**How Old Time Music became Old Time Music**

**Folk Festival in Montana – Pete Wernick and Mike Seeger**

**1 What is Old-Time Music?** (Opinions of participants)

Where did it come from?

Who played it and why?

Instruments?

**2 What was Old-Time Music?**

Other than Native American music, **old-time music represents perhaps the oldest form of North American traditional music**.

encompasses **various styles**

originated in **rural America** before recorded music and radio were available.

**made in the home and in community spaces**, generally for **personal entertainment or dancing.**

Old-time music was basically the first folk music.

Appalachians - isolation

**3** emerged from the **synthesis of European and African musical sensibilities**,

fiddle traditions from Scotland, Ireland, England, France, and Germany;

black fiddle tradition;

ballad traditions from Scotland and England;

vocal, rhythm, and instrumental styles from West Africa.

**the union of European fiddle and African banjo music.**

**Jean Ritchie** adds, “The music evolved through an egalitarian process of inclusion. The core Scots-Irish tradition from the glens of Ulster cross-pollinated with cultural gleanings from the English, Scottish, Irish, German, Welsh, Scandinavian, native Cherokee, and the African-American community.”

4 The **American southeast** has been an especially productive **incubator for old-time music styles**. **Today, the music remains unusually concentrated and persistent in the Southern Appalachian Mountains**.

Other parts of the United States also have their own **regional old-time music styles**.

Old-time music is most commonly played using a wide variety of acoustic stringed instruments. **The instrumentation of an old-time group is often determined solely by what instruments are available, as well as by tradition**.

Historically, the **fiddle** was nearly always the leading melodic instrument, and in many instances dances were accompanied only by a single fiddler, who often also acted as dance caller.

The fiddle is sometimes played by two people at the same time, using small sticks called **fiddlesticks**, sometimes called "beating the straws"). (Al and Emily Cantrell.)

**By the early nineteenth century, the *banjo* (an instrument of West African origin originally played only by people of African descent, both enslaved and free) had become an essential partner to the fiddle, particularly in the southern United States.**

**Fiona Ritchie in *Wayfaring Strangers****:* “By the early 19th century, there was a black banjo presence on the Appalachian frontier and white fiddlers encountered African-American banjo players … influences working in both directions between blacks and whites.”

While in the year **2000 African Americans made up only 8 percent** of the Appalachian population, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries their numbers were greater, due not only to presence of slaves but also free blacks working in timber, coal mining and other industries**. The banjo was widely adopted by white musicians after the Civil War. Even into the twentieth century, it was common for young white musicians to have learned the banjo or other instruments from older African Americans living in the area.**

**5** This musical form developed along with various North American **folk dances, such as square dance, buck dance and clogging**. The genre also encompasses ballads and other types of folk songs. It is played on **acoustic instruments**.

**Naturally, it was not called old-time music at that time.**

6 **Appalachians**

Old-time music come from the "**Southern Appalachian**" region of the United States (the Central Appalachians being in the northeastern U.S. and the Northern Appalachians stretching into [Quebec](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Quebec), [Canada](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Canada)).

As a result of the terrain of the region, **the societies and cultures were fairly isolated from outside intervention.**

**7. more Instruments**

**guitar**

**C.F. Martin & Company**, often referred to as **Martin**, is an American [guitar manufacturer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guitar_manufacturing) established in 1833 by [Christian Frederick Martin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Frederick_Martin). The company was founded in New York City, where it was based for six years before relocating to [Nazareth, Pennsylvania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazareth,_Pennsylvania) in the [Lehigh Valley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lehigh_Valley) region of eastern [Pennsylvania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvania) in 1839. As cheaper and more robust guitars became available, the guitar joined the ensemble.

By the end of the century, guitars could be ordered from **Sears and Roebuck** and other catalogs for as little as **$2.40**.

**mandolin**

The mandolin was originally introduced into America by German and Italian immigrants. It was an ornate instrument with a flat top and round bottom. Not satisfied with the tone, the appearance and the playability of the instrument, Orville Gibson set about to radically change the instrument. Working in his shop in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the 1890s, Gibson started building flat-backed instruments which were carved similar to how a violin is carved. The changes transformed the instrument, making it a powerful instrument which could compete with the banjo.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, other stringed instruments began to be added to the fiddle-banjo duo; these included the

**guitar, mandolin, and double bass** (or washtub bass),

**"string band."**

Occasionally the

**cello**,

**piano**,

**hammered dulcimer**,

**Appalachian dulcimer**,

**tenor banjo**,

**tenor guitar**,

**mouth bow**,

or other instruments were used, as well as such non-string instruments as the

**jug**,

**harmonica**,

**Jew's harp**,

**concertina**,

**accordion**,

**washboard**,

**spoons**, or **bones**.

By far the **oldest type of instrument in this tradition is the** **Appalachian dulcimer**. The instrument’s antiquity belies the fact that it was a relative latecomer to the American South. Germans and other Northern Europeans apparenty brought such instruments in the 19th century, when they were spread vis the Pennsylvania side of the Appalachians into the American South. A newcomer as late as the 1890’s. the Appalachian dulcimer’s apparently medieval design and penchant for modal tunes disquised the fact that, among folk instruments in the South, it was a new kid on the block.

**10 Songs and Collectors**

**Songs scarcely remembered in their land of origin** still held a kind of “racial memory“ spell over Southern ancestors of expatriated yeomen. But the ballad tradition was not static; **newer songs of outlaws and train wrecks sprang up alongside old one of knights and ladies.** In rural society where newspapers were rare outside cities and literacy limited, the **ballad makers filled the rile of dramatist/newsanchor**. The Southern penchant for story songs, often with a morbid bent, remained a striking element of even commerical music until fairly recently.

The preservation of songs was largely the provence of the women. Often not allowed to play instruments, singing was their form of musical expression. Many knew large numbers of often very long songs of 20 or more verses, which had been passed down from generation to generation. Singing was a part of everyday life, something done which doing chores, so people were almost constantly surrounded by singing and songs.

**Francis James Child** (February 1, 1825 – September 11, 1896) was an American scholar, educator, and [folklorist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folkloristics), best known today for his collection of [English](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_people) and [Scottish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_people) [ballads](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballads) now known as the [Child Ballads](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_Ballads). Child was professor of rhetoric and oratory at [Harvard University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvard_University). In 1876 he was named Harvard's first Professor of English, a position which allowed him to focus on academic research. It was during this time that he began work on the **Child Ballads.**

The Child Ballads were published in five volumes between 1882 and 1898: ***The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*** in 1882–1898. While Child was primarily a literary scholar with little interest in the music of the ballads, his work became a major contribution to the study of English-language folk music.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_James_Child#cite_note-1)

**Olive Dame Campbell** was born Olive Arnold Dame in 1882 in [Medford, Massachusetts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medford,_Massachusetts). From a young age, education played an important role in her life, as her father was the head of a private high school. She graduated from [Tufts College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tufts_College) in 1900 during a time when most women did not pursue higher education. In 1903 she met her future husband [John Charles Campbell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_C._Campbell) (1867–1919), 15 years her senior, who was a missionary school teacher, marrying him in 1907, after which he went on to become a noted educator and social reformer.

Olive was Campbell's second wife, and together they traveled to Appalachia, where John had received a grant in 1909 to study the area's social and cultural conditions in hopes of improving their school systems. While there, Olive noted that ballads sung by the residents had strong ties to both English and Scots-Irish folk songs. The ballads that she collected would eventually be published as **English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians** by [Cecil Sharp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecil_Sharp) and Olive D. Campbell in 1917.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olive_Dame_Campbell#cite_note-autogenerated1962-2) This collection would later influence several productions, particularly the 2000 drama film [**Songcatcher**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Songcatcher).

After only 12 years of marriage, Olive's husband John died in 1919. After his death, Olive successfully published *“The Southern Highlander and His Homeland”* in 1921 under John's name.

In 1922 Olive was back to work and ready to embark on a trip to Copenhagen via a fellowship provided by the [American-Scandinavian Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American-Scandinavian_Foundation) in order to study the [Danish Folk School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danish_Folkeskole_Education) style of education, in hopes of finding a way to revitalize the local Appalachian school system. Accompanied by her sister Daisy Dame and colleague Marguerite Butler, the women spent 18 months traveling between Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, visiting local schools along the way.

**In 1925 upon her return, Olive founded the** [**John C. Campbell Folk School**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_C._Campbell_Folk_School) **in** [**Brasstown**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brasstown,_North_Carolina_(Unincorporated_Community))**,** [**North Carolina**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Carolina)**.**

**Cecil James Sharp** (22 November 1859 – 23 June 1924) was an English collector of folk songs, folk dances and instrumental music, as well as a lecturer, teacher, composer and musician. He was a key figure in the [folk-song revival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_folk_revival#First_revival_1890–1920) in England during the [Edwardian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwardian) period. According to Roud's *Folk Song in England*, Sharp was the country's "single most important figure in the study of folk song and music".

Sharp collected over four thousand folk songs, both in South-West England and the Southern Appalachian region of the United States.

During the years of the [First World War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I), Sharp found it difficult to support himself through his customary work in England, and decided to try to earn his living in the United States. He was invited to act as dance consultant for a 1915 New York production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and went on to give successful lectures and classes across the country on English folk song and especially folk dance. He met the wealthy philanthropist [Helen Storrow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Storrow) in Boston, and with her and other colleagues was instrumental in setting up the [Country Dance and Song Society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_Dance_and_Song_Society). **He also met** [**Olive Dame Campbell**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olive_Dame_Campbell)**, who brought with her a portfolio of British-origin ballads she had collected in the Southern Appalachian mountains. The quality of her collection convinced**

In 1916, [**Cecil Sharp**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecil_Sharp) arrived in Appalachia and along with his associate **Maud Karpeles, t**ravelling through the [Appalachian Mountains](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachian_Mountains) in [Virginia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia), [North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Carolina), [Kentucky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kentucky) and [Tennessee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennessee), often covering many miles on foot over rough terrain. Sharp, an authority on British ballads, was able to identify **1,600 versions of 500 songs from 281 singers**, almost all having their origins in the English/Scottish [Child Ballads](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_Ballads). After his first study in Appalachia, he published ***English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians:*** **"Barbara Allen**", etc. The primary sources for many of Sharp's recordings came from **a string of related families around Shelton Laurel, NC.** **Mary Sands** (“Singing Mary“): sang him 25 songs, 23 of which are included in his book. He also collected songs from young members of the [**Ritchie family**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Ritchie) of Kentucky.

**Olive Dame Campbell and her husband** [**John**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_C._Campbell) **had led Sharp and Karpeles to areas with a high concentration of white people of English or Scots-Irish ancestry**, so the collectors had little sense of the cultural mosaic of [White](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Americans), [Black](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Americans), [Indigenous](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States) and [multiracial Americans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiracial_Americans) that existed across Appalachia, or of the interactions between these groups that had resulted in a dynamic, hybridised folk tradition. For instance, **having witnessed in white communities a form of square dancing that he christened the "Kentucky Running Set", Sharp interpreted it inaccurately as the survival of a 17th-century English style, whereas in fact it contained significant African-American and European elements.**

Of note is the fact that **these families maintained a specific, unique vocal tradition and traditional English lyrical pronunciations across several generations, until gaining fame in the 1960s and 1970s** through similar field recordings completed by **John Cohen**. These records featured Dillard Chandler, Berzilla Wallin (recorded by Sharp) and Dellie Norton. Relatives of those individuals continue to keep this unique vocal style alive to this day.

**11** During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, **tunes originating in minstrel, Tin Pan Alley, gospel, and other music styles were adapted into the old-time style**. People played similar music in all regions of the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries, but **in the 20th century it became associated primarily with the Appalachian region**. Popular influences (Stephan Foster, etc.)

**12 Old-time music as dance music:**

Because **old-time fiddle-based string band music is often played for dances**, it is often characterized as dance music. In dance music, **emphasis is placed on providing a strong beat, and instrumental solos, or breaks are rarely taken**. This contrasts with [bluegrass music](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Bluegrass_music) which was developed in the 1940s as a form of concert music. Bluegrass music, however, developed from old-time music, and shares many of the same songs and instruments, but is more oriented toward solo performance than is old-time music.

While **in the British Isles reels and jigs both remain popular, the reel is by far the predominant metric structure preferred by old-time musicians in the United States (though a few hornpipes are also still performed).** Canadian musicians, particularly in the Maritime provinces where the Scottish influence is strong, perform both reels and jigs (as well as other types of tunes such as marches and strathspeys).

Each regional old-time tradition accompanies different dance styles.

clogging and flatfoot dancing (Appalachia),

contradancing ([New England](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/New_England)),

square dancing (Southern states) and s

tep dancing ([Nova Scotia](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nova_Scotia), particularly [Cape Breton Island](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Cape_Breton_Island)), though there is some overlap between regions.

**Henry Ford,** the auto maker, put more money into promoting country music in the 1920s than anyone else. Ford was frightened by what he saw as the urban decadence of couples jazz dancing. In response he organized fiddling contests and promoted square dances across the country to encourage what he saw as the older, more wholesome forms of entertainment.

**13 Recordings – professionalism**

**The evolution of Old-Time music to becoming a genre could not begin until the beginning of recordings.**

**Radio** **was still a utilitarian message service during the First World War**, but on November 2, 1920, Pittsburgh station **KDKA** broadcast the Harding-Cox election returns, and soon Westinghouse researcher Frank Conroad was reading newspapers and playing records over and over again from this primitive studio. **New York station WEAF** began selling time, and radio was on its way to big business. **The record industry was directly challenged.** **"Almost overnight, radio sneaked into the picture and the novelty of tuning in music and static from a distance, combined with the convenience of no cranks to wind and no records to buy and change, began sending the sale of platters downward." Edison's progeny was in trouble in 1923.**

**Recordings from the late 1920s through the mid 1930s are among the best sources to hear old-time music**. These recordings were generally made by and for white rural Southerners. Record labels marketed these records as **"old familiar tunes," "old time tunes," and eventually "hillbilly."** As one might infer from these descriptions, most of the songs were already old and familiar at the time they were first recorded in the '20s and '30s.

