Rosenberg’s *Bluegrass*, a

History (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1985) and Richard D. Smith's *Can't You Hear Me Callin': The Life of Bill Monroe, Father of Bluegrass* (New York: Little, Brown, 2001).

11. I am unable to locate the company that issued this gem. Stay tuned.

12. Gene Wiggins, *Fiddling Georgia Crazy* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987). This excellent biography is another good offering in the Music in American Life series of the University of Illinois.

13. *Radio Digest* had a considerable circulation until the depression years. Many libraries have the journal in their collections.

14. There were a few earlier recordings, but Carson's was successful in sales. See Wiggins, *Fiddling Georgia Crazy* and Malone, *Country Music, USA*.

15. A facsimile of this article appears with other notes enclosed with an LP of reissued recordings by the Hill Billies (*A Fiddler's Convention in Mountain City, Tennessee*). This was compiled by the author and issued by County Records, Roanoke, Virginia, in 1973.

16. Archie Green's article "Hillbilly Music, Source and Symbol," *Journal of American Folklore* (1968) noted that his band was the first to put the term *hillbilly* to a form of music. The *JAF* later issued this article as a booklet, and it is recommended as a fine example of Archie's work, as well as the best introduction to an early country music band. It deals with the complications of such status. Few other works attempt this.

17. Green, "Hillbilly Music."

18. John Hopkins, interview by the author, December 1973.

19. This photograph is part of the facsimile described in #17, above.

20. See the County Records LP *A Fiddler's Convention in Mountain City, Tennessee*, and the booklet of notes (by the author) enclosed with it for more details about this event, which demonstrated that a very large audience could be attracted even in a remote location if the performers were known by radio fans. The Hopkinses' Galax band was there as well as Carson and other persons from distant places. But they were all known in this Appalachian town from radio broadcasts. Although modern hindsight will have some difficulty grasping how it worked, the event was sponsored by the Ku Klux Klan and the Buster Brown Shoe Company and demonstrated how "civic" and corporate sponsorship could be coordinated.

21. Myer Horowitz, *America Listens* (New York: Champion Press, 1931). This small booklet of statistics was aimed at corporations and others using radio advertising. It was to be a quarterly but I have found only one copy.

22. This man and his work get considerable attention from some country music historians.

23. Inez Osborne, interview by the author, January, 1982.

The Carter Family's Rhythmic Asymmetry

Thomas Carl Townsend

The Carter Family began an illustrious recording career in 1927, when A.P. Carter, his wife Sara, and her cousin Maybelle traveled a rough road to Bristol, Tennessee, to record a few songs for Ralph Peer. By the time they recorded those first record sides, the Carters had already worked out a repertory of songs gathered from the countryside near where they lived, in Maces Spring, Virginia. The recordings were released to the public, and the music that would come to be so popular and widely influential was born.

The songs the Carter family recorded that day and in later sessions were simple in melody and harmony; yet, with regard to rhythm they demonstrate an impressive level of detail and ingenuity. Of the seventeen songs from the recorded collections that I will discuss here, more than half contain some type of significant asymmetrical rhythmic event. The songs used for this present study, with one exception, are examples taken from the earliest recorded Carter Family work, specifically from the first volume of CD re-releases on Rounder Records, entitled *Anchored in Love: Their Complete Victor Recordings, 1927–28*.¹ This survey focuses on the earliest releases, but the Carters seem to have used asymmetrical rhythmic devices in their music throughout their recording career, with no apparent large scale trend toward or away from asymmetry.

Rhythmic Asymmetry

Rhythmic asymmetry is defined here as any metrical event that is numeri-

cally unbalanced or that uses irregular patterning. When a beat is dropped from a prevailing 4/4 meter, creating the sudden appearance of a single measure of 3/4, the effect is slightly jarring and poses interpretive problems in reconciling the existing binary pulse with the new measure. When transcribed this causes a temporary change in time signature, which on paper is a big event.

In their book Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff discuss the idea of cognitive understanding of changes in a prevailing meter: "Once a clear metrical pattern is established, the listener renounces it only in the face of strongly contradicting evidence."² The focus of their book is tonal classical music, but the same principles can be applied here to the music of the Carter Family. They present a system of analysis that establishes a hierarchical beat structure used by the listener to clarify the metric location of any given event arising in the music. In the case of dropped beats in Carter songs, the loss of a beat of music is a "foreground" event requiring a moment of reflection by the listener to realign with the correct meter.

Higher levels of rhythmic asymmetry do not necessarily stand out so much to the listener. When a phrase or line of text requires extending the musical phrase by adding additional measures, the effect does not upset the established rhythm or necessarily require a change in time signature but still requires a moment of readjustment for the listener. These additional measures may be more noticeable on paper, and since the Carters and their contemporaries generally did not conceive or perform their music in a written form but rather almost entirely by ear, a flexibility in rhythm or meter might come more naturally in the absence of a visual reminder that something out of the ordinary has happened.

The Phenomenon of Asymmetry

As discussed in Jocelyn Neal's article "The Metric Makings of a Country Hit," rhythmic asymmetry at higher metric levels³ is not as uncommon as one might think in country music. Although country music is saddled with the misperception that it is a rudimentary, even simplistic style overall, Neal reveals that in various types of country music intended for dancing, this type of hypermetrical asymmetry is not uncommon.

The music of the Carter Family was not intended for dancing, however. Many of their recordings use religious lyrics, and the origin of many of the tunes was not in instrument-based music and certainly not dance

music. Another explanation, therefore, must be found for these phenomena, which actually occur so frequently in the Carter Family recordings that they are almost as much the rule as the exception.

Without intending to take away from the aesthetic value of these rhythmic devices, I believe it is possible to identify specific musical conditions that led the Carters to employ them. In most cases these asymmetric events actually serve a specific nonmetrical purpose, not as avant-garde experimentation but in consistent keeping with the Carters' overall conservative musical outlook.

The fact is that rhythmic asymmetry is no stranger to old-time country music. Recorded works by contemporaries of the Carters demonstrate liberal use of rhythmic asymmetry, including the types of events found in the Carters' music. The Carters, with their precise and careful arrangements, provide a good model for the practice of asymmetrical rhythm, which has not vanished in contemporary country music but has changed form; asymmetrical rhythmic events found in modern country music generally preserve a danceable beat, as Neal discusses in "Country Hit." In this chapter I will argue that this change in stylistic practice, which seems to have taken place shortly after the arrival of recorded music as a widespread phenomenon, points to a fundamental shift in the relative priorities given to particular musical elements. Since most of the songs to be examined use more than one type of asymmetric event, it seems advisable to address them individually rather than to try to group them into categories.

Dropped Beat

"Keep on the Sunny Side of Life," "River of Jordan," "I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow," "No Hiding Place Down Here"

"Keep on the Sunny Side of Life" was among the earliest songs recorded by the Carters in Bristol, remained a staple of the Carters' performing repertory for many years, and has become a standard song in American culture. It seems a simple song, its harmony basic, its structure repetitive, and its melody memorable. But as we listen to it and try to keep a 4/4 count going in our minds, we find that something unusual happens with the arrival of the song's famous refrain. The event passes quickly and seems puzzling at first; some type of rhythmic correction has taken place. In fact, the Carters have casually but deliberately dropped a beat from the measure immediately preceding the chorus. The presence of this feature seems to stand apart from the other elements of the song. The printed source from which

the Carters probably learned the tune does not include this feature; so what was their motivation?

Example 1. Dropped beat (m. 9): Keep on the Sunny Side of Life

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of several systems. The first system shows measures 1 through 8, with a guitar part in the upper staff and a bass line in the lower staff. Measure 9 is the first measure of the 1st verse, where the guitar part has a dropped beat. The lyrics for the 1st verse are: "dark and a trouble side of life, there's a bright and a sunny side, too; Tho' we meet with the dark-ness and strife, - The sun-ny side of so may view". The second system shows measures 13 through 16, with a guitar part and lyrics: "Keep on th' sunny side, al-ways on th' sun-ny side, Keep on th' sun-ny side of life; It will help us ev'ry day, it will brighten all the way, If we keep on th' sun-ny side of life". The third system shows measures 17 through 20, with a guitar part and lyrics: "Keep on th' sunny side, al-ways on th' sun-ny side, Keep on th' sun-ny side of life; It will help us ev'ry day, it will brighten all the way, If we keep on th' sun-ny side of life". The fourth system shows measures 21 through 24, with a guitar part and lyrics: "help us ev'ry day, it will brighten all the way, If we keep on th' sun-ny side of life".

Let us examine the melodic structure of “Sunny Side” to find out what conditions led to the dropped beat (example 1). The key here is in the rhythmic structure of the melody, specifically the presence or absence of a quarter note upbeat. Carter melodic phrases commonly end with the last note sounding on the downbeat of a measure. This means that if the melodic phrase to follow begins with an upbeat of at least a quarter note (as-

suming 4/4 time), there will be three beats between the last beat of the preceding phrase and the start of the next. This can be seen at the point where the guitar melody gives way to the verse, in measure 9. The refrain of "Sunny Side," however, has no upbeat.

In cases like this, the Carters consistently shorten the musical space to prevent more than three beats to pass in between melodic lines. With one exception, we shall find that in none of the songs in this collection is there ever more than three beats of space between statements of a melodic line, as expressed by the voice or by the guitar. Including "Keep On the Sunny Side," five songs discussed here include, in a similar way, a dropped beat resulting in a brief change of time signature. For each of the other twelve songs in this survey, the rhythmic structure of the melody does not call for such an adjustment, even assuming that there was a general desire to maintain a maximum of three beats between melodic material.

"River of Jordan" (example 2), track 6 on the CD, also features a dropped beat at the juncture point between verses (m. 17). Again the purpose seems to be to reduce the space between melodic statements to three beats.