“**By 1920**, **the phonograph** had become increasingly commonplace **in the American home**:. But to gain acceptance in the home, it had to blend into the existing context; **it had to become furniture**. Companies had to market the **phonograph** by distancing it from its own technological past and role as arcade novelty. What was emphasized instead was its **role as edifying musical furniture**, an unobtrusive presence in the idealized environment of family life.” – Kyle S. Barnett

The label ***OKeh Records*** was founded by Otto (Jehuda) Karl Erich Heinemann (Lüneburg, Germany, 20 December 1876 – New York, USA, 13 September 1965) a German-American manager for the U.S. branch of [**Odeon Records**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odeon_Records), which was owned by [Carl Lindstrom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Lindstr%C3%B6m_Company), (1869–1932), a Swedish inventor living in [Berlin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin). The Otto Heinemann Phonograph Corporation, a phonograph supplier established in 1916, which branched out into phonograph records in 1918. **Otto Heinemann Phonograph Corporation**, set up a recording studio and pressing plant in New York City, and **started the label in 1918**. The name originally was spelled "**OkeH**" from the initials of Otto K. E. Heinemann but was later changed to "OKeh". **In 1965, OKeh became a subsidiary of** [**Epic Records**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_Records)**, a subsidiary of** [**Sony Music**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sony_Music)**. OKeh has since become a** [**jazz**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jazz) **imprint, distributed by** [**Sony Masterworks**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sony_Masterworks)**.** .

OKeh issued **popular songs, dance numbers, and vaudeville skits**, but Heinemann also wanted to provide music for audiences neglected by the larger record companies. OKeh produced lines of **recordings in German, Czech, Polish, Swedish, and** [**Yiddish**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yiddish) **for immigrant communities in the United States.** Some were pressed from masters leased from European labels, while others were recorded by OKeh in New York.

**OKeh's early releases included music by the New Orleans Jazz Band**. The label issued **a series of** [**race records**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_records) directed by [Clarence Williams](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarence_Williams_(musician)) in New York City and [Richard M. Jones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_M._Jones) in Chicago. From 1921 to 1932, this series included music by Williams, [Lonnie Johnson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lonnie_Johnson_(musician))**,** [**King Oliver**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Oliver)**, and** [**Louis Armstrong**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Armstrong).

**https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/hillbilly\_music**

An Atlanta record dealer, Polk C. Brockman had entered his **grandfather's furniture store business**, James K. Polk, Inc., quickly **taking over the phonograph department**. By 1921 the firm was **Okeh's largest regional outlet** with particularly heavy sales of the new **race records**. The young Atlantan convinced Okeh executive **Otto Heinemann** and W.S. Fuhri to give him a wholesale distributorship. By 1925, they were Okeh’s largest distributor in the Southeast and soon had branches in Richmond, Cincinnati, New Orleans, Memphis, and Dallas.

In 1923, 23-year-old Polk Brockman went to New York and convinced Okeh Records to come to Atlanta and record here!

Polk Brockman soon met **Ralph Peer** in New York City. Brockman's business trips to headquarters were frequent; on one such trip early in June, 1923, he found himself in the old Palace Theater on Times Square viewing a newsreel of a Virginia fiddlers' competition. Struck by a novel idea, he took out his memorandum pad and jotted down ["**Fiddlin' John Carson** – local talent – let's record."](https://web.archive.org/web/20060518024616/http:/www.lib.unc.edu/mss/sfc1/hillbilly/MP3s/Brockman01.mp3) His next step was to arrange for an Atlanta recording expedition. Brockman recalls that Peer had no particular type of talent in mind but wanted anything that might stimulate lagging sales. [Both men went South](https://web.archive.org/web/20060518024616/http:/www.lib.unc.edu/mss/sfc1/hillbilly/MP3s/Brockman02.mp3) via an extended Chicago detour for an Okeh dealers meeting held in conjunction with the National Music Industries annual convention. He’s also credited with **renting the vacant loft at 152 Nassau Street**.

Brockman went on to have quite a career in music – as a salesman, distributor, publisher, producer, and talent scout – and the family furniture business morphed into to **Polk Musical Supply Company**.

It has been suggested that Georgian **Polk Brockman’s career in early country music was much like a strip mining operation: its ultimately destructive impact yielded short-term profit but no long-term benefits or sustainability.** Present at the acknowledged conception of hillbilly/country music, having in 1923 convinced Ralph Peer to record Fiddlin’ John Carson for OKeh records, Brockman followed a path similar to Peer’s, with dramatically different results. **Where Peer shared publishing with the songwriters he worked with, Brockman took full publication rights in exchange for a nominal fee given to the artist.** **The tactic ultimately failed**, as those he took advantage of eventually stopped writing for him. He therefore will be most remembered for his early associations with John Carson, and his involvement in Andrew Jenkins’ writing of “The Death of Floyd Collins,” which became one of Vernon Dalhart’s early hits. [[1]](#footnote-1)

**John Carson,** born in **1868** on a Fannin County, Georgia Blue Ridge Mountain farm and, at the **age of ten, began to play his grandfather's instrument – a Stradivarius copy dated 1714**, reputedly brought to the north Georgia hills from Ireland in 1780. Carson fiddled during his years as a young **race horse jockey** and competed at the annual Atlanta Interstate Fiddlers' Conventions**. In Atlanta, he was able to scrap out a living with his bow between intermittent jobs as a textile hand and building trades painter**. He fiddled constantly at political rallies, on trolley cars and at street corners presenting topical ballads to casual audiences, at the many Civic Auditorium fiddlers' conventions, and, finally, on the then-infant radio.

In **1911**, Carson's family moved to [**Cabbagetown, Georgia**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabbagetown,_Atlanta), and he and his children began working for the **Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill**. Three years later, in **1914, the workers of the cotton mill** [**went on strike**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1914%E2%80%931915_Fulton_Bag_and_Cotton_Mills_strike) **for their right to form a** [**union**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_union)**, and Carson had nothing else to do but to perform for a living in the streets of North Atlanta**.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiddlin%27_John_Carson#cite_note-w65-4)

On **March 16, 1922**, the Atlanta Journal had established **WSB** with a 100-watt transmitter as the first commercial broadcasting unit in the South, and on June 13 it increased its power to 500 watts. Three months later, on **September 9**, Fiddlin' John Carson made his radio debut as part of a novelty program.

**On June 19, 1923, Carson recorded "The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane/The Old Hen Cackled and the Rooster's Going to Crow."** When **Peer expressed misgivings at the initial session in the improvised studio,** [**Brockman offered to buy 500**](https://web.archive.org/web/20060518024616/http:/www.lib.unc.edu/mss/sfc1/hillbilly/MP3s/Brockman04.mp3) **"right now" – in reality, as soon as they could be pressed in New York. Peer acceded and issued the item as an uncatalogued special without a label number for local Atlanta consumption. Brockman sold all 500 copies on one day from the stage at a Fiddlers‘ Convention on July 31, 1923.**

Okeh, which had previously coined the terms "**hillbilly music**" to describe Appalachian and Southern fiddle-based and religious music and "**race recording**" to describe the music of African American recording artists, **began using "old-time music" as a term to describe the music made by artists of Carson's style**. The term, thus, originated as a euphemism, but proved a suitable replacement for other terms that were considered disparaging by many inhabitants of these regions. It remains the term preferred by performers and listeners of the music.

Peer immediately invited Carson to New York, where he recorded **“You Will Never Miss Your Mother Until She is Gone“ and “Old Joe Clark.“** **Both sold over one million copies.** **He said, “I’ll have to quit making moonshine and start making records.“**

Carson ceased recording temporarily in 1931 but resumed in 1934, now for the Victor label. **He recorded almost 150 songs in his career.**

**Eck Robertson**

**Alexander Campbell "Eck" Robertson** (1887 – 1975) was an American [fiddle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiddle) player, mostly known for commercially recording the first [country music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_music) songs in 1922 with Henry Gilliland (1845 - 1924).

Robertson was born in Arkansas and grew up on a farm in the [Texas panhandle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texas_panhandle). **His father, grandfather and uncles were fiddlers who competed in local contests**. His father, a veteran of the Civil War, was also a farmer, and later quit fiddling to become a preacher. **At the age of five, Robertson began learning to play the fiddle**, and **later learned banjo and guitar**. In **1904, at the age of 16**, he **decided to become a professional musician and left home to travel with a** [**medicine show**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine_show) **through** [**Indian Territory**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Territory). In **1906, he married and settled in** [**Vernon, Texas**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vernon,_Texas), and became a **piano tuner for the Total Line Music Company**.

Robertson and his wife Nettie performed at silent movie theaters and fiddling contests through the region. As the son of a [Confederate veteran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederate_States_Army), Robertson was able to attend the annual Old Confederate Soldiers' Reunions across the South, and became a regular performer at these events. At the reunion of 1922, he met **74-year-old fiddler Henry C. Gilliland** (1845–1924), and the two began performing together. In 1863 Gilliland had joined the Confederate army, enlisting in Company H, Second Texas Cavalry. While in the military, he made many lifelong friends and learned to play his brother's fiddle. After the reunion **in June 1922, Gilliland and Robertson traveled to New York City, auditioned for and received a recording contract with the** [**Victor Talking Machine Company**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Talking_Machine_Company). On Friday, June 30, 1922, Robertson and Gilliland recorded four fiddle duets for Victor. These probably represent **the first commercial recordings of country music performers**. Two of them, "**[Arkansaw Traveler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Arkansas_Traveler_(song)" \o "The Arkansas Traveler (song))**" and "[**Turkey in the Straw**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey_in_the_Straw)", were released on Victor. Two others, "Forked Deer" and "Apple Blossom", were never issued. At the company's request, Robertson returned the next day, **July 1, without Gilliland and recorded six additional sides. Four of them - "Sallie Gooden**", "Ragtime Annie", "Sally Johnson/Billy in the Low Ground" and "Done Gone" - were released on Victor over the next two years. The other two, "General Logan Reel/Dominion Hornpipe" and "Brilliancy and Cheatum", remain unissued. Robertson's rendition of "Sallie Gooden" is now a classic since he played the traditional fiddle tune followed by 12 variations.

**Robertson's first record, with his solo "Sallie Gooden" on one side and duet "Arkansaw Traveler" on the other**, was **released on September 1, 1922**, but was not widely circulated until the spring of 1923. Sales figures are not known, but Victor did not promote the record strongly. His next two records were released in 1923 and 1924, but only after the summer of 1923, when [Fiddlin' John Carson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiddlin%27_John_Carson)'s recordings on [Okeh Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okeh_Records) kicked off a boom in old-time country music record sales. In 1925, Victor started using a new electrical recording process, but Robertson's 1922 acoustically made recordings continued to be made available for several years, being listed in “The Catalog of Victor Records 1930”.

The week of September 20, 1940, Robertson recorded 100 fiddle tunes at Jack Sellers Studios in Dallas, Texas. Unfortunately, there is no song listing from these sessions, and none of the tunes have ever surfaced.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eck_Robertson#cite_note-wolfe-2)

Robertson continued to perform extensively at dances, theaters, fiddlers' conventions and on radio.

Robertson died in 1975. His tombstone is engraved "World's Champion Fiddler."

**"Aunt" Samantha Bumgarner** (October 31, 1878 - December 24, 1960) was born southeast of Asheville. Father, Hal Biddix, a well-known fiddler, who forbit her to play the fiddle – the devil’s box. Her father made her a gourd banjo. By 15, she could play the banjo quite well and her father bought her a banjo. She began playing in public. She is said to have won over 100 fiddle and banjo contests.

In 1902, she married Carse Bumgarner, who bought her her first fiddle.

In April 1924, she and guitarist Eva Davis went to New York to record for Columbia Records. (Fist Jubilee Singers). In August 1924, Columbia released “Black-Eyed Susie“ and “Wild Bill Jones.“ The first old-time female recording artist and the first recording of banjo.

From 1928 to 1959, she played Bascom Lamar Lunford’s Mountain Dance and Folk Festival.

In 1935, at age 16, Pete Seeger heard Bumgarner at the Asheville festival.

On June 8, 1939, played at the White House for President Roosevelt and the King of England.

([Marian Anderson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marian_Anderson), [Kate Smith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kate_Smith), singing classical and light popular music; the [Coon Creek Girls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coon_Creek_Girls); [Josh White](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josh_White); the [Golden Gate Quartet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Gate_Quartet); Sam Queen and the Soco Gap Square Dance Team, who demonstrated clog dancing; and [Alan Lomax](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Lomax), singing cowboy songs.)

1950’s article in **Life**. Recorded LP Banjo Songs of the Southern Mountains and for a label in Liverpool, England.

**Grayson and Whitter**

G.B. Grayson and Henry Whitter sang together for only three years during the late '20s and early '30s, but they had a tremendous effect on country music; even contemporary performers continue to cover their songs, which include "Handsome Molly" (recorded by Bob Dylan and Mick Jagger), "Cluck Old Hen," "Tom Dooley," "Rose Conley," and "Lee Highway Blues (Going Down the Lee Highway)."

Fiddler/singer **Grayson** was born in **Ashe Country, North Country**. As a young man, he **made his living as a minstrel**, traveling through mountain towns playing at fairs and dances. He eventually settled near the Tennessee-Virginia border, where he **played with such noted musicians as Clarence “Tom” Ashley and Doc Walsh**. An excellent fiddler, Grayson was also an exceptional singer, and after teaming up with Whitter, he frequently sang lead vocals on their recordings.

Guitarist/singer Henry Whitter was born in Fries, Virginia; while not an exceptional musician or singer, he was devoted to promoting old-time music and was able to arrange many recording sessions. **Whitter and Grayson met at a Fiddlers' convention in Mountain City, Tennessee in 1927.** They teamed up, and by autumn of that year, Whitter had gotten them two record deals. They recorded eight songs for the Gennett label and six for Victor, among them the classic "Handsome Molly," which sold over 50,000 copies. In total, **the two recorded 40 songs in three years**. Grayson was killed in an auto accident in August, 1930 while hitchhiking; Whitter was devastated, but continued performing and occasionally recording until his 1941 death from diabetes.

**Ernest Stoneman**

**Believing he could outdo fellow Virginian Henry Whitter, Ernest “Pop” Stoneman went north to New York City in 1924 to record “The Ship That Never Returned/The Titanic” for OKeh**. Accompanying himself on autoharp and harmonica (although he was also known as a guitar and fiddle player), **Stoneman proved his point**. His musical fortunes would run high through the 1920s. At the **Bristol, Tennessee sessions of April 1927**, **Stoneman cut more masters than the Carter Family or Jimmie Rodgers**, whose fame would soon outstrip his own. With the **Depression** came hard times, as record sales dropped across the board, and Stoneman moved his growing family to Washington, D.C. He odd-jobbed as a **carpenter and eventually found work in a munitions plant**, his family enduring great poverty. By the late 1940s he began performing again, this time with his family, and **in the 1950s and 60s, the Stonemans became a popular country group**, releasing many records and hosting their own television show, and continuing the tradition started by “Pop,” who died in 1968.

Most old-time musicians were white rural, agrarian Southerners. By European art music standards, their singing was unschooled. There were, however, black old-time musicians, who were an essential element of the music.

**The Carter Family**

**Lesley "Esley" Riddle** (June 13, 1905 – July 13, 1979) was an [African American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Americans) musician whose **influence on the** [**Carter Family**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carter_Family) **helped to shape** [**country music**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_music).

Riddle was born in [Burnsville, North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burnsville,_North_Carolina), United States, he grew up near [Kingsport, Tennessee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingsport,_Tennessee), where A.P. Carter met him.

While working as a young man at a cement plant, in August 1927, he tripped on an [auger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Screw_conveyor). The resulting injury entailed the amputation of his right leg at the knee. While he recovered, he took up the guitar, developing an innovative picking and slide technique. Soon, he was collaborating with other musicians from [Sullivan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sullivan_County,_Tennessee) and [Scott](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott_County,_Virginia) counties, including Steve Tarter, Harry Gay, [Brownie McGhee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brownie_McGhee) and John Henry Lyons.

**In December 1928, Riddle met** [**A.P. Carter**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A.P._Carter), who founded the Carter Family country band. The Carter Family had become known for their recordings at the Bristol Sessions in August 1927. Riddle began to divide his time between Kingsport and the Carter home in [Maces Spring, Virginia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maces_Spring,_Virginia). Riddle and Carter embarked on song-collecting trips around the region: Riddle would act as a "**human tape recorder**," memorizing the melody while Carter gathered lyrics.

The Carter Family went on to record a number of songs that Riddle either composed or transmitted, including

"Cannonball Blues,"

"Hello Stranger,"

"I Know What It Means To Be Lonesome,"

"Let the Church Roll On,"

"Bear Creek Blues,"

"March Winds Goin' Blow My Blues Away" and

"Lonesome For You."

Riddle's guitar technique made an impression on [Maybelle Carter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maybelle_Carter), and she incorporated elements of it into her style.

In 1937, Riddle got married and in 1942, moved to [Rochester, New York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochester,_New_York). Soon he retired from music, and in 1945, he sold his guitar, remaining obscure for the next twenty years.

**Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers**

**Gid Tanner** (June 6, 1885 – May 13, 1960)

Tanner was born in Georgia. He made a living as a **chicken farmer for most of his life**. He **learned to play the** [**fiddle**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical_styles_(violin)#Fiddle) **at the age of 14** and quickly established a reputation as **one of the finest musicians in Georgia**. Early on, he participated in several **fiddle conventions together with his rival** [**Fiddlin' John Carson**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiddlin%27_John_Carson); what one of them did not win, the other would. Tanner reportedly had **a repertoire of more than 2000 songs**.

**Tanner and Puckett traveled to** [**New York City**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City) **in March 1924 to make the first of a series of duet recordings for** [**Columbia Records**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbia_Records)**, as Columbia's first recorded southern rural artist.** In **1926, the Skillet Lickers were formed around Tanner as a studio band.** The first recording made with the Skillet Lickers was "[**Hand Me Down My Walking Cane**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hand_Me_Down_My_Walking_Cane)**," recorded in** [**Atlanta**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlanta) **on April 17, 1926**, when the [country music scene in Atlanta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_music_in_Atlanta) rivaled Nashville's.

The first Skillet Lickers line-up was Gid Tanner, **Riley Puckett**, [**Clayton McMichen**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clayton_McMichen) and Fate Norris. **Between 1926 and 1931 they recorded 88 sides for Columbia**, with 82 of them commercially issued. Their best-selling single was "Down Yonder", a hillbilly [breakdown](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breakdown_(music)), in 1934 on [RCA Victor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RCA_Victor). They disbanded in 1931, but reformed for occasional recordings after a couple of years with a changing line-up. "Back Up and Push" was another well-known recording..

**Individual members**

[**Clayton McMichen**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clayton_McMichen)(1900–1970) was the lead fiddler. At the age of 11 he learned to play the fiddle from his uncle and father. Two years later, in 1913, his family moved to [Atlanta, Georgia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlanta,_Georgia) where Mac made his living as **an automobile mechanic**. **In 1918 he formed a band called "The Hometown Boys"**. The Hometown Boys made their first **radio debut on September 18, 1922**. In 1931, he performed with the "Georgia Wildcats" on their first recording session for [Columbia Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbia_Records). He was **National Fiddling Champion from 1934 to 1949**. Mac made his last recordings in 1945, although he continued to perform until 1955 when he retired. His most notable composition was "Peach Pickin' Time in Georgia", later recorded by [Jimmie Rodgers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmie_Rodgers_(country_singer)) in 1932. **By the time the folk revival was under way in the late 1950s, his irritation with being asked to play old-fashioned material was unconcealed. At the** [**Newport Festival**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newport_Folk_Festival) **he spoke out on stage of his disdain for the Skillet Lickers**.

[**Riley Puckett**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riley_Puckett) (May 7, 1894 - July 13, 1946) recorded solo for [Victor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RCA_Victor) and [Decca](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decca_Records) in the 1930s and early 1940s. He also belonged to a trio called Bert Layne and his Mountaineers. After 1931 the group occasionally consisted of Riley Puckett on guitar, Gordon Tanner on fiddle, Edward "Ted" Hawkins on mandolin and record producer [Dan Hornsby](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Hornsby) on vocals. There are recordings by a group called the Arthur Tanner and the Cornshuckers, which may have contained [Gid Tanner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gid_Tanner).

**The virtuosity of Puckett tended to pull in a different direction from that of Mac.** The band recorded in two long recording sessions per year, from 1926 to 1931. Few members of the group were full-time professional musicians. [Clayton McMichen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clayton_McMichen) was an auto mechanic. McMichen was a welder. **Tanner was a chicken farmer**. [**Riley Puckett**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riley_Puckett) **toured as a musician with his own tent show. His technical virtuosity marks him out as one of the best guitarists of the 1920s and early 1930s.**

Riley Puckett's influence on the development of country music cannot be underestimated. A blind guitar player known for his wide knowledge and repertoire of songs, including British ballads and contemporary numbers, Puckett's guitar technique **was emulated by many of the musicians of the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s**, while his haunting **yodel** on "Rock All Our Babies to Sleep" is believed to be the first of its kind and may have had a tremendous influence on Jimmie Rodgers, the "Blue Yodeler" considered country music's first true star. **While he's often associated with the Skillet Lickers, a group he founded with Gid Tanner and with which he performed until 1931, Puckett made over 200 recordings of his own and with other groups until his death in 1946.**

**Skillet Lickers Legacy**

While many bands are celebrated for their innovations, the Skillet Lickers are celebrated for embracing and **popularizing a style of American music rarely heard outside of private performances or get togethers like picnics or in places outside of the South.** They were a wellspring of such music and greatly aided in popularizing this type of fiddle driven, rural based music. They played many instrumentals, ballads, pop songs and comedy sketches, such as "A Corn Licker Still in Georgia".

**Dock Boggs**

**Moran Lee "Dock" Boggs** (February 7, 1898 – February 7, 1971)

was born in [West Norton, Virginia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norton,_Virginia), in 1898, the youngest of ten children. In the late 1890s, the arrival of railroads in central Appalachia brought large-scale coal mining to the region, and by the time Dock was born, the Boggs family had made the transition from [subsistence farming](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subsistence_farming) to working for wages and living in mining towns. Dock's father, who worked as a carpenter and blacksmith, loved singing and could read sheet music. He taught his children to sing, and several of Dock's siblings learned to play the banjo.

As a young child, he would follow an African-American guitarist named "Go Lightning" up and down the railroad tracks between Norton and [Dorchester](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorchester,_Wise_County,_Virginia). Boggs's version of the ballad "[John Henry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Henry_(folklore))" was based in part on the version he learned from Go Lightning. He also recalled sneaking over to the African-American camps in Dorchester at night, where he first observed [string bands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/String_band) playing at dances and parties. He was enamoured of the bands' banjo players' preference for picking, having previously been exposed only to the "[frailing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clawhammer" \o "Clawhammer)" style of his siblings.

Around the time he began working in coal mines, Boggs began playing music more often and more seriously. He learned much of his technique during this period from his brother Roscoe and an itinerant musician named Homer Crawford, both of whom shared Dock's preference for picking. Crawford taught him "Hustlin' Gambler," which was the basis for Boggs's "Country Blues." He also picked up several songs (such as "[Turkey in the Straw](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey_in_the_Straw)") from a local African-American musician named Jim White. Boggs probably began playing at parties around 1918.

Around late 1926 or early 1927, Boggs tried out at one such audition, held by [Brunswick Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brunswick_Records) at the Norton Hotel. Although he played on a banjo borrowed from a local music store and needed whiskey to calm his nerves, he played well enough to gain a contract. He recorded 8 side for Brunswick in New York later that year. He deemed their payment sufficient for only that number.

Boggs played in a style known as up-picking, which involves picking upwards on the first two strings and playing one of the other three strings with the thumb. He played several songs in a lower D-modal tuning. His technique, which Seeger considered "a style possessed by no other recorded player," was adapted to fit previously unaccompanied mountain ballads.

Boggs's records sold moderately well, and he returned to the mining areas of southwestern Virginia and eastern Kentucky, where he began to play at parties, gatherings, and mining camps. Around this time, his brother-in-law Lee Hansucker, who was a [Holiness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holiness_movement) preacher and singer, began teaching him religious songs from the Holiness and Baptist traditions. Boggs also learned a large number of songs from listening to Hansucker's vast record collection.

By 1928, he was making enough money to quit working in coal mines and focus exclusively on music. He bought a new banjo and formed a band known as "Dock Boggs and His Cumberland Mountain Entertainers". At one point, he was earning three to four hundred dollars a week.

While Dock was experiencing a moderate amount of success, the life of a travelling musician often left him at odds with his religious neighbors, who considered such a life sinful. His wife, Sarah, whom he had married in 1918, despised secular music and was opposed to his earning a living by playing music. The constantly moving mining camps were fraught with excess and violence, and Boggs was consistently engaging in drunken brawls that often left him or an opponent badly injured. The song "Wise County Jail", written by Boggs in 1928, was inspired by an incident in which he had to flee to Kentucky, after attacking a lawman who tried to break up a party at which he was playing.

The stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent [Great Depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression) hit southern Appalachia particularly hard, and few people had the means to pay musicians to play at gatherings or buy records.

In **1929**, Boggs travelled to [**Chicago**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago,_Illinois) to record **four sides for Lonesome Ace Records**. However, with the onset of the Great Depression, he was unable to profit from these recordings. In 1930, he travelled to [Atlanta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlanta,_Georgia), where [OKeh Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OKeh_Records) had set up a live audition on radio station WSB. Because of stage fright, however, he performed poorly. He was offered several other recording auditions over the next three years, but he could not raise enough money to cover his travel expenses. He eventually pawned his banjo and gave up hopes of making a living playing music.

**Charles Cleveland Poole** (March 22, 1892 – May 21, 1931) was born in North Carolina. As a child, he learned to play the [banjo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjo). He played [baseball](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baseball), and his three-fingered technique was the result of an accident. Whilst betting that he could catch a baseball without a glove, the ball broke his thumb as he closed his hand too soon, resulting in a permanent arch in his right hand.

Poole bought his first banjo, an **Orpheum No. 3 Special**, with profits from making [moonshine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moonshine). He later appeared in the 1929 [Gibson Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gibson_Guitar_Corporation) catalog to promote their banjo.

He spent much of his adult life working in [textile mills](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textile_mills).

**The North Carolina Ramblers**

Poole and **fiddle player** [**Posey Rorer**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posey_Rorer), whose sister he married, formed a trio with **guitarist Norman Woodlief** called the **North Carolina Ramblers**. They auditioned in [New York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_(state)) for [**Columbia Records**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbia_Records). After signing a contract, they recorded **"Don't Let Your Deal Go Down Blues" on July 27 1925. This song was successful, selling over 106,000 copies** at a time when there were estimated to be only 6,000 [phonographs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonograph) in the southern [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States). The band was paid $75 for the session.

For the next five years, Poole and the Ramblers were a popular band. The band's sound remained consistent, although several members came and left (including Posey Rorer and Norm Woodlief). The band recorded **over 60 songs for Columbia Records** during the 1920s, including **"Sweet Sunny South", "White House Blues", "He Rambled", and "Take a Drink on Me"**.

[Bill C. Malone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_C._Malone), in his history of country music, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, says, "The Rambler sound was predictable: a bluesy fiddle lead, backed up by long, flowing, melodic guitar runs and the finger-style banjo picking of Poole. Predictable as it may be, it was nonetheless outstanding. No string band in early country music equaled the Ramblers' controlled, clean, well-patterned sound."

Poole composed few of his recordings, mostly covering old folk songs. Nevertheless, his dynamic renditions were popular with a broad audience in the Southeast United States. He is considered a primary source for [old-time music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old-time_music) revivalists and aficionados.