Example 2. Dropped beat (m. 17): River of Jordan

1st
verse:

I'm goin' down to the River of Jor- dan, oh yes,

I'm goin' down to the River of Jor-dan some of these days;

I'm goin' down to the River of Jor-dan, I'm goin'

down to the River of Jor-dan some of these days.

"I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow" begins with the guitar's statement of the verse melody in a truncated form (example 3). As the guitar melody

concludes we find a dropped beat in the measure before the verse begins (m. 8), again limiting the space to three beats. Each time the guitar states a fragment of the melody after a verse, the expected fourth beat is dropped, as can be seen in mm. 18–19.

Example 3. Dropped beat (m. 8): I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow

The musical score for "I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow" is presented in two systems. The first system shows the guitar part (bass clef) and the first line of the vocal part (treble clef). The guitar part consists of two staves of music, with measures 1 through 8. The time signatures are 4/4, 3/4, 4/4, 3/4, 4/4, 3/4, 4/4, and 3/4. The vocal part begins at measure 9 with the lyrics "I'm a-going to leave this coun-try, I'm a-going a-round this world; I'm". The second system shows the vocal part continuing from measure 9 to 16, with lyrics "go-ing to leave this coun-try, for the sake of". The guitar part continues from measure 17 to 20, with lyrics "one lit-tle girl. She told me, that". The guitar part has time signatures of 4/4, 3/4, 4/4, and 3/4. The lyrics "one lit-tle girl." are under measures 17-18, and "She told me, that" are under measures 19-20. There are some handwritten annotations in the guitar part, including "5. 6. 7. 8." under measures 17-18 and "1. 2. 3. 4." under measure 16.

Recorded somewhat later in the Carters' career than the other songs in the present survey, "There's No Hiding Place Down Here" is not found on the first volume of the Rounder CD series. It is included here partly to verify the general assertion that the Carters did not abandon asymmetrical rhythmic devices early in their career but continued to use this feature as a staple of their music. "No Hiding Place" was recorded in 1934, six years after the other songs.

The first verse is symmetrical; each line begins with a quarter note upbeat, seen just before measures 1, 5, and 9 in example 4. Something interesting happens in the guitar's bass line as the verse concludes in mm. 12–16, to which we shall return for examination later when we consider some special guitar topics. The chorus has a dropped beat between halves

(m. 23); the words “well I” have been squeezed into the value of a single eighth note (two sixteenths) as distinct from the full quarter note value found at earlier points in the chorus, such as in measure 20. Again the result reduces the space to three beats.

Example 4. Dropped beat (m. 23): There's No Hiding Place Down Here

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a vocal line (labeled 'Vt' or 'Chorus') and a guitar line. The key signature has one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 3/4. Measure numbers 1 through 31 are indicated above the vocal lines. The lyrics are: 'Sis-ter Mary she wears the golden chain; Sis-ter Mary, she wears the golden chain; Sis-ter Mary wears the golden chain; ev'ry link in Jesus' name; there's no hi-ding place down here. There's no hi-ding place down here; well, I run to the rocks to hide my face, the rocks say no hi-ding place; no hi-ding place down here.' The guitar part consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment. In measure 23, the vocal line has a dropped beat, with the words 'Here; well, I' squeezed into a single eighth note. The guitar part continues with a full eighth note in measure 23. Brackets are used to group measures 1-8, 9-16, 17-23, and 24-31.

The second verse (example 5) is almost the same as the first, but soon we find that a beat is dropped at the halfway point at measure 7. In the first verse an upbeat was formed by the word “Sister,” which perhaps proved impractical or awkward to compress into a rhythmic value less than a full

quarter note. In the second verse, the word “I’ll,” appearing as a quarter note before measures 1 and 5, is readily reduced to an eighth note in measure 7, hastening the arrival of measure 8 (example 6).

Example 5. Dropped beat (m. 7): There’s No Hiding Place Down Here, second verse

2nd
verse:

I'll pitch my tent on the old camp-ground I'll pitch my tent on the old camp-ground I'll

guitar:

8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

I'll pitch my tent on the old camp-ground, I'll give old Sa-tan one more round, No hi-ding place down here. There's

Example 6. Dropped beat (second line, m. 7): There’s No Hiding Place Down Here, first verse compared with second verse

1st
verse:

Sis-ter Ma-ry she wears a golden chainy - Sis-ter Ma-ry she wears golden chainy - Sis-ter

2nd
verse:

I'll pitch my tent on the old camp-ground, I'll pitch my tent on the old camp-ground; I'll

In my opinion the need to reduce space from between melodic activity is a product of an a cappella tradition (from which many of these songs were drawn). If one can imagine a song such as “Sunny Side” sung with no accompaniment, a delay of four beats seems too long a silence. Admittedly this is a subjective judgment, but it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that different rules apply in situations in which the absence of melody means complete silence. Modern renditions of the song invariably prefer to keep a continuous 4/4 measure throughout, and singers (including later recordings by Maybelle Carter) often fill in the last beat before the refrain with a vocalization to keep the dead space to a maximum of three counts.

Phrase Asymmetry

“Wildwood Flower,” “River of Jordan,” “Single Girl Married Girl”

Another type of rhythmic asymmetry may be found in what is probably the Carters' most famous recording, “Wildwood Flower,” which uses asymmetry of a larger scale (example 7). Highlighted by alternating guitar and voice melody, the song has a unique phrase structure: a pair of five-bar phrases followed by a four-bar phrase followed by another five-bar phrase. Asymmetry is created first by the five-measure phrase design used for the first, second, and fourth lines of the song. It is a pleasing tune and no unbalance is felt, yet on paper it is unmistakably unconventional.

Example 7. Asymmetrical phrasing: Wildwood Flower

1st Verse:

Oh, I'll twine with my mingled and waving black hair, With the
 roses so red and the lilies so fair; And the
 myrtle so bright with the emerald dew, The
 pale and the leader with eyes look like blue.

* The author makes no guarantees regarding the correctness of this lyric.

It is possible to perform the melody without the additional space between phrases, bringing the whole line into symmetrical four-bar groupings; this is how the song is usually transcribed. However, the melody lines of “Wildwood Flower” are rather long and taxing to sing in rapid succession. In my opinion, measures were added at least partly to allow the singer to breathe and clearly declaim the text even at the expense of symmetrical rhythm (example 8). In this way the use of rhythmic asymmetry serves a practical purpose for the song.

Example 8. Wildwood Flower, altered to use symmetrical phrasing

Oh, I'll twine with my mingled and waving black hair, with the roses so red and the lilies so fair, and the myrtle so bright with the

But why then is the third phrase only four bars? In other words, what conditions preclude the need for extra space here? As shown in the transcription (example 7), the fourth phrase begins not with a quarter note upbeat, as do the other three, but with an eighth note pickup. To include an additional measure before the fourth phrase would allow four beats to pass with no melodic activity—an unacceptable pause, according to the standard observed in the other songs.

“River of Jordan” also uses an asymmetrical phrase structure. The first and third lines are extended to five measures. To identify a specific practical purpose for this feature in this case would be difficult. Perhaps its use served to preserve an aspect of the song’s performance as they knew it. The extended material in the third verse (measures 10–14) features syncopation, a trait very rare in Carter melodies, which in this case creates challenges in counting (example 9).

Example 9. Asymmetrical phrasing (m. 12–14): River of Jordan

1st Verse: I'm gain' down to the River of Jor-dan, oh yes, I'm gain' down to the River of Jor-dan some of these days; I'm gain' down to the River of Jor-dan, I'm gain' down to the River of Jor-dan some of these days.

The rhythmic features of "Single Girl, Married Girl" include an asymmetrical phrase structure and a truncation of the melody by the guitar. An overall asymmetry is created in each sung stanza by the partial repetition of the phrase; this extension balances sixteen beats for the first half of the phrase with twelve beats for the second (example 10).

Example 10. Asymmetrical phrasing: Single Girl, Married Girl

1st
verse:

Single girl, single girl, she's go-ing dressed fine,

Oh,
go-ing dressed fine;

=16				=12			
4	4	2	6	4	2	6	

Changing Meter

"The Wandering Boy," "Single Girl," "Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?"

The third type of rhythmic asymmetry I would like to examine is the occurrence of changing meter in Carter Family songs. The songs to be discussed here use metrical patterns largely based on the changing rhythms of the lyrics, with little or no attempt made to conform to a continuous meter.

"The Wandering Boy" is a song with pentatonic melody and simple harmony but whose meter continuously changes, so much so that the rhythm of the song itself seems to wander. From the very beginning, it is unclear what the meter of the song should be (example 11). The first task in understanding "Wandering Boy" is to all but abandon preconceived notions of rhythm and meter.

In the absence of clear metric indicators, one is forced to draw an interpretation using inference and detective work. The first phrase, "Out in the cold world," (mm. 1–2) seems to receive accent mostly on the word "cold," implying that this is a downbeat. The word "Out" also seems to receive accent, and in the second verse it clearly is a downbeat. The completion of the phrase, encompassing "cold world, and" (m. 2) occupies five beats, assuming that the word "Far," which is accented, is a downbeat. "Far away from . . ." seems to fit nicely within four beats, with "home" as an accented downbeat. Measure 4 seems to have five beats, or at least that is the time interval before the arrival of the next phrase, beginning with "Somebody's. . . ." It is actually unclear where this phrase (mm. 5–8) should be placed metrically, because the accent pattern cannot be interpreted in an ideal manner. The third phrase, in measures 9–12, follows the same metrical pattern as the first.

The last phrase, located in measures 13–16, fits into two bars of four (by now the appearance of two consecutive measures of the same value an anomaly!). This allows the word "homeless," which seems to be accented, to arrive as a downbeat (m. 15). But in order to allow "-night," which seems accented, to become a downbeat, this measure must have three beats.