Poole developed a unique fingerpicking style, a blend of melody, arpeggio, and rhythm (distinct from [clawhammer/ frailing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clawhammer) and [Scruggs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_Scruggs)' variations).

Poole had been invited to [Hollywood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hollywood,_Los_Angeles) to play background music for a film, but died before this could happen in May 1931. His cause of death was a heart attack due to alcohol poisoning. According to some reports, he had been disheartened by the slump in record sales due to the [Depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression).

**Clarence "Tom" Ashley** (born **Clarence Earl McCurry**; September 29, 1895 – June 2, 1967) was born **Clarence Earl McCurry** in [Bristol, Tennessee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol,_Tennessee) in 1895, the only child of George McCurry and Rose-Belle Ashley. Those who knew George McCurry described him variously as a "one-eyed fiddler, hell-raiser, and big talker." Shortly before Clarence was born, Rose-Belle's father, Enoch Ashley, discovered that his son-in-law George was an adulterer. George was forced to leave town. Rose-Belle moved back in with her father, and around 1900, the family relocated to Shouns, Tennessee, a crossroads just south of [Mountain City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mountain_City,_Tennessee), where Enoch ran a boarding house. When Clarence was very young, he was [nicknamed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nickname) "Tommy Tiddy Waddy" (after a nursery rhyme) by his grandfather Enoch, and thus became known to friends and acquaintances as 'Tom'. As he was raised by the parents of his mother, the name "McCurry" was dropped in favor of "Ashley". From infancy, Tom was acquainted with musicians. **His grandfather bought him a banjo when he was eight years old, and his mother and aunts taught him to play** [**traditional Appalachian folk songs and ballads**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachian_music). He learned a number of songs and techniques from itinerant lumberjacks and railroad workers lodging at his grandfather's boarding house. **In 1911, Tom joined a medicine show** that happened to be passing through Mountain City. He **played banjo and guitar, and performed** [**blackface comedy**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackface). Tom would play with **medicine shows every summer until the early 1940s**. During **winters, he organized local concerts at rural schools**. He would also **play for money at coal camps and rayon mills**, often accompanied by influential [Johnson County](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johnson_County,_Tennessee) fiddler [G. B. Grayson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G._B._Grayson).

**Recording career and the Great Depression**

**Repertoire and influence**

Ashley learned much of **his repertoire from his grandfather and aunts and itinerant musicians lodging at his grandfather's boarding house in the early 1900s**. His unusual G-modal banjo tuning style, which he called "sawmill" (gDGCD from fifth string to the first), was likely taught to him by family members. He recorded several songs derived from **English or Irish ballads** that were passed down through generations in Appalachia, the best-known of which included **"**[**Coo Coo Bird**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cuckoo_(song))**"** (which he learned from his mother), **"**[**House Carpenter**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_Carpenter)**"**, and "[Rude and Rambling Man](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Newry_Highwayman)". Other recordings included the murder ballads **"**[**Naomi Wise**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omie_Wise)**", "**[**Little Sadie**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Sadie)**", and "**[**John Hardy**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hardy_(song))**",** and the folk songs "Frankie Silvers" and **"Greenback Dollar"**. An [African-American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American) influence can be heard on Ashley's renderings of "Dark Holler", "Haunted Road Blues", and **"**[**Corrina, Corrina**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrina,_Corrina_(song))**".**

**The oldest known recording of the song, "**[**House of the Rising Sun**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_the_Rising_Sun)**",** **under the title** "Rising Sun Blues", is by [Appalachian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachian_music) artists Ashley and [Foster](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gwin_Foster), who recorded it on September 6, 1933, on the [Vocalion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vocalion_Records) label (02576), which he claimed **he learned from his maternal grandfather**.

Tom made his **first recordings for** [**Gennett Records**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gennett_Records) **during February 1928 with the Blue Ridge Mountain Entertainers**, which then consisted of Ashley on banjo or guitar, Garley Foster on harmonica, and [Clarence Horton Greene](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarence_Horton_Greene) on fiddle. Later that year, with the help of Victor producer [Ralph Peer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Peer), Ashley made several recordings with [**The Carolina Tar Heels**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Carolina_Tar_Heels)**, which consisted of Tom on guitar and vocals, his friend Dock Walsh on banjo, and Gwen or Garley Foster on harmonica.** In 1929 Ashley made his first solo recordings. During the early 1930s, Ashley again recorded with the Blue Ridge Entertainers, this time for the [American Record Corporation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Record_Corporation). The final recordings from his early era were a series of duets with harmonica player Gwen Foster in 1931.

The effects of the [Great Depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression) made money scarce throughout the early 1930s. Not only was Ashley no longer recruited to make records, it was virtually impossible to earn money playing at coal camps or on street corners. The Depression (along with government regulations) also greatly reduced the crowds that attended medicine shows. **Ashley worked briefly as a coal miner in** [**West Virginia**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Virginia)**, and did odd jobs back in Shouns to support his wife, Hettie, and their two children. In 1937, he established a trucking business in Mountain City that hauled furniture and crops to various cities around the region.** Throughout the following decade, Ashley **performed as a comedian with the Stanley Brothers. He formed a local string band, the** [**Tennessee Merrymakers**](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tennessee_Merrymakers&action=edit&redlink=1).

The technology which enables us to hear Fiddlin‘ John Carson a century later also heralded the demise of the oral tradition and the relative isolation which had nurtured old-time music since the coming of the South’s first Anglo-Celtic settlers.

**Influence**

Old time music was a major influence on styles like [**country music**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_music) and [**bluegrass**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluegrass_music).

It is one of the few regional styles of old-time music that, since World War II, has been learned and widely practiced in all areas of the United States and Canada (as well as in Europe, Australia, and elsewhere). **In some cases (as in the Midwest and Northeast), its popularity has eclipsed the indigenous old-time traditions of these regions**. There is a particularly high concentration of performers playing Appalachian folk music on the East and West Coasts (especially in New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and the Pacific Northwest). A number of American classical composers, in particular [Henry Cowell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Cowell) and [Aaron Copland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron_Copland), have composed works that merge the idioms of Appalachian folk music with the Old World–based classical tradition.

Though they share similar instrumentation and even some repertoire, **bluegrass** is not considered old-time music. Old-time music laid the foundation for bluegrass. Early bluegrass musicians like **Bill Monroe**, **Earl Scruggs**, and the **Stanley Brothers** played and listened to old-time music before bluegrass emerged in the 1940s. Bluegrass is a more modern form of Appalachian music that incorporates improvised solos, which are generally not part of old-time music traditions. Bluegrass also tends to be music for performance, whereas old-time music is connected to social events like dancing.

**The continuing tradition**

**Uncle Dave Macon**

**David Harrison Macon** (October 7, 1870 – March 22, 1952), known professionally as **Uncle Dave Macon**, "The Dixie Dewdrop", gained regional fame as a [vaudeville](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaudeville) performer in the early 1920s before becoming the first star of the [Grand Ole Opry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Ole_Opry) in the latter half of the decade.

Macon's music is considered the **ultimate bridge between 19th-century American folk and vaudeville music and the phonograph and radio-based music of the early 20th-century.** Music historian Charles Wolfe wrote, "If [Jimmie Rodgers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmie_Rodgers_(country_singer)) was 'the father of country music,' then Uncle Dave was **'the grandfather of country music'**." Macon's polished stage presence and lively personality have made him one of the most enduring figures of early [country music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_music).

Macon was the son of [Confederate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederate_States_of_America) [Captain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_captain) John Macon. In 1884, when David Macon was 13 years old, his family moved to [Nashville, Tennessee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nashville,_Tennessee), to run the Old Broadway Hotel, which they had purchased. The hotel became a center for Macon and his growing musical interests, and was frequented by artists and troupers traveling along vaudeville circuit and circus acts. **In 1885, he learned to play the banjo from a circus comedian called Joel Davidson.** Mason’s father was murdered outside the hotel in 1886 and and the family moved to [Readyville, Tennessee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Readyville,_Tennessee), where his mother ran a stagecoach inn. Macon began entertaining passengers at the rest stop, playing a banjo on a homemade stage.

Around **1900**, Macon **opened a freight line** between [Murfreesboro](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murfreesboro,_Tennessee) and [Woodbury, Tennessee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woodbury,_Tennessee). It was called The **Macon Midway Mule and Mitchell Wagon Transportation Company**. Often, when Macon was driving along with his mules, hauling freight and produce, he would entertain people by singing and playing the banjo at various stops along the way. But the arrival of an automobile-based competitor threatened his mule company, and he was forced to close down in 1920.

**Professional career**

Although Macon had long performed as an amateur and was well known for his showmanship, his **first professional performance was in 1921** at a school in [Morrison, Tennessee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morrison,_Tennessee), during a Methodist church benefit. **In 1923, during a performance for the** [**Shriners**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shriners) **in** [**Nashville**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nashville,_Tennessee)**, Macon was seen by** [**Marcus Loew**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcus_Loew) **of** [**Loews Theatres**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loews_Theatres)**, who offered him fifteen dollars if he would perform at a theater in** [**Alabama**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alabama). Macon accepted and went to Alabama. After the show he was approached by the manager of Loews Theatres in [Birmingham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham,_Alabama), who wanted to hire him to perform there. Macon's salary was several hundred dollars a week. This led to offers from other theaters in the Loew's Vaudeville circuit. **At age fifty, Macon found himself a successful entertainer**.

In 1923 Macon began a tour of the south-eastern [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States), joined by **fiddler** [**Sid Harkreader**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sid_Harkreader) and five other acts. By now, the [**Sterchi Brothers Furniture Compan**y](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_G._Sterchi#Sterchi_Brothers), distributors of [Vocalion Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vocalion_Records), had noticed Macon and realised his potential as a recording artist. **On July 8, 1924, Macon and Harkreader made their first recordings for Vocalion in** [**New York City**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City). The session extended over several days and **eighteen songs were recorded**. Their tours on the Loew's circuit now included comedy, buck-dancing and old time music. **In late 1925, Macon met guitarist** [**Sam McGee**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McGee_Brothers)**, who was to become Macon's regular recording and performance partner**. On **November 6, 1925**, Macon and Harkreader **performed at the** [**Ryman Auditorium**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ryman_Auditorium)—the future home of the [Grand Ole Opry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Ole_Opry)— in a benefit for the Nashville police force. **The show was just three weeks before the Opry started as the *WSM Barn Dance*.**

Macon was one of the first performers at the new [WSM](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WSM_(AM)) radio station. **On December 26, 1925, Macon and fiddler** [**Uncle Jimmy Thompson**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Jimmy_Thompson) **appeared together on the WSM Saturday night program**. Macon's career with WSM lasted twenty-six years, but as he continued touring, he wasn't a regular performer in the years of the Grand Ole Opry. In early **1927, Macon formed the Fruit Jar Drinkers**, composed of Macon, Sam McGee, [Kirk McGee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McGee_Brothers) and Mazy Todd. **The Fruit Jar Drinkers recorded for the first time on May 7, 1927**. Although the group's repertoire was mainly traditional songs and fiddle numbers, they occasionally **recorded religious songs**, for which Macon would alter the group's name to **the Dixie Sacred Singers**.

Macon recorded for [Okeh Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Okeh_Records), for [Gennett Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gennett_Records) and on January 22, 1935, he began recording for [Bluebird Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluebird_Records) with the [Delmore Brothers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delmore_Brothers) and a few years later in 1938 he recorded with Glenn "Smoky Mountain" Stagner. Between 1930 and 1952, Macon was often accompanied by **his son Dorris** who played the guitar. **In 1940 Macon— together with Opry founder** [**George D. Hay**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_D._Hay)**, rising Opry star** [**Roy Acuff**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy_Acuff)**, and Dorris Macon— received an invitation from** [**Hollywood**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_of_the_United_States) **to take part in the** [**Republic Pictures**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_Pictures) **movie** [***Grand Ole Opry***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Ole_Opry_(film)). The film contains rare footage of Macon performing, including a memorable duet of "Take Me Back to My Carolina Home" with Dorris in which the 69-year-old Macon jumps out of his seat and dances throughout the second half of the song. Although Macon **toured with** [**Bill Monroe**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Monroe) **in the late 1940s**, he was neither impressed by the new [bluegrass](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluegrass_music) style nor by the banjo picking of Monroe's bandmate [Earl Scruggs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_Scruggs). Macon also toured throughout the South with such Opry headliners as [DeFord Bailey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DeFord_Bailey) and Roy Acuff.

While Uncle Dave Macon recorded over 170 songs between 1924 and 1938.

Macon played an open-backed Gibson banjo on most of his recordings, and while contemporary musicians didn't consider him a particularly skillful banjo player, modern musicologists have identified no less than 19 picking styles on Macon's recordings.

**Death and legacy**

Macon continued to perform until shortly before his death on March 22, 1952

During the second full weekend in July the city of Murfreesboro celebrates "Uncle Dave Macon Days."

**Roy Acuff**

**Fater was a fiddler and played piano; Acuff played baseball (sunstroke); learned to fiddle from Gid Tanner records; Medicine Show**

**Wabash Cannonball  
Great Speckled Bird**

**1938 – Grand Ole Oprey: Crazy Tennesseans > Smoky Mountain Boys; 1942: Rose-Acuff Publishing.**

**Grandpa Jones**

**Louis Marshall Jones** (October 20, 1913 – February 19, 1998), known professionally as **Grandpa Jones**, was born in the small farming community of [Niagara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niagara,_Kentucky) in [Henderson County, Kentucky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henderson_County,_Kentucky), the youngest of 10 children in a sharecropper's family. His father was an [old-time fiddle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_time_fiddle) player, and his mother was a ballad singer and herself adept on the [concertina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concertina). His first instrument was guitar.