The guitar's bass line in "Wandering Boy" is hard to follow, partly due to the acoustical fidelity of this recording but also because Maybelle must, it seems, jump through hoops to find regular rhythm in which to apply a regular pulse.

It is actually possible to bar much of the song in strict measures of 4/4 (example 12), but the accent pattern of the text, which I believe was considered important to the Carters, is repeatedly thrown off from expectation by this scheme. Such an interpretation is theoretically interesting but less practical than an interpretation in which the meter changes frequently.

Example 12. Wandering Boy, measured in 4/4 time

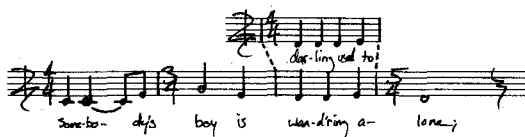
1st Verse:

out in the cdd world, and far a-way from home, some-bo-
 -dy's boy is wand'ring a-lone; no-one to guide him, and
 keep his foot-steps right; some-bo- dy's boy is home-less to
 -night. but unaccounted for

The chart in example 13 shows verses and refrains in the horizontal rows, in order of appearance, with the verses placed adjacently to compare the values for each of the song's measures, which are shown in the vertical columns. For instance, we can see that measure 1 has a value of three beats, while measure 2 has five beats. Measures 6 and 7 correspond to measures 14 and 15 within a single verse cycle, yet the metrical value of the two measures is reversed from three then four beats to four then three beats, respectively.

Measure 7 receives treatment in the first verse different from its treatment in the other three verses. The motivation for this change seems to be the text: the melodic pattern of the first verse for the words "wand'ring a-[lone]" calls for a measure of three beats, while the second verse, using the words "darling used to . . .," needs four beats. The third and fourth verses likewise require four beats in this location.

Example 13. Wandering Boy: Time values for phrases at comparable verse locations



measure #:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
harmony:	I	IV	I		I	IV			I	IV	I		I	IV	I	
verses:																
1st	3	5	4	5	4	3	3	5	3	5	4	5	4	4	3	5
2nd	3	5	4	5	4	3	4	5	3	7	4	5	4	4	3	5
3rd	3	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	3	5	4	5	4	4	3	5
4th	3	5	4	5	4	3	4	5	3	5	4	5	4	4	3	5
Chorus:																
1st	+1	6	3	6	6	4	5		3	5	4	5	4	4	3	5
2nd	+1	6	3	6	6	4	5		3	5	4	5	4	4	3	5

These details and others reveal that the Carters must have planned their arrangements carefully, and also that in working them out they placed the needs of the text above the concern for continuous meter. Again I believe that an a cappella tradition may lie behind the rhythmic irregularity. Some other Carter songs from the present survey use changing meter, including "Single Girl" and "Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?" but I know of no other Carter Family recording that uses the extraordinary degree of wandering rhythm found in "Wandering Boy."

"Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?" shares with "Wandering Boy" a frequently changing time signature upon transcription (example 14). The verse is sung in measures of mostly five beats, in itself unusual. The arrival of a measure of six beats (m. 4) and later a measure of three beats (m. 8) con-

tributes further to an asymmetrical effect. Measure six receives four beats in the first verse, and five in the second, reflecting a change in the text. The song's chorus, found in measures 10–18, uses even more frequent changes in time signature.

Example 14. Changing meter: Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?

1st Verse:

When death shall close these eye-lids, and this heart shall cease to beat? And they
 lay me down to rest, 'Neath some flowering boun-d'ry tree—
 (be-) -side me,
 (guitar:)

Chorus:

Will you miss me, Will you miss me,
 Will you miss me, Will you miss me when I'm gone? Per-

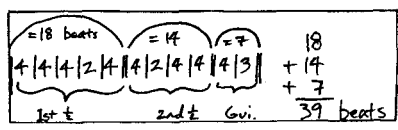
Detailed description: The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The first verse consists of 9 measures. Measures 1-3 are in 3/4 time. Measure 4 is in 4/4 time. Measures 5-9 are in 5/4 time. The chorus consists of 8 measures. Measures 10-11 are in 3/4 time. Measure 12 is in 4/4 time. Measure 13 is in 5/4 time. Measures 14-18 are in 3/4 time. The guitar part is shown in bass clef, starting in measure 6 and continuing through measure 18.

“Going to Work” uses unbalanced phrasing as well. The guitar statement of the melody, shown in example 15, changes meter with every measure when it is transcribed on paper. And the diagram in example 16 shows, the two halves of the verse are not balanced with each other. The guitar’s melodic extension further enhances an overall asymmetry for each verse.

Example 15. Changing meter, asymmetrical phrasing: I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow

The musical score for 'I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow' is presented in two systems. The first system shows the guitar part (bass clef) with measures 1 through 8. The meter changes from 4/4 to 3/4, then 4/4, then 3/4, and finally 2/4. The second system shows the 1st Verse (treble clef) with lyrics and guitar accompaniment. The lyrics are: "I'm a-going to leave this coun-try, I'm a-going a-round this world; I'm go-ing to leave this coun-try, for the sake of one lit-tle girl. She told me, that". The guitar part continues with measures 9 through 20, with the meter changing to 3/4, then 4/4, then 3/4, and finally 4/4. The guitar part includes a sequence of notes: 5 - 6 - 7 - 9.

Example 16. Asymmetrical phrase time values: I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow



Looking more closely at the measure before the verse, we see that not only has the last beat been taken out, but Maybelle's bass line creates the expectation that the measure will be of full value by playing on beats 1 and 3, implying a normal beat pattern for a bar of 4/4. This heightens the surprise when the verse arrives one beat before it is anticipated (m. 8).

The two halves of the verse are clearly related to each other, creating a sense of phrase, yet they are different from each other in particular ways (example 17). The first half adds a measure of 2/4 (m. 12) to an otherwise even phrase. The second half reflects the first but changes certain details. For instance, corresponding words used in both halves fall on different beats in their second statement. The word “country,” for example, receives a downbeat accent in the second half (m. 15), whereas in the first half it received a lesser accent, placed on the third beat of measure 10.

Example 17. I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow, two halves of verse compared

1st half: I'm a-going to leave this coun-try, I'm a-going a-round this world, I'm a-

2nd half: going to leave this coun-try, for the sake of one lit-tle girl

As was the case for “Wandering Boy,” changing text rhythms results in a change in the musical rhythm for the second verse. The line “for the sake of one little girl,” seen in example 15, requires eight counts, while “she’s courting whoever she please” needs six counts (example 18).

Example 18. Changing text rhythms: I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow, second verse

except first 2nd verse: got her back turned on me, she's court-ting who-e-ver she

guitar: please.

Guitar Topics

Rhythm topics are, of course, very important in the guitar work of Maybelle Carter. Not only did she provide the rhythmic backbone of the music; she often played the melody also, in structural alternation with the voice. By analyzing the guitar work in some of the songs, we can find moments when two different rhythmic schemas intersect, and we can get some idea of the relative importance of the instrumental sections when compared with the vocal sections.

Melodic Truncation

“Going to Work,” “Single Girl,” “No Hiding Place”

Many Carter songs use an overall formal design that alternates between the sung and instrumental renditions of the melody. In many of the songs the guitar's melodic statement is shortened, or truncated, from its sung form; in no cases is it expanded. The implied idea seems to be that the sung melody is hierarchically more important than the instrumental. This makes sense if one assumes that the texts of the songs were considered important to the Carters. We have already seen that they apparently preferred not to allow much space between melodic material and that in some cases they preferred to change the meter rather than to allow the text to become altered or obscured. These features point to a hierarchical structure of elements in their music in which the lyrics take top priority, followed by sung melody, then instrumental melody, and rhythmic continuity running in last place.

An instance of this type of event may be seen in “Going to Work.” Rhythmically the guitar melody reduces some of the note durations from the voice melody, inexactly reflecting the rhythm and contour of the vocal line. Example 19 shows the two versions of the melody together (they do not occur concurrently in the song). Another deviation from the vocal is that the sung melody features a non-diatonic pitch, while the guitar's statement of the melody does not use the non-diatonic note, instead staying within a pentatonic scale (example 20).

Example 19. Guitar truncation of melody: I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow, first verse compared to guitar

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is labeled "1st Verse:" and contains a vocal melody in 4/4 time. The bottom staff is labeled "guitar:" and contains a guitar accompaniment in 4/4 time. The lyrics are written below the vocal staff: "I'm a-going to leave this coun-try, I'm a-going a-round this world, I'm a-". The guitar accompaniment follows the vocal melody but with some rhythmic truncation, notably shorter note durations in the first and second measures.

Example 20. Melodic simplification by guitar: I Ain't Going to Work Tomorrow

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is labeled 'guitar:' and contains a melodic line with various rhythmic values and rests. The bottom staff is a vocal line with lyrics: 'single girl, single girl, she's go-ing dressed fine,'. The guitar part is a simplified version of the vocal melody, using shorter note values and rests to match the relative durations of the voice.

The guitar solo for “Single Girl” is also a truncation of the vocal melody. In terms of rhythm, it is intended to reflect the relative durations of the voice while systematically reducing the note values. The guitar and voice melodies are shown adjacently for analytical comparison in example 21. The Carters have perhaps implied that the sung melody is more important than the guitar, as demonstrated by the consistent practice of shortening the melody in the guitar, never expanding on it.