Jones spent his teenage years in [**Akron, Ohio**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akron,_Ohio), where he began singing country music tunes on a radio show on **WJW**. In 1931, Jones joined the Pine Ridge String Band, which provided the musical accompaniment for the [*Lum and Abner*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lum_and_Abner) show. By 1935 his pursuit of a musical career took him to [**WBZ**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WBZ_(AM)) **radio in** [**Boston, Massachusetts**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boston,_Massachusetts), where he met musician/songwriter [**Bradley Kincaid**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bradley_Kincaid), who gave him the **nickname "Grandpa Jones"** when he was 22 years old, **because of his off-stage grumpiness at early-morning radio shows**.

Jones liked the name and decided to create a stage persona based around it. Later in life, he lived in [Mountain View, Arkansas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mountain_View,_Arkansas). In the 1940s he met rising country radio star.

Performing as Grandpa Jones, he played the guitar or [banjo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjo), [yodeled](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yodeling), and sang mostly old-time [ballads](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballad). **By 1937, Jones had made his way to West Virginia, where** [**Cousin Emmy**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cousin_Emmy) **taught Jones the art of the** [**clawhammer**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clawhammer) **style of** [**banjo**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjo) **playing**, which gave a rough backwoods flavor to his performances.

In 1942, Jones joined [WLW](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WLW) in [Cincinnati, Ohio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cincinnati,_Ohio). It was there that he met fellow Kentuckian [Merle Travis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merle_Travis). In 1943, they made their recording debuts together for [Syd Nathan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syd_Nathan)'s upstart [King Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Records_(United_States)). Jones was making records under his own name for King by 1944 and had his first hit with "It's Raining Here This Morning."

His recording career was put on hold when he **enlisted in the United States Army during** [**World War II**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II)**. Discharged in 1946**, he recorded again for King. Through 1946–1949, when he and several Opry cast members ([Clyde Moody](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clyde_Moody) and [Chubby Wise](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chubby_Wise) among them) were invited to become a part of the burgeoning world of television by Washington D.C. entrepreneur Connie B Gay, he became a cast member at the **Old Dominion Barn** Dance, broadcast over WRVA **in Richmond, Virginia**. **In March 1946, he moved to** [**Nashville, Tennessee**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nashville,_Tennessee)**, and started performing on the** [**Grand Ole Opry**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Ole_Opry)**. He married Ramona Riggins on October 14, 1946.** As an accomplished performer herself, she would take part in his performances. Jones' vaudeville humor was a bridge to television. His more famous songs include "T For Texas," "Are You From Dixie," "Night Train To Memphis," "[Mountain Dew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_Old_Mountain_Dew)," and "Eight More Miles To Louisville."

In the **fall of 1968, Jones became a charter cast member on the long-running television show** [***Hee Haw***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hee_Haw), often responding to the show's skits with his trademark phrase "Outrageous." He also played banjo, by himself or with banjo player [David "Stringbean" Akeman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_%22Stringbean%22_Akeman). A musical segment featured in the early years had Jones and "his lovely wife Ramona" singing while ringing bells held in their hands and strapped to their ankles. A favorite skit had off-camera cast members ask, "Hey Grandpa, what's for supper?" in which he would describe a delicious, country-style meal, often in a rhyming, [talking blues](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talking_blues) style.

**Honors**

1978, Jones was inducted into the **Country Music Hall of Fame**.

His autobiography *Everybody's Grandpa: Fifty Years Behind the Mike* was published in 1984.

In 2023, Jones was inducted into the [**American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Banjo_Museum_Hall_of_Fame_members) in the Historical category.

**Death**

In January 1998, Jones suffered two strokes after his second show performance at the Grand Ole Opry. He died on February 19, 1998, at age 84. Jones's gravestone in Goodlettsville, Tennessee

**Stringbean**

**David Akeman** (June 17, 1915 – November 10, 1973) better known as **Stringbean** (or **String Bean**), was born in [Annville](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annville,_Kentucky), Akeman came from a musical family, including **his father, James Akeman, who played the banjo at local dances**. He got his **first banjo when he was 12 years** **old in exchange for a pair of prize** [**bantam chickens**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bantam_(poultry)). Akeman began playing at local dances and gained a reputation as a musician, but the income was not enough to live on. He joined the **Depression-era** [**Civilian Conservation Corps**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilian_Conservation_Corps)**, building roads and planting trees.**

Eventually, he entered a **talent contest judged by** [**Asa Martin**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asa_Martin). He won and was invited to join Martin's band. During an early appearance, **Martin forgot Akeman's name and introduced him as "String Bean" because of his tall, thin build**. Akeman used the nickname the rest of his career.

Akeman originally was only a musician, but when another performer failed to show up one night, **he was used as a singer and comic**.

**Akeman also played semiprofessional baseball. As a ballplayer, he met** [**bluegrass**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluegrass_music) **pioneer** [**Bill Monroe**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Monroe)**, who fielded with another semipro team**. From **1943 to 1945, Akeman played banjo for Monroe's band, performing on recordings such as "Goodbye Old Pal"**. **When he left Monroe, he was replaced by** [**Earl Scruggs**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_Scruggs)**, a** [**banjoist**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjoist) **with a very different style.**

**In 1945**, Akeman married Estell Stanfill. The same year, he formed a comedy duet with Willie Egbert Westbrook, and they were **invited to perform on the** [**Grand Ole Opry**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Ole_Opry). **The following year, Akeman began working with** [**Grandpa Jones**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grandpa_Jones)**, another old-time banjo player and comedian.** **Jones and Akeman worked together at the Oprey**. They also became neighbors in Goodlettsville, Tennessee. **Akeman became a protégé of** [**Uncle Dave Macon**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Dave_Macon)**, one of the biggest Opry stars. Near the end of his life, Macon gave Akeman one of his prized banjos.**

**Stringbean was one of the Opry's major stars in the 1950s.** He adopted a stage costume that accentuated his height—**a shirt with an exceptionally long waist and tail, tucked into a pair of short blue jeans belted around his knees**.

**Akeman did not record as a solo artist until the early 1960s**, when he was signed by the Starday label. Akeman remained a celebrated performer of the old-fashioned banjo **playing, "**[**clawhammer**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clawhammer)**" or "frailing".** In addition to his skill as a clawhammer player, Akeman **also frequently played two-finger banjo, using thumb and forefinger**.

Akeman kept his audience with his traditional playing and his mixture of comedy and song. He scored **country-chart hits with "Chewing Gum" and "I Wonder Where Wanda Went".** Between 1962 and 1971, he recorded seven albums. The first, *Old Time Pickin' & Grinnin' with Stringbean* (1961), included folk songs (especially humorous animal songs), tall stories, and country jokes.

**In 1969, Akeman and Grandpa Jones became cast members of a new television show entitled *Hee Haw*.** *Hee Haw* continued airing his taped segments following his death and his final episode was season five, episode 26, which aired on March 23, 1974.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_%22Stringbean%22_Akeman#cite_note-8)

On the morning of November 11, **1973**, Grandpa Jones discovered the bodies of Akeman and his wife, Estelle, who had been murdered during the night by robbers. Jones testified at the trial of the killers; his testimony helped to secure a conviction.

**Coon Creek Girls**

The **Coon Creek Girls** were one of the first all-female string bands. The band was created in the mid-1930s by [John Lair](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Lair&action=edit&redlink=1) for his [Renfro Valley Barn Dance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renfro_Valley_Barn_Dance) show.

Lily May was recruited by John Lair after winning a fiddle contest. In October 1937, Mr. Lair met Rosie, Lily May's sister, and he decided to hire her and create an all-female band for the Renfro Valley Barn Dance show. The band originally consisted of sisters [Lily May](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lily_May_Ledford) and Rosie Ledford (from [Powell County, Kentucky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Powell_County,_Kentucky)) along with Esther "Violet" Koehler (from [Indiana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indiana)), Evelyn "Daisy" Lange (from [Ohio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ohio)) and Norma Madge Mullins (from [Renfro Valley, Kentucky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renfro_Valley,_Kentucky)). Esther and Evelyn both took on stage names to match the flower theme names of the Ledford sisters.

The first performance as the “Coon Creek Girls” occurred at [Cincinnati Music Hall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cincinnati_Music_Hall) in Cincinnati Ohio, where the Renfro Valley Barn Dance show was to be broadcast and carried by [WLW-AM](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WLW).

**First recordings**

In March 1938, The Coon Creek Girls and Aunt Idy went to Chicago for a recording session with “**Vocalion Records**.” Mr. Art Datherly produced an album for the Coon Creek Girls. They recorded six songs: "**Little Birdie**," "**Pretty Polly**," "You're a Flower that is Blooming," "Sowing on the mountain," as well as "Lonesome Lulu Lee" and "Keep on Fiddlin' on Uncle Doodie."

**On June 8, 1939, the Coon Creek Girls performed in the** [**East Room**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Room) **of the White House for President** [**Franklin D. Roosevelt**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franklin_D._Roosevelt)**, his wife** [**Eleanor Roosevelt**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleanor_Roosevelt)**, and for the King and Queen of England,** [**King George VI**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_George_VI) **and** [**Queen Elizabeth**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Bowes-Lyon)**.** The Coon Creek Girls were chosen by First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt.

According to the program from the White House, the Coon Creek Girls performed “Cindy”, “The Soldier and the Lady”, "Buffalo Gals", and "How Many Biscuits Can You Eat?". The girls were asked not to wear costumes to the White House, therefore they made their own dresses, matching the color of their dresses with their respective flower names. **While they were rehearsing at the White House, they fiddled with a gentleman who called himself “Cactus Jack,” though it turned out to be Vice President** [**John (Jack) Nance Garner**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Nance_Garner). Both the royal family and the Roosevelts were front row for the performance. All were visibly enjoying the music except the King. Lily May wrote that she, “Caught him patting his foot ever so little, and I knew we had him.” After the show was over, the Coon Creek Girls and the other performers recorded their White House performance in a studio in Washington D.C. The recording was meant to be a memento for the King and Queen of England to take home with them to commemorate their first visit to the White House.

In November 1939, Daisy and Violet left the group. From that point forward, the group consisted of a trio of the Ledford Sisters, Lily May, Rosie, and Susie.

The band disbanded in 1957.

The Coon Creek Girls inspired many women musicians such as Suzanne Edmundson, Carol Elizabeth Jones, and Cathy Fink. Pete Seeger also claimed that his style of banjo playing was influenced by Lily May herself.

**The *New Coon Creek Girls***

In 1979, John Lair reinvented the band using the name the *New Coon Creek Girls*, a combo which remained popular for several decades, despite numerous changes in line-up. Among the former members are Pamela Gadd and Pam Perry, who later became members of the country band [Wild Rose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wild_Rose_(band)).

In 2013, the original touring group of the New Coon Creek Girls from 1985 to 1987 (Vicki Simmons, Pam Perry Combs, Wanda Barnett, and Pam Gadd) made the decision to reunite in order to fund speech therapy music camp for Simmons who underwent surgery for an aneurysm in 2008. As of 2014, Simmons has made an amazing recovery, and the band was still performing various reunion concerts.

**Lily May Ledford** (March 17, 1917 – July 14, 1985)

In the 1960s, musicologist [Ralph Rinzler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Rinzler) rediscovered Ledford, and invited her to play at the [Newport Folk Festival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newport_Folk_Festival) in 1968. Ledford became a regular at folk festivals across the U.S. and Canada, initially with her sisters, and then as a solo artist when her sisters were unable to join her. In 1971, she appeared at the "Man and His World Festival" in [Montreal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montreal,_Canada), and she played at the [Smithsonian Folklife Festival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smithsonian_Folklife_Festival) in [Washington, D.C.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington,_D.C.) the following year. In 1976, Ledford toured the Western U.S. and Canada with [Mike Seeger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Seeger)'s Old-Time Music Festival. In 1979, while on tour with the [Red Clay Ramblers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Clay_Ramblers), Ledford recorded an album, *Banjo Pickin' Girl*, that was released on the Greenhays label in 1983. Around the same period, she appeared at the [Mariposa Folk Festival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mariposa_Folk_Festival) in [Orillia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orillia,_Ontario).

In the early 1980s, author [Loyal Jones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loyal_Jones) interviewed Ledford extensively as part of research conducted with a grant from the [National Endowment for the Arts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Endowment_for_the_Arts), and broadcast the interviews on [National Public Radio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Public_Radio). In 1980, [Berea College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berea_College) published *Coon Creek Girl,* an autobiography Ledford had written in the late 1970s. Ledford stopped performing in 1983, when she was diagnosed with [lung cancer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lung_cancer). Just before her death in 1985, she was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship, which is the United States government's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts. Ledford inspired a generation of younger folk musicians, including [Pete Seeger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pete_Seeger).

**Native Americans**

Several distinctive Native American and First Nations old-time traditions exist, including Métis fiddle and Athabaskian fiddle.

Old-time music has also been adopted by individual Native Amerian musicians, including Walker Calhoun (1918-2012) of Big Cove of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee in North Carolina and Matthew Kinman of the Apache tribe. Calhoun played three-finger-style banjo and sang in the Cherokee Language. Calhoun was a medicine man and spiritual leader who worked to preserve the history, religion, and herbal healing methods of his people.

Oklahoma with its high concentration of Native American inhabitants, has produced some Native American old-time string bands, most notably Big Chief Henry’s Indian String Band, which recorded for the Victor company 1929. H.C. Speir, a music promoter from Jackson, Mississippi, heard them playing at the Choctaw Fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi and got them a recording contract for Victor.

**Revival**

**Bascom Lamar Lunsford** (March 21, 1882 – September 4, 1973) was a [folklorist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folklore_studies), performer of [traditional Appalachian music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachian_music), and lawyer from western [North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Carolina). He was often known by the nickname "**Minstrel of the** [**Appalachians**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachians)".

**Biography**

Bascom Lamar Lunsford was born at [Mars Hill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mars_Hill,_North_Carolina), [Madison County](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madison_County,_North_Carolina), North Carolina in 1882, into the world of traditional [Appalachian folk music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachian_music). At an early age, his father, a teacher, gave him a **fiddle**, and **his mother sang religious songs and traditional ballads**. Lunsford also learned **banjo** and began to **perform at weddings and square dances**.

Lunsford **taught at schools** in [Madison County](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madison_County,_North_Carolina). In 1913, Lunsford **qualified in law** at [Trinity College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity,_North_Carolina), later to become [Duke University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke_University).

He began to travel and collect material at the start of the 20th century, often meeting singers on isolated farms.

**Appalachian music**

Lunsford gave lectures and performances while dressed in a starched white shirt and black bow tie. This formal dress was part of his campaign against the stereotyping of “hillbillies”.

In **1922** [Frank C. Brown](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_C._Brown), a song collector, **recorded 32 items on** [**wax cylinders**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonograph_cylinder) **from Bascom**. In 1928, Lunsford recorded ["Jesse James"](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesse_James_(folk_song)) and "[I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Wish_I_Was_a_Mole_in_the_Ground)" for the [Brunswick record label](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brunswick_Records). [Harry Smith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Everett_Smith) included "I Wish I Was a Mole in the Ground" on his [*Anthology of American Folk Music*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthology_of_American_Folk_Music) in 1952.

Lunsford **played** in a style from Western North Carolina, which **had a rhythmic up-stroke brushing the strings**. It sounds similar to [clawhammer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clawhammer) banjo playing, which emphasises the downstroke. **He also played a "mandoline", an instrument with mandolin body and a five-string banjo neck.** He **occasionally played fiddle** for dance tunes such as "Rye Straw". He censored the canon, avoiding obscene songs or omitting verses. His **repertoire included** [**Child Ballads**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_Ballads)**,** [**negro spirituals**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negro_spiritual) **and** [**parlor songs**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parlor_song). A CD collection of Lunsford's recordings, from the Brunswick recordings of the 1920s to the recordings for the Archive of American Folk Song at the [Library of Congress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Congress) in 1949, *Ballads, Banjo Tunes and Sacred Songs of Western North Carolina*, was released by [Smithsonian Folkways Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folkways_Records) in 1996.

**The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival**

**In 1927 the** [**Asheville**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asheville,_North_Carolina) **Chamber of Commerce organized a '**[**Rhododendron**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhododendron) **Festival' to encourage tourism. The Chamber asked Lunsford to invite local musicians and dancers. 1928 was the first year of the** [**Mountain Dance and Folk Festival**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mountain_Dance_and_Folk_Festival)**, often claimed as the first event to be described as a "**[**Folk Festival**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_Festival)**"**. After a few years the rhododendron element disappeared but the festival continues to this day. He was the **organiser and performed there every year until he suffered a stroke in 1965**.

**Lunsford cofounded the Bascom Lamar Lunsford "Minstrel of Appalachia" Festival**, taking place at Lunsford's birthplace at Mars Hill University in Mars Hill, North Carolina, just 20 minutes north of Asheville.

**Politics and fame**

Bascom was **involved in the politics of the** [**Democratic Party**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Party_(United_States)). He managed the campaign for Congressman [Zebulon Weaver](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zebulon_Weaver) for North Carolina. From 1931 to 1934 he was a **reading clerk of the** [**North Carolina House of Representatives**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Carolina_House_of_Representatives). [**Charles Seeger**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Seeger) **employed him in the mid-30s to promote singers in "Skyline Farms", as part of the "**[**New Deal**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Deal)**"**. Lunsford was **invited to the** [**White House**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_House) **by** [**President Roosevelt**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franklin_Delano_Roosevelt) **in 1939, when he performed his music for** [**King George VI**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_George_VI).

**Personal**

Lunsford married Nellie Sarah Triplett (June 22, 1881 – May 4, 1960). They had six daughters (Sarah, Ellen, Lynn, Nellie, Merton & Josefa) and one son (Blackwell). After Nellie's death Lunsford married Freda English née Metcalf (1913–1974). Bascom Lunsford died on 4 September 1973. Fifteen months after Bascom's death, Freda took her own life.

***Anthology of American Folk Music***

is **a three-volume compilation album released in 1952 by** [**Folkways Records**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folkways_Records).

**compiled by experimental filmmaker** [**Harry Smith**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Everett_Smith) **from his own personal collection of** [**78 rpm records**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gramophone_record)**.**

**eighty-four recordings of American** [**folk**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_music)**,** [**blues**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blues_music) **and** [**country music**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_music) **made and issued from 1926 to 1933** by a variety of performers, divided into **three categories: "Ballads", "Social music", and "Songs."**

Upon its release the Anthology sold relatively poorly and had no notable early coverage besides a minor mention in [***Sing Out!***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sing_Out!) **magazine in 1958**. However, it would eventually become regarded as a landmark and influential release, particularly for the 1950s and 1960s [American folk music revival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_folk_music_revival). In **2003,** [***Rolling Stone***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rolling_Stone) **ranked the album at number 276 on their list of** [**The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rolling_Stone%27s_500_Greatest_Albums_of_All_Time), and, in 2005, the album was inducted into the [National Recording Registry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Recording_Registry) by the [Library of Congress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Congress).

**Background**

Harry Smith was a West Coast filmmaker, [magickian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magick) and [bohemian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohemianism) eccentric. As a teenager he started collecting old [blues](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blues_music), [jazz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jazz), [country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_music), [Cajun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cajun_music), and [gospel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_music) records and accumulated a large collection of 78s, those being the only medium at the time.

In 1947, he met with [Moses Asch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses_Asch), with an interest in selling or licensing the collection to Asch's label, [Folkways Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folkways_Records). **Smith** he selected recordings **from between "1927, when electronic recording made possible accurate music reproduction, and 1932, when the** [**Great Depression**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression) **halted folk music sales."** When the *Anthology* was released, **neither Folkways nor Smith possessed the licensing rights** to these recordings, many of which had initially been issued by record companies that were still in existence, including [Columbia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbia_Records) and [Paramount](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paramount_Records). **The anthology thus technically qualifies as a high profile** [**bootleg**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bootleg_recording)**.** Folkways would later obtain some licensing rights, although the ***Anthology* would not be completely licensed until the 1997** [**Smithsonian**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smithsonian) **reissue**.

Smith's booklet in the original release refers to **three additionally planned volumes** made up of music up until 1950. Although none were released during his lifetime, **a** [**fourth volume**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Smith%27s_Anthology_of_American_Folk_Music,_Vol._4) **was released posthumously in 2000. Entitled *Labor Songs***, this volume centers around work songs and union songs. The album contains later material than the original three volumes, anthologizing material recorded as late as 1940.

Old-time music experienced a great revival in the early 1960s in areas such as Chapel Hill, North Carolina. It was initially a matter of northern city people learning the country music. **Alan Jabbour**, **founding director of the Folklife Center at the** [**Library of Congress**](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Library_of_Congress), became a leader of this revival while a student at Duke University. Other important revivalists include **Mike Seeger** and [**Pete Seeger**](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pete_Seeger), who brought the music to New York City as early as the 1940s. The **New Lost City Ramblers** in particular took the revival across the country and often featured older musicians in their show. The band was originally **Mike Seeger**, **John Cohen**, and **Tom Paley**, later **Tracy Schwarz**. The New Lost City Ramblers sparked new interest in old-timey music.

**Alan Jabbour** (1942-2017) born in Jacksonville, Florida, began playing classical music. From 1965 through 1968 he made extensive trips through North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia to record instrumental folk music, folksongs and folklore, especially documenting old-time musician Henry Reed: *Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier: The Henry Reed Collection.*

He became a **member** of the **Hollow Rock String Band**: *The Hollow Rock String Band: Traditional Dance Tunes* (1967)

Ph.D 1968, **taught English, folklore and ethnomusicology at UCLA**. In 1969, (to 1974) appointed **head of the Archive of Folk Song (now: Archive of Folk Culture) at the Library of Congress**. 1974, **National Endowment of the Arts**. In 1976, **founding director of the American Folklife Center**, the principal respository for field documentation of American folklore and folklife.

**Mike Seeger** did a lot of field recording in Appalachia, including of people like Roscoe Holcomb, Dock Boggs, and Tommy Jarrell.

**Still living old-time music**Appalachian old-time music is itself made up of regional traditions. Some of the most prominent traditions include those of   
Mount Airy, [North Carolina](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/North_Carolina) (specifically the Round Peak style of Tommy Jarrell) and Grayson County/Galax, [Virginia](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Virginia) (Wade Ward and Albert Hash),   
[West Virginia](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/West_Virginia) (the Hammons Family),  
 East Kentucky (J. P. Fraley and Lee Sexton), and   
East Tennessee (Roan Mountain Hilltoppers).

The **New Lost City Ramblers**, or **NLCR**, **formed in New York City in 1958** during the folk revival. **Mike Seeger**, **John Cohen** and **Tom Paley** were its founding members. **Tracy Schwarz** replaced Paley, who left the group in 1962. Seeger died of cancer in 2009, Paley died in 2017, and Cohen died in 2019.

The Ramblers named themselves in response to a request by Moe Asch, based on an amalgam of a favorite tune, J.E. Mainer’s “New Lost Train Blues,“ and Charlie Poole’s North Carolina Ramblers.

NLCR participated in the old-time music revival, and directly influenced many later musicians.

**Career**

The Ramblers distinguished themselves by focusing on the traditional playing styles they heard on old 78rpm records of musicians recorded during the 1920s and 1930s, many of whom had earlier appeared on the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, as well as recording from the Archive of Folk Music.

The New Lost City Ramblers **refused to "sanitize" these southern sounds** as did other folk groups of the time, such as **the Weavers or Kingston Trio**. Instead, the Ramblers have always **strived for an *authentic* sound**. However, the Ramblers did not merely copy the old recordings that inspired them. Rather, they **used the various old-time styles** they encountered **while at the same time not becoming slaves to imitation**.

On *Songs from the Depression*, the New Lost City Ramblers performed a variety of **popular political songs**.

In his autobiography, *Chronicles: Volume One*, Bob Dylan described the impression the *Ramblers made on him when he heard their records in 1960:*

*Everything about them appealed to me—their style, their singing, their sound. I liked the way they looked, the way they dressed and I especially liked their name. Their songs rang the gamut in style, everything from mountain ballads to fiddle tunes and railway blues... I'd stay with the Ramblers for days. At the time, I didn't know they were replicating everything they did off old 78 records, but what would it have mattered anyway? It wouldn't have mattered at all. They had originality in spades, were men of mystery. I couldn't listen to them enough.*

The group drifted apart during the latter half of the 1960s. Schwarz and Seeger performed with different musicians and together formed the short lived Strange Creek Singers.

The New Lost City Ramblers' extensive recordings for the Folkways label became, after the death of Moe Asch, part of the Smithsonian Institution, which reissues Folkways titles on CD.

John Cohen is said to have inspired the titular John of the Grateful Dead's 1970 song "Uncle John's Band".

**John Cohen** (1932–2019) was one of the most prolific contributors to the Smithsonian Folkways collection of recorded sounds. He was a musician, photographer, filmmaker, and record producer.

John grew up in eastern Long Island and attended Yale, where he studied painting with Josef Albers. While at Yale, he met Tom Paley, a banjo-playing mathematics major. The two played music together and organized “hoots” on campus.

After John moved to New York City, he, Tom Paley, and Mike Seeger formed the New Lost City Ramblers. Their self-titled album, *The New Lost City Ramblers* (Folkways, 1958), was the first of 15 albums for Folkways.

In New York, John was at the center of wildly diverse worlds of art and music. He photographed poets Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso wn a young Bob Dylan, who had just arrived in the city.

In 1959, John made a recording trip to eastern Kentucky. The trip produced the seminal album *Mountain Music of Kentucky* (Folkways, 1960), which introduced the music of singer and banjo player Roscoe Holcomb, among many others. A return trip to Kentucky in 1962 yielded **John’s first film, *The High Lonesome Sound***.

In 1961, John Cohen, Ralph Rinzler, and Israel Young formed the Friends of Old Time Music, a volunteer organization that brought traditional southern musicians to New York to perform for new city audiences. At the first F.O.T.M. concert, John personally introduced the evening’s featured performer, Roscoe Holcomb. The organization produced 13 more concerts that presented Clarence Ashley, Doc Watson, Mississippi John Hurt, Bill Monroe, Dock Boggs, Fred McDowell, Maybelle Carter, Hobart Smith, and numerous others: *Friends of Old Time Music* (Smithsonian Folkways, 2006).

John’s design style defined the look of the many records of old time music and bluegrass produced for Folkways by Ralph Rinzler, Mike Seeger, and John himself, as well as posters and handbills for the Friends of Old Time Music concerts.

Through the 1960s, John continued to make albums for Folkways. The artists included ballad singer Dillard Chandler, “Singing Miner” George Davis, and Roscoe Holcomb.

John made 15 films, including *The High Lonesome Sound* (1963), *Sara and Maybelle: The Carter Family* (1981), and *Mountain Music of Peru* (1984). He himself was the subject of the Smithsonian Channel’s 2009 film *Play On, John: A Life in Music*.

The magnitude of John Cohen’s impact on public awareness of traditional music is almost impossible to comprehend. When John arrived on the scene, very few people knew about old time music. The rural musicians who still played it were mostly unknown outside their own communities, and appreciation in the cities was largely limited to those who knew about Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music* (Folkways, 1952).

In later years, John became a mentor to new generations of young musicians.

John Cohen died on the evening of September 16, 2019.

**Comeback of older musicians**

The New Lost City Ramblers introduced the Revival to artists such as Charlie Poole, Gid Tanner and Uncle Dave Macon, but also sought out performers on the old records and bring them to modern audiences: Dock Boggs, Roscoe Holcomb, Eck Robertson and Maybelle Carter.