Example 21. Guitar truncation of melody: Single Girl, Married Girl, voice compared to guitar

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system has two staves: the top staff is labeled '1st Verse:' and contains a vocal line with lyrics: 'single girl, single girl, she's go-ing dressed fine,'. The bottom staff is labeled 'guitar:' and contains a guitar line. The second system also has two staves: the top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: 'ch, go-ing dressal fine;'. The bottom staff is a guitar line. The guitar part is a truncated version of the vocal melody, using shorter note values and rests to match the relative durations of the voice.

The guitar melody statement in “No Hiding Place” is truncated; example 22 shows the guitar line adjacent to the vocal melody for the chorus. Measure three is here notated as a single bar of three beats in the guitar part, in place of two bars of two beats in the voice part. Measures 6 and 7 in the guitar part create two bars of two beats, where a bar of three had stood before in the voice.

Example 22. Guitar truncation of melody: There's No Hiding Place Down Here, guitar compared with chorus

The image shows a musical score for the song "There's No Hiding Place Down Here". It is divided into two systems. The first system is labeled "Chorus:" and "guitar:". The chorus part is written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics are: "There's, No hi-ding place down here, There's No hi-ding place down here; well I". The guitar part is written in bass clef and consists of a steady eighth-note bass line. The second system is labeled "(Verse)" and shows measures 8 through 15. The melody continues with lyrics: "run to... to hide my... the rocks cried... No hi-ding... There's No hi-ding place down here. Sis-ter". The guitar part continues with the same eighth-note bass line pattern.

Polymeter

“Keep on the Sunny Side of Life,” “No Hiding Place”

An interesting aspect of the dropped beat that was seen in the melody of “Keep on the Sunny Side of Life” involves the guitar’s bass line, transcribed in example 23. Maybelle Carter’s famous guitar work made frequent use of bass patterns alternating between the root and another pitch from the chord being played, creating a steady two-beat pulse that adds rhythmic drive to the music and clarifies the meter. When the beat is dropped in “Sunny Side” at m. 16, one might anticipate that Maybelle will try to find a way to make the meter change clear, so as to avoid confusing the listener. What actually happens at this point is that she continues the established alternating bass pattern unchanged for the first chord of the refrain, in defiance of the changed meter in the melody, creating a brief passage of polymeter. As the refrain proceeds to the second line and the second chord, Maybelle reconciles the accent pattern in the bass with the voice, and the refrain continues in regular time.

Example 23. Polymeter: Keep on the Sunny Side of Life

The musical score is divided into several systems, each with a guitar part and a vocal part. Measure numbers are indicated above the notes.

Guitar: Measures 1-8. Measure 8 includes the lyrics "There's a".

1st verse: Measures 9-12. Lyrics: "dark and a troubled side of life, there's a bright and a sun-ny side, too; Tho' we".

Guitar: Measures 13-16. Measure 16 includes the lyrics "view".

chorus: Measures 17-20. Lyrics: "Keep on th' sun-ny side, al-ways on th' sun-ny side, Keep on th' sun-ny side of life; It will".

Guitar: Measures 21-24. Measure 21 includes the lyrics "help us ev'ry day, it will brighten all the way, if we keep on th' sun-ny side of life".

Whether Maybelle was trying to enhance the unusual rhythmic event or trying to smooth over the change in metric pulse is impossible to say, but this moment of the music doubtless posed a problem for her to solve, requiring her to accommodate two conflicting rhythmic goals. This shows that the Carters were aware of the metric shifts in their music and at the same time dispels the notion that they simply made mistakes. Although these recordings are not completely free of performance errors,⁴ the consistency with which the Carter Family employed these rhythmic devices during a given song clearly shows that they used them deliberately and with specific goals in mind.

Example 24. Polymeter: There's No Hiding Place Down Here

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with a vocal line and a guitar line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. Measure numbers 1 through 31 are indicated above the notes.

Verse:

1st Verse: Sister Mary she wears the golden chain, Sister Mary, she wears the golden chain; Sister Mary wears the golden chain, every link in Jesus' name; there's No Hiding Place down Here. There's

Chorus:

17 No Hiding Place Down Here, There's No Hiding Place Down Here; well, I

24 run to the rocks, to hide my face, the rocks are always No Hiding Place, there's No Hiding Place Down Here.

31 (guitar)

In the first chorus of “No Hiding Place” the guitar’s bass pattern creates an interesting phenomenon (example 24). As measure 23 arrives and a beat is dropped in the melody, we might expect the bass line to adjust in some way, since the dropped beat represents a disruption of the steady two-beat pulse already well established. What in fact happens is that Maybelle resists altering the pulse, creating a polyrhythm lasting several measures (mm. 24–28). This is caused by a displacement of the bass part by exactly one beat, first seen in measure 24. The displacement is corrected by way of short-walking the bass lines just as the chorus concludes in mea-

sure 29, a remarkable feat of rhythmic control. This event is repeated exactly for the second and third verses and choruses but does not occur in the first verse. The difference in the text between verses caused the rhythmic change in the melodic line, showing again that the Carters seem to have placed the lyrics first in their arrangement decisions.

Looking now to the guitar's bass pattern in the first verse, (example 24 again), notice that even though the verse does not include any dropped beats and therefore requires no change in accent pattern in the bass line, as will be needed in the upcoming stanzas, Maybelle nevertheless includes just such a displacement in measures 12 and 13, and then corrects the rhythm in measure 14. In other words, she has ingeniously foreshadows the rhythmic events to come.

Rhythmically Symmetrical Songs

**“The Storms Are on the Ocean,” “Meet Me by the Moonlight,”
“Anchored in Love,” “John Hardy,” “Little Darling Pal of Mine,”
“Bury Me under the Weeping Willow,” “Poor Orphan Child,” “Log
Cabin by the Sea,” “Chewing Gum”**

Let us examine a few of the songs from these early recordings that use little or no rhythmic asymmetry. The second track on the CD, “The Storms are on the Ocean,” is in a fast waltz time, fast enough to be perceived as 6/8. One generalization that can be made about the Carters’ use of rhythmic asymmetry is that they did not use it in waltzes, at least at the pulse or metric level. Perhaps this is because the peculiar rhythmic drive of the meter made any change in time signature too disturbing to allow. “Meet Me By the Moonlight,” another waltz, is also symmetrical. “Anchored in Love,” uses a driving 6/8 meter, and does not use asymmetry at the beat level. Its phrase structure is slightly asymmetrical because the song’s refrain is grouped by three-line phrases rather than by two or four.

The vocal melody of “John Hardy” is symmetrical, but the addition of a partial repetition of the melody by the guitar with each verse creates a measure of two beats and an overall asymmetry for each phrase (example 25).

Example 25. Mostly symmetrical: John Hardy

1st verse:

John Hardy - was a despise little man, he carried two guns every day; he shot a man on the West Virginia line, you ought to see John Hardy, gettin' a-way.

guitar:

Neither “Little Darling, Pal of Mine” nor “Bury Me under the Weeping Willow” use rhythmic asymmetry. A brief glance at their melodies (examples 26A and 26B) shows that the phrases all have at least a quarter note up-beat; there is no need to close up the space between lines or verses because it is already limited to three beats or less. For the same reasons, neither “Little Log Cabin by the Sea” nor “Chewing Gum” uses any type of rhythmic asymmetry.

Example 26A. Rhythmic symmetry: Little Darling, Pal of Mine

chorus

Oh little dar-ling oh how I love you, How I love you none can tell; in your heart you love a- no-ther, Lit-tle dar-ling, pal of mine.

Example 26B. Rhythmic symmetry: Bury Me Under the Weeping Willow

chorus:

Oh, bury me un-der the wee- ping willow, yes, un-der the weeping willow tree; So he will know where I am sleep-ing and per- haps he will weep o- ver me. My

“Poor Orphan Child,” is almost entirely symmetrical, except for the unexpected addition of a single beat between each stanza. As the melodic lines are all very long, again with an upbeat for each one, perhaps the brief pause allows the singers a moment to breathe. Interestingly enough, the extra beat creates a pause of four beats between stanzas, making “Poor Orphan Child” an apparent exception to the standard applied in the other songs.

Structure

Let us turn now to a brief discussion of structure in the songs. In the larger sense, song structure is a type of rhythm,⁵ and an asymmetrical structure that involves some disruption of an established structural pattern therefore offers an analogy to asymmetrical rhythms as already discussed. The structure chart (example 27) shows that even though some of the songs from the CD follow a stereotyped structure most are, in fact, distinct from one another. The most stereotyped structure is one in which guitar melody, verse, and chorus alternate; this occurs in only four songs in this collection. Five of the songs have a repeating structure, but each is unique. The remaining songs all use some kind of changing asymmetrical structure, and, therefore, overall it must be said that these tunes are not so structurally redundant as they might seem.

Harmony

In general, harmony in these songs is literally as simple as it can be. Chords change only when the melody demands it, never by themselves. Perhaps constrained by the limitations of Sarah’s autoharp, all the songs are in C or F. If viewed within a hierarchy of elements, harmony comes fairly low on the list, since it cannot exist without melody for very long (three beats).

Likewise the melodies are memorable but hardly adventurous. Virtually no syncopation occurs. Most of the songs use only a major scale and a few are closer to pentatonic. Only two songs use any pitch from outside the prevailing scale—of these, both represent tonicizations of the IV chord via a flatted seventh scale degree in the melody (“John Hardy,” “I Ain’t Going to Work Tomorrow”).