**Eck Robertson**

In **1963,** [**John Cohen**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cohen_(musician))**,** [**Mike Seeger**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Seeger) **and** [**Tracy Schwarz**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tracy_Schwarz) **visited Eck Robertson at his home in Amarillo, Texas** and taped some of his music, which was released on [County Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_Records) as ***Eck Robertson, Famous Cowboy Fiddler***. Robertson appeared at the **UCLA Folk Festival** in 1964, and at **the** [**Newport Folk Festival**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newport_Folk_Festival) **in 1965, accompanied by the** [**New Lost City Ramblers**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Lost_City_Ramblers)**.**

**Dock Boggs**

In **June 1963**, at the height of the folk music revival in the United States, the folk music scholar Two of his recordings had been on the **Anthology of American Folk Music**. Mike Seeger sought out and found Boggs at his home near Needmore, Virginia. Seeger was delighted to learn that Boggs had recently repurchased a banjo and had been practicing the instrument for several months before his arrival. He persuaded Boggs to play at the **American Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina**, later that year. With Seeger's help, Boggs began recording again, eventually recording **three albums for** [**Folkways Records**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folkways_Records). Throughout the 1960s, he toured the United States, playing in clubs and at folk music festivals, including a performance before an audience of 10,000 at the [Newport Folk Festival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newport_Folk_Festival).

In the early 1970s, Boggs's health began to deteriorate, and he **died on his 73rd birthday**. In 1968, his protégé Jack Wright started the **Dock Boggs Festival**, which is still held annually **in Boggs's hometown of Norton**, although it is now known as the Dock Boggs & [Kate Peters Sturgill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kate_Peters_Sturgill) Festival.

**Clarence Ashley**

**Rediscovery**

**In 1960,** [**Ralph Rinzler**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Rinzler) **met Ashley at the Old Time Fiddler's Convention in** [**Union Grove, North Carolina**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Grove_Township,_North_Carolina). By this time, Ashley was well known among folk music enthusiasts due in large part to [Harry Smith](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Everett_Smith)'s [***Anthology of American Folk Music***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthology_of_American_Folk_Music) (1952), which included some of Ashley's early recordings. Rinzler eventually persuaded him to start playing banjo again and to record his repertoire of songs. Over the next few years Ashley and his friends [Doc Watson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doc_Watson), Clint Howard, and [Fred Price](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fred_Price_(musician)&action=edit&redlink=1) played at numerous urban folk festivals, including the **Chicago Folk Festival** in 1962 and the **Newport Folk Festival** in 1963 und [**Carnegie Hall**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnegie_Hall).

**During the folk revival years of the 1960s, Ashley and his band helped to popularize the 18th century English, Southern hymn, "**[**Amazing Grace**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazing_Grace)**."**

Several notable musicians cite Ashley as an important influence. [Roy Acuff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy_Acuff) once worked medicine shows with Ashley, and Ashley probably taught him "House of the Rising Sun" (which Acuff recorded during 1938) and "Greenback Dollar."[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarence_Ashley#cite_note-wilson-2) Folk musician [Doc Watson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doc_Watson) began his recording career with Ashley in 1960 and played in Ashley's band throughout much of the decade. [Grateful Dead](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grateful_Dead) frontman [Jerry Garcia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Garcia) once said in an interview that he learned [clawhammer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clawhammer) picking from "listening to Clarence Ashley". Other folk musicians influenced by Ashley include [Joan Baez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_Baez), [Judy Collins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judy_Collins), and [Jean Ritchie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Ritchie).[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarence_Ashley#cite_note-wilson-2)

A second tour of England was planned for 1967, but Ashley grew ill and discovered he had cancer before he departed. He died in 1967 in [Winston-Salem, North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston-Salem,_North_Carolina).

In March 2013, the [Library of Congress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Library_of_Congress) announced that the album, ***Old Time Music at Clarence Ashley's*,** would be added to **the** [**National Recording Registry**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Recording_Registry). The album consists of a series of early-1960s recordings by Ralph Rinzler of folk songs performed by Ashley and bandmates [**Doc Watson**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doc_Watson)**,** [**Clint Howard**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clint_Howard)**,** [**Fred Price**](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fred_Price_(musician)&action=edit&redlink=1)**,** [**Gaither Carlton**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaither_Carlton) **and** [**Tommy Moore**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommy_Moore_(musician)).

**During the folk revival years of the 1960s, Ashley and his band helped to popularize the 18th century English, Southern hymn, "**[**Amazing Grace**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazing_Grace)**."**

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**Frank Proffitt**

**Frank Noah Proffitt** (June 1, 1913 – November 24, 1965)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Proffitt#cite_note-LarkinGE-1) was an [Appalachian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachia) [old time](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old-time_music) [banjoist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjoist) who preserved the song "[**Tom Dooley**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Dooley_(song))" in the form we know it today and was a key figure in inspiring musicians of the 1960s and 1970s to play the traditional five-string [banjo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjo).

He was born in [Laurel Bloomery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurel_Bloomery,_Tennessee), Tennessee, United States, and was raised in the Reese area of [Watauga County](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watauga_County,_North_Carolina), North Carolina, where he worked in a variety of jobs and **lived on a farm with his wife and six children**. He **grew tobacco, worked as a carpenter, and in a spark plug factory**. He was known for his skills as a **carpenter and** [**luthier**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luthier)**; Proffitt's fretless** [**banjos**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjo) **and** [**dulcimers**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachian_dulcimer) **were homemade**.

In **1937, Frank Proffitt met folksong collectors** [**Anne and Frank Warner**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Warner_(folklorist)). Frank Warner was searching for a dulcimer builder and thus began a 30-year friendship and song swapping. Warner collected his songs and shared them with [**Alan Lomax**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Lomax), who included many, including the ballad **"Tom Dooley"** that Warner had learned from Proffitt, **in his book, *Folksong U.S.A.*.** Proffitt had **learned the song from his aunt Nancy Prather**, who had in turn learnt it from her mother Edy Adeline (Pardue) Proffitt, who had known both **Dula** (locally pronounced "Dooley") and Laura Foster. [**The Kingston Trio**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Kingston_Trio) **learned "Tom Dooley" from a recording by Warner**, and were eventually required by court judgement to acknowledge their debt to Proffitt and pay him royalties for the use of the song.

**Proffitt recorded "Tom Dooley" and other ballad songs in 1961, on the album *Frank Proffitt Sings Folk Songs***, edited by Warner and issued by [Folkways Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folkways_Records). A second set of Proffitt's recordings, ***Frank Proffitt of Reece NC: Traditional Songs and Ballads of Appalachia*, was released in 1962**, and **Proffitt performed at the 1963** [**Newport Folk Festival**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newport_Folk_Festival). He also performed at the [**1964 New York World's Fair**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1964_New_York_World%27s_Fair), and recorded several more tracks released on the **compilation album** [***High Atmosphere: Ballads and Banjo Tunes from Virginia and North Carolina***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Atmosphere).

Proffitt died in 1965, aged 52. The *Frank Proffitt Memorial Album* was released by [Folk Legacy Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_Legacy_Records) in 1969, followed by a tribute album, *Nothing Seems Better To Me: The Music of Frank Proffitt and North Carolina*, was issued in 2000.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Proffitt#cite_note-strong-3)

**Stanley Hicks**

**Stanley Hicks** (1911–1989) was an American folk artist from [**Watauga County**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watauga_County,_North_Carolina)**,** [**North Carolina**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Carolina). Hicks was known for his **musical instrument building, particularly banjos and dulcimers**, and for his woodwork, work as **a musician, dancer and storyteller**.

Hicks has been **recognized as a "National Historic Artist" by** the [Blue Ridge National Heritage Area](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Ridge_National_Heritage_Area) of **the US** [**National Park Service**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Park_Service). He was a recipient of a **1983** [**National Heritage Fellowship**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Heritage_Fellowship) **awarded by the** [**National Endowment for the Arts**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Endowment_for_the_Arts), which is the United States **government's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts**.

In the early 1980s Hicks was filmed by UNC-TV for the "Music From The Hills" episode of the *Folkways* series. The original camera tapes from these interviews have been digitized and are being preserved by [UNC-TV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNC-TV)

The Proffitts and Hicks were heirs to a centuries-old folk tradition, and through the middle to late twentieth century and they continued to perform in a style older than the stringbands often associated with old time music.

**Roscoe Holcomb**

**Roscoe Holcomb** (born **Roscoe Halcomb**;[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roscoe_Holcomb#cite_note-1) September 5, 1912 – February 1, 1981) from [Daisy, Kentucky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daisy,_Kentucky). Holcomb was the inspiration for the term "high, lonesome sound", coined by folklorist and friend [John Cohen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cohen_(musician)). The "high lonesome sound" term is now used to describe [bluegrass](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluegrass_music) singing, although Holcomb was not, strictly speaking, a bluegrass performer

**Performance style**

Holcomb's repertoire included [**old-time music**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old-time_music)**,** [**hymns**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hymns)**,** [**traditional music**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_music) **and** [**blues**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blues) **ballads**. In addition to playing the **banjo and guitar**, he was a competent [**harmonica**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harmonica) **and** [**fiddle**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiddle) player, and sang many of his most memorable songs [**a cappella**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_cappella).

Holcomb sang in a **nasal style informed by the** [**Old Regular Baptist**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Regular_Baptist) vocal tradition. [**Bob Dylan**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Dylan), a fan of Holcomb, described his singing as possessing **"an untamed sense of control"**. He was also admired by the [**Stanley Brothers**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanley_Brothers) and [**Eric Clapton**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Clapton), who cited Holcomb as his favorite country musician.

**Life and career**

**A** [**coal miner**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coal_miner)**, construction laborer and farmer for much of his life, Holcomb was not recorded until 1958**, after which his career as a **professional musician was bolstered by the** [**folk revival**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_revival) **in the 1960s**. Holcomb gave his **last live performance in 1978**. Due to what he described as injuries he sustained during his long career as a laborer, Holcomb was eventually unable to work for more than short periods, and his later income came primarily from his music. **Suffering from asthma and** [**emphysema**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emphysema) **as a result of working in coal mines, he died in a nursing home in 1981, at the age of 68**.

**Leslie Riddle**

In 1965, [**Mike Seeger**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Seeger), fresh from a collaboration with Maybelle Carter, **tracked down** **Leslie Riddle** and **persuaded him to return to recording music**. Over the next 13 years, Riddle and **Seeger made a series of studio recordings**, several of them compiled in the album "Step by Step", released in 1993. Riddle also made appearances at the **Smithsonian Folk Festival** and the [**Mariposa Folk Festival**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mariposa_Folk_Festival).

**Riddle died in July 1979, in** [**Asheville, North Carolina**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asheville,_North_Carolina). In **1993**, a selection from the sessions with Mike Seeger was released by [Rounder Records](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rounder_Records) as ***Step By Step: Lesley Riddle Meets The Carter Family: Blues, Country & Sacred Songs***.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lesley_Riddle#cite_note-AMG-2)

On July 31, 2009, a stage production about Riddle's life, including his time with and influence on the Carter Family, had its world premier at the Parkway Playhouse in Burnsville, North Carolina, Riddle's birthplace, *The Life and Music of Lesley Riddle*.

**Jean Ritchie (1922-2015)**

Jean Ritchie was born into "great ballad-singing family.

**In 1917, the folk music collector Cecil Sharp collected songs from Jean's older sisters Una and May**. Jean's father Balis had printed up a book of old songs entitled Lovers' Melodies, and music making was an important activity in the Ritchie home.

She was the youngest of 14 siblings. She was quick to memorize songs and, with Chalmers and Velma McDaniels, performed at local dances and at county fairs, where they repeatedly won blue ribbons in Hazard, the county seat. **When the family acquired a radio in the late 1940s they discovered that what they had been singing was hillbilly music, a word they had never heard before.**

Ritchie preferred to sing without instrumental accompaniment, but occasionally she also accompanied herself on autoharp, guitar or on a handmade plucked Appalachian dulcimer.

Ritchie graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a B.A. in social work from the University of Kentucky, in Lexington in 1946. During World War II, she taught in elementary school. After graduating she got a job as a social worker at the Henry Street Settlement, where she taught music to children. There she **befriended Alan Lomax, who recorded her extensively for the Library of Congress**. **She joined the New York folksong scene** and met Lead Belly, Pete Seeger, and Oscar Brand. In 1948, she shared the stage with The Weavers, Woody Guthrie, and Betty Sanders at the Spring Fever Hootenanny and by October 1949 was a regular guest on Oscar Brand's Folksong Festival radio show on WNYC. In 1949 and 1950, she recorded several hours of songs, stories, and oral history for Lomax in New York City. **Elektra records signed her and released three albums**: Jean Ritchie Sings (1952), Songs of Her Kentucky Mountain Family (1957) and A Time for Singing (1962).

By 1949, Ritchie's playing of the Appalachian dulcimer had become a hallmark of her style. After her husband made one for her as a present, the couple decided there might be a potential market for them. Pickow's uncle, Morris Pickow, set up an instrument workshop for them under the Williamsburg Bridge in Brooklyn.

**George Pickow, a professional photographer and filmmaker, and Ritchie married in 1950 and had two sons, Peter and Jon.** Jean Ritchie was awarded a **Fulbright scholarship** to trace the links between American ballads and the songs from Britain and Ireland. As a song-collector, she began by setting down the 300 songs that she already knew from her mother's knee. Ritchie spent **18 months tape recording and interviewing singers. Pickow accompanied her, photographing Seamus Ennis, Leo Rowsome, Sarah Makem and other musicians**. In 1955 Ritchie wrote a book about her family called **Singing Family of the Cumberlands**.

Jean Ritchie performed At Carnegie Hall and at the Royal Albert Hall. Her album, **None But One**, was awarded the Rolling Stone Critics Award in 1977. Ritchie is a recipient of a **2002 National Heritage Fellowship awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts**, which is the United States' highest honor in the folk and traditional arts. In 2002, she was elected as a part of the first class into the [Kentucky Music Hall of Fame](https://completely-kentucky.fandom.com/wiki/Category:Kentucky_Music_Hall_of_Fame).

She died at home on [June 1](https://completely-kentucky.fandom.com/wiki/June_1), [2015](https://completely-kentucky.fandom.com/wiki/2010s#2015), aged 92.

**Ola Belle Reed** (August 18, 1916 – August 16, 2002)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ola_Belle_Reed#cite_note-FamilySearch-US-SSDI-2002-1) was was born Ola Wave Campbell in the unincorporated town of [Grassy Creek, Ashe County, North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grassy_Creek,_Ashe_County,_North_Carolina). She was the fourth of thirteen children.