Given the apparently conservative features described, the Carters’ use of rhythm raises interesting questions, since by modern standards these rhythmic devices are uncommon. Modern performances of Carter songs, includ-

Example 27. Song Structures

G = Guitar Break V = Verse C = Chorus

Songs with Guitar-Verse-chorus structure:

- 1) Keep on the Sunny Side G-V1-C/G-V2-C/G-V3-C/G
 4) Meet me by the Moonlight G-V1-C/G-V2-C/G-V3-C/G-V4-C/G
 8) Anchored in Love G-V1-C/G-V2-C/G-V3-C/G
 13) Chewing Gum G-V1-C/G-V2-C/G-V3-C/G-V4-C/G-V5-C/G-V6-C/G-V7-C/G

Songs with repeating structure:

- 3) Wildwood Flower G-V1/G-V2/G-V3/G-V4/G
 5) Wandering Boy V1-V2-C/V3-V4-C
 11) Single Girl, Married Girl G-G-V1-V2/G-G-V3-V4/G-G-V5-V6/G-G
 14) Poor Orphan Child V1-C/V2-C/V3-C/V4-C
 15) John Hardy G/V1-½G/V2-½G/V3-½G/V4-½G/V5-½G/V6-½G/V7-½G/G

Songs with changing structure:

- 2) The Storms are Over... V1-C/V2-C-G/V3-C/V4-C
 6) River of Jordan G-V1-V2/G-V3-V4/G-V5
 7) I Ain't Going to Work... G/V1-½G-V2-½G/G-V3-½G-V4-½G/V5-½G-V6-½G/G
 9) Little Darling, Pal of Mine G-V1-C/G-V2/G-V3/C-G-V4/C-G-V5/C
 10) Bury Me Under... V1-C/V2-C/G-V3-C/G-V4-C
 16) Will You Miss Me... V1-C/V2-C/V3-V4-C

ing even performances by later incarnations of the Carter Family, invariably smooth over the rhythmic irregularities. The consistent evening of these rhythmic events by subsequent generations of musicians suggests that a change in the relative importance of the different musical elements has taken place in our culture. Whereas the original Carter Family clearly placed melody and text at the pinnacle of their music, later musicians prefer to maintain continuous rhythm, forcing the melody and text to accommodate.

As I listen to these haunting voices from the past, I am struck by their directness and familiarity. Every word is clearly articulated, as though the words they sing are important. The instruments shape the background; the guitar plays to announce and frame the song and to prepare the way for the singer. The singer proceeds directly through the words with the sole purpose of declaiming them as plainly as possible and uses the melody's rise and fall to welcome the words into their place. The words govern and control the melody, which in turn governs the background. The rhythm is part of the background, and when the words indicate a change in rhythm, it changes. The background cannot exist by itself for long. Instead, the words assert themselves to arrive in place of the apparent void created by the absence of melody, recalling the a cappella traditions of the past.

Notes

1. I regret that a copy of the recording cannot be provided here and recommend that the reader obtain this disc to accompany the article.

2. Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983), 17.

3. This is called *hypermeter*, which refers to the perceived grouping of a regular number of measures as a discrete musical unit. See Lerdahl and Jackendoff, *Generative Theory*.

4. Most of them were recorded in one or two takes.

5. Lerdahl and Jackendoff make a similar point.

Country Music's Confederate Grandfather

Henry C. Gilliland

Kevin S. Fontenot

The story of the birth of the country music industry has attained legendary status. In June 1922, two men, the younger dressed as a cowboy, the other as a Confederate veteran, pushed their way into the New York offices of the Victor Recording Company. The cowboy announced that they had arrived to make a few recordings of old-time fiddle music and that if the Victor agents listened he was sure the recordings would please them. After some argument, the Victor representatives agreed to let the men cut what were to be the first recordings of old-time rural music.¹ While the event did not occur exactly in this manner, the legend solidified. Eck Robertson, the cowboy, lived to cantankerously relate his life story. The Confederate veteran, Henry Clay Gilliland, faded into obscurity, all but forgotten. And the obscurity would have remained had Gilliland himself not realized the importance of his life and left several autobiographical writings and a scrapbook. Henry Gilliland lived a typical frontier life, marred by the Civil War and Indian raids, distinguished by public service and being one of the first men to record country music.

Henry Clay Gilliland was born on March 11, 1845, near the Granby lead mines in Jasper County, Missouri. His father, Joseph C. Gilliland, lost an arm at the age of sixteen and received a "fine education" to help him in life. Henry's mother, Lucretia K. Gilliland, claimed descent from a family of English gentry, the Barringtons. Henry took great pride in the family association and noted his relations in his autobiography. The Joseph Gilliland



Confederate veteran Henry C. Gilliland, one of the first men to record country music. (Kevin Fontenot collection)

family consisted of eight children: Samuel, James, William, Joseph, Martha, Henry, John, and Ann Eliza.²

The family often moved in search of opportunity. In 1851 the Gillilands located in Independence, Missouri, and in 1853 in Texas. They moved several times in Texas, remaining largely in the Red River valley region, eventually settling permanently in Parker County, some thirty miles west of Dallas.³ Gilliland recalled a peaceful life with the local Kiowa and Comanche, except for an altercation between brother Sam and some “uncouth” Indians. Life was difficult for the family, and on February 14, 1855, tragedy struck when Joseph Gilliland died of pneumonia. The sons rose to the

occasion and were soon operating a productive wheat farm. In 1857 the family moved again. At the same time, Indian depredations increased in the Parker County area and continued nearly unabated until the 1870s. Animosity grew between the settlers and the Comanche and Kiowa raiding parties and the Gilliland brothers actively joined patrols of armed men policing the region. Henry was too young to fight and often retreated with his family to the "settlements" for protection.⁴

In 1861 the four elder Gilliland brothers joined the Confederate cause, two enlisting in the Second Texas Cavalry, Arizona Brigade. Henry's brothers saw action in the Confederate invasion of the New Mexico territory. While his brothers fought the Yankees, Henry commandeered one brother's fiddle. Joseph C. Gilliland was "known all over the state as one of Texas' best fiddlers. When they left home, [Henry] took charge of his fiddle, and learned very rapidly to play." Gilliland lamented the poor quality of his horse-hair strings and the lack of older brothers to teach him the fine points of fiddling. However, in February 1863 Gilliland enlisted in the Second Texas Cavalry with his brothers.⁵

Though proud of his war service and active in the United Confederate Veterans, Gilliland remained strangely silent on his war years. This might be due to the fact that Gilliland served in the Trans-Mississippi Department, a region noted for its extreme violence and guerrilla activity. The Second was commanded by Brig. Gen. Thomas Green, a noted hero of the Texas Republic and the Mexican War. Green inspired a near fanatical devotion from his men, and his death at the battle of Blair's Landing, Louisiana, in 1864 devastated the troops. William Gilliland composed a lengthy poem idolizing the slain commander and read the poem at Green's state funeral in Austin.⁶ Following the Red River campaign, the Second Texas Cavalry saw little action. The unit was surrendered by Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith on May 26, 1865.

The war probably gave Henry an opportunity to fine tune his fiddle playing with the guidance of his brothers and to learn tunes from other soldiers. Fiddlers were common in the Confederate service and held in esteem by other soldiers. H.W. Manson of Rockwell, Texas, recalled a company of Barksdale's Mississippians with ninety men of whom "seventy five were good fiddlers." Music provided diversion during the monotonous periods between battles and also opportunities for fiddlers from different regions to learn from each other. In a society where units often challenged one another to ball games and wrestling matches, competition among com-

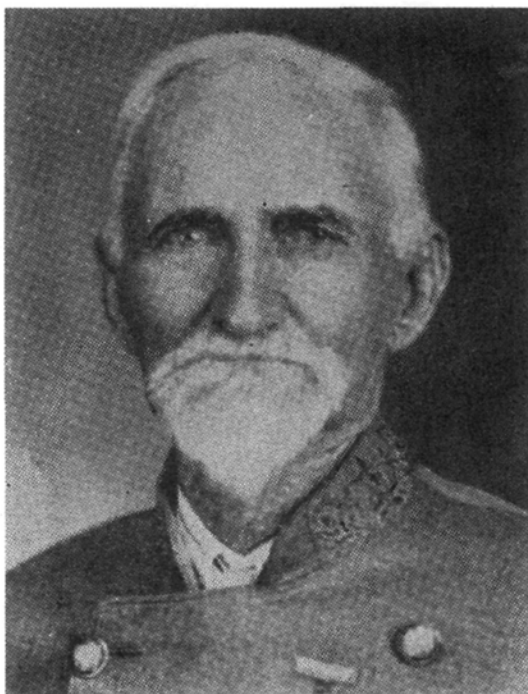
panies to determine the best fiddler is easily imagined. What Gilliland might have learned regarding fiddle playing during the war must be left to imagination as well; he was as silent on that issue as he was the war in general.⁷

Gilliland returned from the war to a devastated Parker County. "Indians, stirred by the lust for blood, and bent on carrying on the destruction which the whites had worked for four years, were ravaging the Texas frontier," remarked a 1911 article on Gilliland, who along with other veterans, again took up arms and "went out to meet the savages."⁸ During this trying time, Gilliland often "forted up" with other families and used the time to "practice my fiddle little dreaming that in later years was to be called 'one of the best in the state'"⁹

Gilliland placed his fiddle aside on July 5, 1869, to participate in a battle against marauding Comanche Indians.¹⁰ The Comanches had raided outside Fort Worth the previous day and brutally murdered several whites, including Jacob Lopp, a close friend of the Gilliland family. Following the Comanche party in a driving rain, Gilliland and five others charged the Indians, who retreated to a hollow. The twenty-four-year-old Gilliland rallied the men and drove the Indians out of their position, killing five and recovering some two hundred stolen horses. Gilliland regarded the battle of July 5 as one of the high points of his life, never failing to mention his courage whenever possible. He devoted eight pages of his twenty-two page autobiography to an account of the fight.

With his growing fame as a fiddle player and new-found recognition as an Indian fighter, Gilliland settled into a prosperous life. On December 9, 1869, he married Susie Borden, with whom he eventually had six children. He farmed his land and in 1888 successfully ran for the district clerk of Parker County, a position he held for many years. At some point in the 1870s Gilliland was elected captain of a local company of Parker Countians raised to combat the Kiowas and Comanches. The unit disbanded before it saw any service. Nevertheless, Gilliland used the title of captain until the day he died.¹¹

Gilliland lived an active life in Parker County. He participated in local Democratic Party politics, developing a fondness for the Democratic agrarianism exemplified by fiddling Tennessee politician Robert Love Taylor. He belonged to the Baptist Church and the Order of Odd Fellows. As his children grew, three of them moved to the newly opened territory of Oklahoma. With several children relocated and the deaths of his mother and siblings, "a strange melancholy took possession of [his] nature" and Gilliland



Moses Bonner, cofounder of the Old Fiddlers' Association. (Kevin Fontenot collection)

moved near Altus, Oklahoma, in October 1900. The “melancholy” may have been exacerbated by physical problems related to his war service. In October 1899 Gilliland applied for a Confederate pension complaining of “periatitis” of the leg and hip joint, muscular atrophy, and a “shortening of the limb” that rendered him unable to perform manual labor. These ailments resulted from his “exposure and heavy duty guarding the gulf coast of Texas.” The pension, which was designed to help disabled and indigent veterans, was denied due to Gilliland’s wealth. He listed among his property in 1899 one hundred and eleven acres of land valued at \$277.50, a wagon, and a horse. Fifty acres of the land, which was located approximately eleven and one half miles northwest of Weatherford, was in cultivation.¹²

The move to Oklahoma rejuvenated Gilliland. He entered local politics and held a succession of elected positions, including mayor of Altus, jus-



Henry C. Gilliland and his fiddle. (Kevin Fontenot collection)

tice of the peace, city clerk, country clerk, and county sheriff. He joined the local chapter of the United Confederate Veterans, Altus Camp, No. 1417, and acted as adjutant of the camp until his death. And he maintained close ties to his friends in North Texas, particularly through his membership in the Old Fiddlers' Association, which he helped found with Mose Bonner in 1901.

On May 25, 1913, Susie Gilliland died. Gilliland was broken and found escape in his fiddle and in his rivalries with other fiddlers. He recovered from his depression and annually traveled to the Dallas fair to compete in fiddle contests. On the way home, he usually spent time with his friend Walter Morgan, and Gilliland played his fiddle to entertain his friends and their guests. One of those guests, a young widow named Mollie Aldridge, was enchanted by Gilliland's playing, and the two wed on August 20, 1914.

Gilliland boasted in his autobiography that she was "twenty-six years younger than I am, but she is all that keeps me alive." In 1917 Mollie Gilliland died, leaving Henry to retreat once again into his fiddle.¹³

In addition to his political career and family life, Henry Gilliland kept up an active pace as a fiddle player. During the "long and tedious months" of Indian raiding activity, Gilliland reports that he was "busy with my fiddle. They were having balls all over the country and I was one of their fiddlers and dancers. I did not play in contests then, for they did not have them, but the time soon came when the old fiddlers had their contests." Gilliland entered numerous fiddle contests and won top honors at Weatherford and Fort Worth in the 1880s. "In Oklahoma I played in thirteen prize contests and won twelve out of thirteen," he recalled. "I cannot begin to tell the number of first prizes won in Texas, but they were many." A regular challenger to Gilliland was Wallace Stafford, with whom he seems to have had a particular rivalry. Other contestants cited by Gilliland in his autobiography read like a "who's who" of Texas fiddlers: Jesse Roberts, Polk Harriss, Mose J. Bonner, Sam Stafford, Jim Gunn, and the legendary Matt Brown.¹⁴

Matt Brown was one of the few fiddle players Gilliland held in higher esteem than he held himself. Brown was the "best fiddler on earth" whose reputation "will last as long as time lasts." Gilliland vigorously defended Brown from rumors that his friend had drowned while fishing at Spur, Texas, on June 18, 1915. Rather, Gilliland asserted that Brown suffered a heart attack in the lake. This is a curious digression, perhaps the result of rumors surrounding Brown's death. Gilliland seems eager to suggest that Brown died from no fault of his own. Regardless, the defense underscores Gilliland's deep respect for Brown.¹⁵

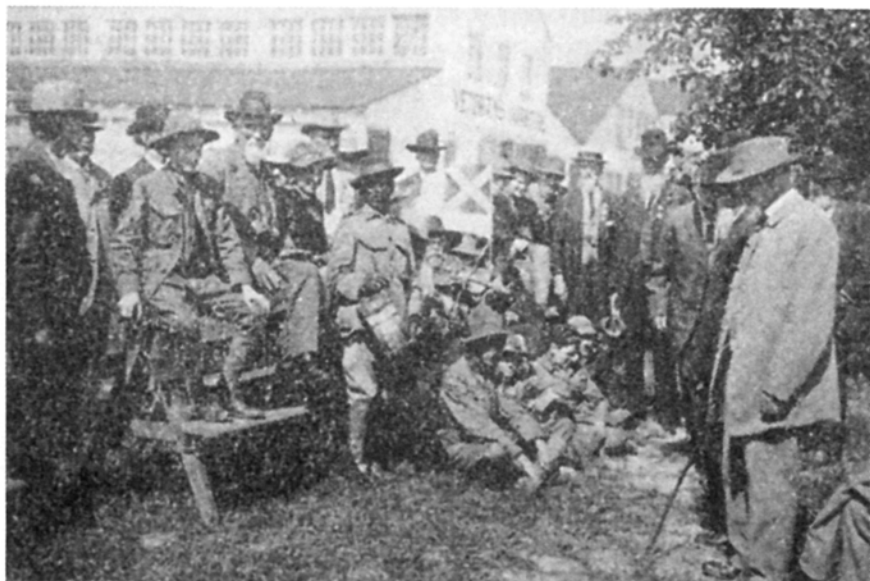
Coinciding with Gilliland's activity as a fiddle player was his growing participation in the United Confederate Veterans, an organization created to promote veterans' issues and foster memory of the Confederacy. Gilliland held many posts in the UCV, including adjutant of the Altus (Oklahoma) Camp, commander of the Third Brigade, Oklahoma Division, and adjutant general and chief of staff of the Oklahoma Division. In 1919 he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in the UCV, a ceremonial title he seems not to have used. Gilliland also belonged to the Second Texas Cavalry Association and served as its secretary for several years.¹⁶ In addition to various administrative duties, Gilliland assisted veterans and their widows in establishing proper credentials needed to obtain pensions. In the hectic last days of the war many unit rosters were destroyed or lost, and the

pension process required veterans whose service could not be verified by existing rosters to produce statements from comrades in order to establish their service. Such was the case with Texas fiddler Mose Bonner, who enlisted very late in the war and appeared on no surviving rosters. Upon applying for a pension in 1930, Bonner produced a statement from R.J. McKinney verifying his service in the Twelfth Texas Cavalry (Parson's Brigade). Gilliland placed advertisements in the *Confederate Veteran* asking for those who had served with various soldiers to aid in establishing service. He himself provided personal testimony for Angelina Gililand, the widow of his brother James.¹⁷

Gilliland regularly attended veterans' reunions, where he proved to be in much demand for his skills as a fiddle player. "Plenty of entertainment was provided" at the reunions with many "musicians (among the veterans) who had brought along their instruments to pass the time."¹⁸ Veterans at the seventeenth annual reunion thrilled listening to "Veteran Brock, of Texas, the famous one-armed violinist, who skillfully held the bow between his knees, and with his left arm manipulates his fiddle, while one after another of the Veterans shuffled his feet to 'Chicken in the Dough Tray' and other famous jigs."¹⁹

But the veterans' reunions were more than times to dance and reminisce. The United Confederate Veterans fought for pensions and hospitals for aging soldiers and waged a war for a proper legacy. The veteran "shaped the mind of the South. By means of memorial activities he left behind constant reminders of his past. He handed down an ideal of gallantry and self-sacrifice by which any future sacrifices paled in comparison." Veterans hoped to remind future generations that they were, in Gilliland's words, "whipped but not conquered." Veterans battled school boards over the selection of texts, championing books that presented a favorable view of the Confederacy. The emergence of the New South deeply troubled them, and many feared that the new order eroded traditional values and mores. As exemplars of gallantry, the veterans felt the duty to pass on those values and mores to the new generation.²⁰

At this point Gilliland's interests in veteran's activities and old-time fiddling merged. Indeed, the two had been coming together for several years. Gilliland and El Taylor frequently performed at veterans' meetings. Fiddle contests in North Texas were heavily populated by ex-Confederates. The Old Fiddlers' Association, organized at Fort Worth in April 1901, was led by veterans Jesse Roberts, Moses Bonner, and Gilliland, who served for



Oklahoma fiddlers at a Confederate veterans reunion. (Kevin Fontenot collection)

years as its secretary. The Association's contests were held under the auspices of "ex-Confederate associations of the city." The contests were a mixture of old-time music, patriotic rhetoric, and joviality. The 1900 contest featured a fiddle handmade by J.K. Griffith while a prisoner on Johnson's Island during the Civil War.²¹ Judges at the 1901 contest awarded prizes not only to the best fiddler, but also to those with the largest and smallest feet, the fattest and leanest build, whitest hair and baldest head, and for the best rebel yell. Special prizes were given for the best renditions of "Dixie" and "Arkansaw Traveller," both of which were won by Gilliland, who also took first prize. The prizes ranged from a gold watch for first place to a suit of clothes for third. Two black fiddlers, Ran Versey and Sam Green, competed in a category for "colored contestants." The contest was "a great success financially and otherwise, and the addition to the funds of the camp came very seasonably."²²

Henry Gilliland viewed the fiddle contests as something more than good times. For him the contests provided an opportunity to impart values to future generations and to smooth the rough edges of an increasingly violent South. Gilliland stated that the Old Fiddlers' Association's

purpose for organization was social recreation and a revivifying of the old time music loved and enjoyed by our forefathers. . . . We are willing to admit that science has made wonderful strides in the development of music, but we are not willing to admit that it has been materially improved, and while our musical theory may greatly differ from that of our friends of the "classics" yet we cast no aspersions at their style of music, therefore we are willing to allow them the same privilege we ask for ourselves.

We believe that music with its benign influence, has done more toward civilizing the human family than any other art known to man. We further believe that the famous lecture "The Fiddle and the Bow" so beautifully and eloquently rendered by the immortal Robert L. Taylor has gladdened more hearts than any other lecture that has ever fallen from the lips of mortal man, and if a few more such lectures could take the place of the political verbosity now invading the sacred precincts of Church and State our people would love each other better and it would be less difficult to get a little of the milk of human kindness to go into our social [efforts?].

We need more music and less whisky; we need more sociability and less selfishness, and if people would devote more time to love, laughter, and song we would have a paradise right here on earth; tears of sorrow would vanish and the wrinkled brow of old age would be transformed into the rose-tints of youth and health. . . . Music the fountain stream of joy, peace, and happiness, the very essence of our social fabric, a pleasant intoxicant that leads us out into the flower-clad plains of nature and points the highway that leads to a higher and better life.

If music was driven from our churches, how long would it be until the moss and cobwebs would cover the threshold to that sacred edifice? Drive music from the American home and from out our land and country, and discontent would take its place.

Therefore . . . let us admonish the proprietor of every home to install some kind of music; learn your children to love music, it will ingraft into their minds a mellow affection that will last until life is extinct.²³

For Gilliland music was the means by which the tumultuous turn of the century years in the South could be calmed and endowed with the restraint and vision of American forefathers.

Rhetoric aside, fiddle contests were often scheduled to coincide with veteran's meetings. Fiddling veterans arrived armed with their instruments to defend regimental and state honor. John Silas Todd, a Tennessee veteran who owned a "Stradivarius," defended his championships at reunions and also accompanied veteran "Uncle Joe" McDonald's vocals. Dr. L.H. Hill of

Germantown, North Carolina, issued a challenge to any “takers” through the pages of the *Confederate Veteran*: “I wish to invite all old veterans who play the fiddle to join me in an old-time fiddlers’ convention during the Reunion in Birmingham, May 16–18 [1916]; so don’t fail to come prepared to contest for the championship of old-time fiddlers. Come prepared to do your best, and then if you don’t mind these old Tarheels will show you how they play and put ‘the tar on you.’ I will say, lastly, that when allowed to play I have won the first prize. Old vets or their children can contest.”²⁴

Gilliland himself promoted fiddle contests between veterans and others. For the 1910 Texas State Fair, Gilliland sent out letters requesting that five hundred fiddlers come to the fair for a massive contest to be held on opening day in the convention hall. The Old Fiddlers’ Association placed only one restriction on the contestants, namely, that anyone using the terms “violin” or “violinist” would suffer the penalty of a one dollar fine. Only twenty-five arrived for the contest, but they were held up as examples of hardy pioneers who had settled the west and paved the way for modern Dallas.²⁵

In 1911 Gilliland announced his intentions to seek the world’s championship and challenged all fiddling veterans to meet him at the reunion in Little Rock that year to compete. In an interview for the *St. Louis Republic* on April 2, 1911, Gilliland recalled that his triumphs with the fiddle were too numerous to be remembered but that he was especially proud of opening the Texas State Fair in Dallas in 1910, and that he was the victor in nine of the ten contests in which he had fiddled in Oklahoma. He also added that he had played in fewer contests since moving to Oklahoma, which, he said, was not his fault. Oklahoma, in Gilliland’s view, was not “so much of a fiddling state as is Texas.” The reporter assessed Gilliland as a “soldier who has seen service, and Indian fighter who led in charge in which men really were killed, a political power to be reckoned with in his county, but over and above all these things, a fiddler who knows how to fiddle.” Henry Gilliland emerged as a frontier legend, a status in which he reveled. Perhaps the legend was too much. The Little Rock battle for the world championship attracted few competitors, namely, Polk Harris, Jesse Roberts, Mose Bonner, and two Arkansans. The judges declared a tie.²⁶

Contests knew no boundaries. Confederate and Union veterans, Cherokee and Creek Indians, and blacks competed, though the blacks did so in a colored division. Regardless, fiddle conventions drew a broad constituency and enabled fiddlers to meet and exchange ideas with players of various

traditions. The Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce promoted the “Biggest Fiddler’s Contest Ever Held in the Southwest,” inviting fiddlers from Oklahoma, New Mexico, Texas, and Arkansas. Fifty fiddlers promised to attend, including Matt Brown, “the champion fiddler of the United States,” Jesse Roberts, “a medal swinger of considerable repute,” and “of course Uncle Henry himself . . . his first class medals will be left at home, for when assembled they are too heavy and too much in the way to carry.” After the contest in Wichita Falls, the group—led by the famous three fiddlers—was to make a concert tour on the Denver railroad. The tour was to include the towns of Childress, Amarillo, and Dalhart.²⁷

Veterans’ reunions and fiddle contests were intimately linked. Both served as points where memory, tradition, and the future intersected. At these gatherings, veterans were eager to pass along values, patriotism, old tunes, and technical skill to the next generation. In an increasingly urban (or at least town-oriented) world, fiddling brought generations together. Gilliland always emphasized in his press releases and newspaper interviews that the old fiddlers welcomed the “younger ones.” With one of these younger ones, Henry Gilliland made history for the last time.

The 1922 Confederate Veterans’ Reunion was held in Richmond, Virginia, at the end of June. Gilliland traveled to the reunion as a colonel in the organization, adjutant general and chief of staff to Oklahoma Division commander William Taylor. The fiddle came with him. In Richmond Gilliland was joined by Alexander Campbell “Eck” Robertson, whom the old man probably knew from contests in Texas. The two performed an impromptu “barn dance” in the lobby of the Jefferson Hotel on June 20, while veterans enthusiastically danced the “shake down” and “buck and wing.” The lobby filled to “overflowing,” and the *Richmond News Leader* noted that the music was provided by “two famous Texas fiddlers” and printed Gilliland and Robertson’s photograph on the front page of the June 21 edition. The euphoria demonstrated by the dancers and the four thousand veterans who heard the duo play at the opening session may have convinced Gilliland and Robertson to make their next move.

Martin W. Littleton, a friend of Gilliland occasionally did legal work for the Victor Recording Company. Littleton invited the duo to New York and introduced them at the Victor offices. After an audition at which Robertson played “Sally Gooden,” Victor executives invited Gilliland and Robertson to return on June 30 to record. They cut “Arkansas Traveler” and “Turkey in the Straw,” two tunes familiar to Texas fiddlers.²⁸ The next day Robertson

returned to make several more sides, but Gilliland had established his place as one of the first men to record what eventually became known as country music.²⁹

He returned to Oklahoma and to his activities as a veteran and Odd Fellow. On April 21, 1924, after a long illness, Henry Clay Gilliland died. His funeral, held in the Baptist church, was the largest ever held in Altus. The funeral services were conducted by his Confederate comrades, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Odd Fellows.

What Henry Gilliland thought of his recording experience remains unknown. His fellow veterans took note, though. The obituary in the *Confederate Veteran* emphasized that "Comrade Gilliland was a violinist of note, being the champion fiddler of five States, and he was considered the greatest 'fiddler' of the world. He had been called to New York City and his playing recorded by a phonograph company, and its thus reproduced everywhere."³⁰

Undoubtedly, Henry Gilliland would take great pride in the knowledge that his recordings are still being "reproduced everywhere." He might not even mind paying the fine for being called a violinist.

Notes

The author would like to thank Bill C. Malone, Wilbur Meneray, Ronald Parsley, Ronnie Pugh, Amy Trepagnier, and Gov. Jimmie Davis for their assistance and interest in this project.

1. For a basic account of the first country music recording session, see Charles Wolfe, *The Devil's Box: Masters of Southern Fiddling* (Nashville: Country Music Foundation & Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1997), 13–17; and Bill C. Malone, *Country Music USA*, rev. ed. (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1985), 35.

2. Henry C. Gilliland, *Life and Battles of Henry C. Gilliland For Seventy Years: Wars of the Confederacy, Wars with the Indians and Wars with the "Fiddle and Bow"* (Altus, Okla.: Henry C. Gilliland, c 1915). Gilliland also contributed a short autobiographical sketch titled "Autobiography of Henry Gilliland" to John S. Grace and R.B. Jones, *A New History of Parker County* (Weatherford, Tex.: Parker County Historical Commission, reprint edition, 1987), 183–84. Also, a short biographical sketch of Gilliland appears in Frank W. Johnson, *A History of Texas and Texans* (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1916), 5: 2432–34, based primarily on his published autobiography.

3. At the site of the current city of Weatherford.

4. Gilliland, *Life and Battles*, 1–11.

5. *Ibid.*, 11. William, Joseph, and Henry Gilliland served in Company H, Sec-

ond Texas Cavalry, Arizona Brigade. Joseph rose to the rank of 1st Sergeant. Samuel and James served in Company A, Griffin's Battalion. Gilliland states that the younger of the two brothers in the Second was the fiddle player.

6. W.M. Gilleland (*sic*), "Burial March of Maj. Gen. Tom Green" (Austin, Tex.: 1864). The author wishes to thank James Hollandsworth of the University of Southern Mississippi for bringing this item to my attention.

7. On the Mississippi unit see H.W. Mason, "A.P. Hill's Signal Corps," *Confederate Veteran* 2 (January 1894): 12. *Confederate Veteran*, the official magazine of the United Confederate Veterans, contains numerous mentions of fiddle playing during the war. The magazine remains an underutilized source for nineteenth century southern folk culture.

8. "Henry C. Gilliland, the Crack Fiddler of Oklahoma, Now Seeks World's Championship," *St. Louis Republic*, April 2, 1911.

9. Gilliland, *Life*, 12.

10. On this battle see Gilliland, *Life*, 12–19, and Grace and Jones, *A New History*, 75–76. He also listed the battle in a short profile in William E. Mickle, *Well Known Confederate Veterans and Their War Records* (New Orleans: W.E. Mickle, 1907), 65. The entry is illustrated with a fine photograph of Gilliland. On the Comanche and Kiowa depredations following the war see T.R. Fehrenbach, *Comanches: The Destruction of a People* (1974; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 493–552. Reports of depredations in Parker County are included in James M. Day and Dorman Winfrey, *Texas Indian Papers 1860–1916* (Austin: Texas State Library, 1961), particularly 218–23, 294–303, and 380–81.

11. David A. Baldwin, Research Assistant, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, to Kevin S. Fontenot, June 11, 1996. Gilliland claimed to have been a captain in the Texas Rangers, though the records of the Rangers do not support this assertion. His title of captain rests on his election by this group of Indian fighters. I have been unable to locate records of this group.

12. Gilliland, "Autobiography," 184; H.C. Gilliland, application for Confederate Pension, October 5, 1899, Texas State Archives.

13. Gilliland, *Life and Battles*, 21. A frontier tragedy of another sort afflicted the Gilliland family on June 20, 1902, when John N. Cockburn, a son-in-law, was killed by outlaws.

14. Gilliland, *Life and Battles*, 19.

15. *Ibid.*, 19–20. Gilliland cites evidence that a doctor from Haskell, Texas, found no water in Brown's body and "we all know that when a man drowns he is filled with water."

16. Information on Gilliland's service in various veterans' organizations comes from clippings in his scrapbook, housed at the Ford-Price Memorial Reference Library, Museum of the Western Prairie, Altus, Oklahoma (hereafter cited as Gilliland Scrapbook). The scrapbook appears to be dismantled, and the author wishes to

thank Bart McClenny, curator of the Museum, for providing photocopies of the scrapbook. Additional information comes from various volumes of the minutes of the Annual Meetings of the United Confederate Veterans in the Louisiana Historical Association Collection, Manuscripts Collection 55, Special Collections, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana. Gilliland appears actively in the UCV records from 1908 to 1924.

17. On Bonner see his application for a pension #47914 and his daughter's application for mortuary warrant, Texas State Archives. R.J. McKinney recalled camping with Bonner during the war. Bonner enlisted in Company E, Twelfth Texas Cavalry (Parson's Brigade) in May 1864 and served until the end of the war. It is highly unlikely that he saw combat. On Angelina Gilliland, see her widow's application for a pension, #37521, Texas State Archives, which includes Henry Gilliland's statement.

18. William W. White, *The Confederate Veteran* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: Confederate Publishing Company, 1962), 47.

19. Minutes of 17th Annual Reunion, UCV, 31.

20. White, *Confederate Veteran*, 116–17. Gilliland quote from *Weatherford (Tex.) Daily Herald*, July 23, 1906. For discussions of the motivating factors behind Confederate veteran organizations, see David Herbert Donald, "A Generation of Defeat," in *From the Old South to the New: Essays on the Transitional South*, ed. Walter J. Fraser Jr., and Winfred B. Moore Jr. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 3–20; Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), esp. 104–14; and John A. Simpson, *S.A. Cunningham and the Confederate Heritage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994).

21. Clipping titled "Old Fiddler's Contest," *Weatherford (Tex.) Daily Herald*, July 6, 1900. The making of this fiddle might be referred to in an account by Horace Carpenter, also a prisoner at Johnson's Island. Carpenter recalled that "in one instance, with nothing better than the wood pile on which to draw for material, one of the men fashioned a violin." Carpenter's memoir originally appeared in *Century Magazine*. This quote is from William H. Knauss, *The Story of Camp Chase* (Nashville and Dallas: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1906), 245.

22. 1901 *Fort Worth Herald* clipping titled "Texas Fiddlers," in Gilliland Scrapbook.

23. "Old Fiddlers Gather on State Fair Grounds," undated clipping in Gilliland Scrapbook.

24. For Todd, a distant relative of Abraham Lincoln's wife, see Jay S. Hoar, *The South's Last Boys in Gray* (Bowling Green, Ky.: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986), 15–16. Hill's challenge is to be found in the *Confederate Veteran* 24 (February 1916): 93.

25. Assorted clippings (mostly undated) regarding the Texas State Fair, Gilliland Scrapbook.

26. See quoted clipping and clipping titled "Fiddler's Contest Was a Tie" (date in pencil 1911), Gilliland Scrapbook.

27. Undated clipping, Gilliland Scrapbook.

28. See appendix 1 for a listing of fiddle tunes mentioned in the Gilliland Scrapbook.

29. See Wolfe, *Devil's Box*, for a discussion of this session. The recorded duets are available on Eck Robertson, *Old Time Texas Fiddler*, County 5515.

30. "Col. Henry C. Gilliland," *Confederate Veteran* 33 (April 1925): 145.

Appendix 1

Fiddle Tunes Mentioned in Gilliland Scrapbook Clippings

Note: Parenthetical numbers indicate how many times the tune is mentioned in the clippings, if more than once. Asterisks (*) signal tunes Gilliland is said to have played. Spelling of individual titles has been retained from source clippings.

Apple Blossom*	Leather Breeches
Arkansas Traveller (7)*	Mississippi Sawyer
Barnyard	Money Musk (3)*
Bonaparte's Retreat	Nancy Rowland
Bonnie Blue Flag*	Natchez Under the Hill (3)
The Broken Gambler	Natchy Made the Hill
Chapel Serenade	The Night is Dark
Cotteneyed Joe	Old Grey Horse Come Flying Out of the Wilderness
Devil's Dream	Rocky Mountain
Dixie (4)*	Rosin the Bow
Drunken Hiccoughs	Rye Straw
Eighth of January	Soapsuds Over the Fence
Fine Times	Speed the Plow
Fisher's Hornpipe	Texas
Foggy Dew	Turkey in the Straw (2)
Forked Deer (2)	Van Buren's Favorite
Hog Eye	Village Quickstep
Home Sweet Home*	Wagoner (3)*
Jennie Nettles	Widow Johnson
Jennie on the Highland	
Julia Hoover	

Appendix 2

Fiddlers Mentioned in Gilliland Scrapbook Clippings

Moses J. Bonner

Matt Brown

L.J. Chadwick

W.E. Chadwick

J.E. Clifford

S.A. Daniel

J.D. Ferguson

W.P. Foster

Henry C. Gilliland

Sam Green

J.K. Griffith

J.M. "Jim" Gunn

Robert T. Hanks (Black Fox)

James Knox Polk Harris

H.H. Hubbard

M.P. James

A.B. Kelley

T.M. Lee

T.D. McLaughlin

A.J. Merritt

Lawrence Merritt

D.R. Moberly

R.L. Peace

R. Phares

Jesse Roberts

Samuel Shirrel

A.C. Slatum

William Synder

Wallace P. Stafford

El Taylor

D.C. Van Buren

Ran Vesey

Appendix 3

Moses J. Bonner: A Brief Sketch

Moses J. Bonner's importance to the history of country music lies in the fact that he was one of the first musicians to play a radio "barn dance"—on January 4, 1923, over WBAP, Fort Worth, Texas. He also recorded two sides in 1925 and led an active life as a fiddle-contest performer.

Details of Bonner's life remain sketchy. He was born around 1847, and his family moved to Texas in 1854. In 1880 he located in Tarrant County, Texas, where he lived until his death. In May 1864 Bonner joined Company E, Twelfth Texas Cavalry, Parson's Brigade, and served until the end of the Civil War. By May of 1864 the war was generally finished in the West, and it is not known if Bonner ever saw combat. He appears on no surviving roles of the unit, and when he applied for a pension, he required an affidavit from a comrade to support his service.

What Bonner did for a living after the war is unknown. In 1901 Bonner became one of the founders of the Old Fiddlers' Association and served as the organization's president for many years. He was active in local and regional fiddle contests and participated at the world's championship held in Little Rock in 1911, tying with Jesse Roberts and Henry Gilliland. On March 17, 1925, Bonner recorded two sides for Victor. He was accompanied by Fred Wagoner on the harp-guitar. The sides consisted of the medleys "Yearling's in the Canebrake/The Gal on the Log" and "Dusty Miller/Ma Ferguson," the latter record perhaps indicating his political leanings since the A-side, considered a minor classic, is named after a controversial gover-

nor of Texas. He actively participated in Confederate veterans' organizations and attended the 1921 reunion of the United Confederate Veterans. In 1931 Bonner served as commander of the Texas Division, UCV, and represented the organization at the reunion in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1939 Bonner, with the rank of lieutenant general commanding the Army of the Trans-Mississippi, attended the forty-ninth UCV reunion in Trinidad, Colorado (August 22–26, 1939).

Bonner died on September 2, 1939, in the Fort Worth home of his daughter, Mrs. J.C. Jones.

Sources

- Bonner, M.J.. Soldier's Application for a Pension, #47914. Texas State Archives. Louisiana Historical Association Papers. Collection 55, Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, Tulane University.
- Bailey, Anne J. *Between the Enemy and Texas: Parsons's Texas Cavalry in the Civil War*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian Univ. Press, 1989.
- Chandler, Keith. Liner notes to *Texas Fiddle Bands*. Document Records DOCD-8038. (Contains both of Bonner's recordings.)

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