**As a young child, Reed learned the** [**clawhammer-style banjo**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clawhammer_banjo) and with her musical family sang old-time songs from the mountain region where they lived**. Several family members on both sides of her family played instruments and sang**. Reed's paternal grandfather, Alexander Campbell, played the fiddle. Her father played several instruments including the fiddle, banjo, guitar, and organ. Her uncle, Dockery Campbell, is credited with teaching Reed the clawhammer style. On her mother's side, family member Bob Ingraham taught singing schools and her uncle Herb Osborne was versed in mining songs. Reed learned ballads and songs from her mother and grandmother.

**Career**

When she was a teenager, **Reed's family moved to Southern Pennsylvania**. In the mid-**1930s, Reed joined The North Carolina Ridge Runners**. She later formed the band, **The New River Boys and Girls, with her brother, Alex Campbell**, which went on to open **the New River Ranch in** [**Rising Sun**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rising_Sun,_Maryland)**, Maryland**, a music park that hosted many well known performers **until being destroyed in 1958**. They went on to be the "house band" and broadcast live shows at another music park called Sunset Park in [West Grove](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Grove,_Pennsylvania), Pennsylvania.

Reed's **songs** often speak of [**Appalachian**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachian_people) **life and traditions**. Her best-known songs have been recorded by mainstream bluegrass and country artists. **"High on a Mountain"** has been recorded by [Del McCoury](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Del_McCoury), [Tim O'Brien](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_O%27Brien_(musician)), and [Marty Stuart](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marty_Stuart)**;"I've Endured"** has been recorded by [Del McCoury](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Del_McCoury) as well as [Tim O'Brien](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_O%27Brien_(musician)). The **New York-based folk music group** [**Ollabelle**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ollabelle) is named after Reed.

The annual **Ola Belle Reed Music Festival in** [**Lansing, North Carolina**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lansing,_North_Carolina), celebrates her life and music.

**Charlie Poole Legacy**

**Poole's music saw a revival in the 1960s, most likely due to his inclusion on the 1952** [***Anthology of American Folk Music***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthology_of_American_Folk_Music), and his renditions have been re-recorded by numerous artists, such as [John Mellencamp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Mellencamp) with "White House Blues", [The Chieftains](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chieftains), [New Lost City Ramblers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Lost_City_Ramblers), [Holy Modal Rounders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Modal_Rounders) and [Hot Tuna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hot_Tuna) with "Hesitation Blues", and [Joan Baez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_Baez) with "Sweet Sunny South".

**Since 1995, the Charlie Poole Music Festival.** [**Bob Dylan**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Dylan) in his [Nobel Lecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobel_Lecture) acknowledged Poole and several lyrics of his song "You Ain't Talkin To Me".

Columbia issued a three-CD box set of his music, entitled *You Ain't Talkin' to Me: Charlie Poole and the Roots of Country Music* in 2005. The album, produced by Henry "Hank" Sapoznik, was nominated for three [Grammy Awards](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammy_Award). It chronicles the music made for [Columbia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbia_Records) by Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers between 1925 and 1931.

Kinney Rorer penned a biography of Charlie Poole: ***Ramblin' Blues: The Life and Songs of Charlie Poole* in 1982**.

A **double-CD** album by singer-songwriter [Loudon Wainwright III](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loudon_Wainwright_III) in August 2009. The album, entitled [***High Wide & Handsome: The Charlie Poole Project***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Wide_%26_Handsome:_The_Charlie_Poole_Project)**,** features 30 tracks, including new versions of songs originally recorded by Poole, as well as tunes composed by Wainwright and producer Dick Connette on the artist's life and times; it was awarded the [**Grammy Award for Best Traditional Folk Album**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammy_Award_for_Best_Traditional_Folk_Album)

**Old Time Musicic today: a living tradition**

Old-time music is a living tradition. Some people who play it today prefer to stick close to the styles of the original source material, while others use the older styles as a springboard for creativity and innovation. These more contemporary adaptations are sometimes referred to as neo-traditional.

Weekly or monthly old-time music **jams** occur in many communities across the United States. These communities develop a shared repertoire of tunes that they play together in an informal setting. **Contradances and** [**square dances**](https://balladofamerica.org/southern-square-dance/), accompanied by live old-time music, are also present **in many parts of the United States**. Many of the jams and dances focus almost exclusively on fiddle tunes.

Old-time music is also shared and passed on in more formal settings, such as **fiddle contests and music camps**. (first documented contest in 1736) While fiddle contests are a place for players to compete, they are cherished by participants for the opportunity to jam and interact with like-minded musicians.

**The largest old-time music event in the United States is the** [**Appalachian String Band Festival**](http://www.wvculture.org/stringband/) **held every August in Clifftop, West Virginia**. Approximately **3000 musicians participate** in this five-day mountaintop gathering, which features contests, concerts, workshops, [square dances](https://balladofamerica.org/southern-square-dance/), and perhaps most importantly, informal jams at the campsites.

Musicians and non-musicians alike can learn how to play old-time music at a number of **music camps**, including Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College's Old-Time Week (West Virginia), Mars Hill University's Blue Ridge Old-Time Music Week (North Carolina), Old-Time Week at Warren Wilson College's Swannanoa Gathering (North Carolina), and Ashokan Music & Dance Camps (New York). These camps provide excellent opportunities to learn directly from experts in old-time music traditions and to interact with other enthusiasts. In one-week or weekend sessions, they offer classes ranging from beginning to advanced fiddle, banjo, guitar, singing, mandolin, dance, and more.

**Regional styles**

There are numerous regional styles of old-time music, each with its own repertoire and playing style. Nevertheless, some tunes (such as "Soldier's Joy") are found in nearly every regional style, though played somewhat differently in each.

**Dwight Diller** (August 17, 1946 – 14 February 2023) was considered one of the most prominent exponents of the [clawhammer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clawhammer) banjo tradition.

Diller lived in [Hillsboro, West Virginia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillsboro,_West_Virginia), and then [Marlinton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marlinton), and was an **inheritor of the** [**old-time music**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old-time_music) **tradition of the** [**Hammons Family**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edden_Hammons) **of West Virginia**. He **conducted banjo workshops around the United States and in England**. He released a number of **recordings and instructional videos**.

Dwight Diller is one of a small handful of native West Virginia musicians actively engaged in preserving the traditional music of his state. His ancestors were some of the earliest settlers of the region around Pocahontas County. Dwight’s early interest in the old stories and the old music, **led him to seek out the old people in his home area who were the repositories of this tradition**. According to Dwight: ”I can’t remember when I wasn’t interested in the stories being told by and about the old folks from my region.” Then on his own, approximately 40 years ago, with a powerful desire to connect with his heritage,

**The most well known of Dwight’s neighbors that had kept the music alive were the Hammons’ [Burl, Maggie, Sherman, James], Lee Hammons [no relation] and Hamp Carpenter. Starting in 1968 when he first visited them, he spent countless hours absorbing everything he could**. Dwight was also subconsciously fulfilling a deeper need while becoming close friends with the Hammons’ and Hamp. Their friendship was satisfying a longing for his mountain grandparents that were long dead, to help him through some of the very darkest periods of his life. Since that time, for a span of almost 40 years Dwight has experienced continual difficulties which have forced him to grow not just in his knowledge of the music and the culture, but also in wisdom and spirituality. At the age of 30 he experienced head on what was eternally real and became a Christian. This led to his spending 3 years in seminary and **becoming a back porch Mennonite minister**, which he has been **since 1984**.

**In 1970, Dwight introduced the Hammons’ to the Library of Congress**. Within two years, after sifting through all of Dwight’s many, many hours of recorded material and using **Dwight as the major consultant, the Library of Congress had issued a boxed two LP record set with a 40 page booklet**. The then-infant Rounder Records also released “Shaking Down the Acorns”, which was recorded at two small autumn gatherings Dwight sponsored near his home in 1970 and again in 1971. Both the above recordings were combined and re-released in 1998 by Rounder Records on CDs with a thick booklet included. Augusta Heritage Center released some of Dwight’s personal recordings as “The Diller Collection” Vol. 1 [1996] contained 35 fiddle tunes from Burl Hammons; Vol. 2 [1997]had 37 banjo tunes by 5 different Hammons’ and Hamp Carpenter

The **June 1996 issue of “Banjo Newsletter” featured a large interview with Dwight** by Bates Littlehales. The **1997 issue of “Sing Out”** also had included an interview with Dwight. This article referred to him as the “guardian of traditional West Virginia mountain music”. **In 2003 Dwight was chosen as one of the representatives of the Appalachian region at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC.**

Now the members of Dwight’s generation are the ones who are carrying the tradition and have the responsibility of passing on the music and stories to the coming generations. No one is more able than Dwight to attend to this task.

**Riley Baugus**

**Riley Baugus** grew up in the [Regular Baptist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regular_Baptist) tradition, which gave him a solid foundation in unaccompanied singing. He **began playing the fiddle at age 10** and grew up with the fiddler [Kirk Sutphin](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kirk_Sutphin&action=edit&redlink=1). As a youth, he also had the opportunity to study with old-time musicians from [Surry County, North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surry_County,_North_Carolina) and [Grayson County, Virginia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grayson_County,_Virginia), including [Tommy Jarrell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommy_Jarrell), Robert Sykes, Dix Freeman, Verlin Clifton, and Paul Sutphin. **He is influenced particularly by the** [**Round Peak**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Round_Peak,_North_Carolina) **style of Surry County, North Carolina**.

Baugus **worked as a welder and blacksmith for 18 years before pursuing a career as a professional musician.** He **has performed throughout the United States and internationally in Canada, Ireland, Scotland, and England**. He has played with several old-time string bands, including The Farmer's Daughters, The Konnarock Critters, The Red Hots, Backstep, and the Old Hollow Stringband. **He tours regularly with** [**Dirk Powell**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirk_Powell) **and** [**Tim O'Brien**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_O%27Brien_(musician)).

He **sang on the** [**soundtrack**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_Mountain_(soundtrack)) **to the 2003 film** [***Cold Mountain***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_Mountain_(film)). He has recorded with[**Robert Plant**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Plant)**,** [**Alison Krauss**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alison_Krauss)**,** [**Willie Nelson**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willie_Nelson)**,** [**Dirk Powell**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirk_Powell), and [Martha Scanlan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martha_Scanlan). He **taught banjo at the** [**Augusta Heritage Center**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augusta_Heritage_Center)**'s Old Time Week in** [**Elkins, West Virginia**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elkins,_West_Virginia) **and at the** [**Midwest Banjo Camp**](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Midwest_Banjo_Camp&action=edit&redlink=1), in [Olivet, Michigan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olivet,_Michigan).

Baugus released his first album**, *Life of Riley*,** in 2001. A second album, ***Long Steel Rail*,** was released in 2006.

He lives in [Walkertown, North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walkertown,_North_Carolina).

**Tim Eriksen**

**Tim Eriksen** (b. 1966) is an American musician, [musicologist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musicologist), and professor. He is the leader of the band [Cordelia's Dad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cordelia%27s_Dad), a solo artist, and was a performer and consultant for the award-winning [soundtrack](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_Mountain_(soundtrack)) of the film [*Cold Mountain*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_Mountain_(film)).

**Cordelia's Dad**

Cordelia's Dad combines traditional/[old-time music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old-time_music) and [punk rock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punk_rock) influences to create a unique [folk-punk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_punk) sound. [*The Village Voice*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Village_Voice) describes the band as "semi-reformed punks turned shape-note singers...recently gone entirely acoustic, but buzzing with metaphorical electricity". The band has released nine full-length albums, played festivals such as [The Newport Folk Festival](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newport_Folk_Festival), and toured with notable bands such as [Nirvana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana_(band)).

**Musicologist**

Eriksen successfully defended his **PhD in** [**ethnomusicology**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnomusicology) **at** [**Wesleyan University**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wesleyan_University) **in May 2015**, having received an M.A. in the same discipline from Wesleyan in 1993, and has **served as a visiting music professor at** [**Dartmouth College**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dartmouth_College)**,** [**Amherst College**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amherst_College)**,** [**Hampshire College**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hampshire_College) **and the** [**University of Minnesota**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Minnesota). He **has also taught in** [**Poland**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland) **and the** [**Czech Republic**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czech_Republic)**.** Additionally, Eriksen is a collector of variations of folk songs, and has conducted extensive research on traditional [Yugoslavian music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_Yugoslavia). In 2011, Eriksen taught a class on the history of the [Sacred Harp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacred_Harp) at [Smith College](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smith_College).

**Solo artist**

Eriksen shared his extensive knowledge of folk music while a **consultant for the soundtrack of the film *Cold Mountain*** and also **performed on the *Cold Mountain* soundtrack, singing with** [**Riley Baugus**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riley_Baugus) **on traditional songs such as "I Wish My Baby Was Born" and "**[**The Cuckoo**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cuckoo_(song))".

Eriksen has also released **seven solo albums**: *Tim Eriksen*; *Every Sound Below*; *Northern Roots Live In Namest*; *Soul Of The January Hills*; *Star in the East*; *Banjo, Fiddle And Voice*; and *Josh Billings Voyage or, Cosmopolite on the Cotton Road*. The [Pop Matters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pop_Matters) review of *Every Sound Below* describes it as a "stunning mixture of traditional hymns, songs from the [American Civil War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War), and Eriksen's own compositions".

**Leroy Troy**

**Troy Boswell** (born May 23, 1966), known professionally as **Leroy Troy**, is an old-time [banjo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjo) player from [Goodlettsville, Tennessee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goodlettsville,_Tennessee). His banjo style is the [clawhammer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clawhammer) or [frailing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frailing) style. He often performs humorous or comedy songs from the [old-time music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old-time_music) genre. Troy often uses a [washboard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washboard_(musical_instrument)) with various sound making devices affixed to it. Major musical influence is attributed to [Uncle Dave Macon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Dave_Macon) and others taught by him. **Troy debuted on the** [**Grand Ole Opry**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Ole_Opry) **in 1988 and was the National Old-Time Banjo Champion in 1996**.

Troy is known as "The Tennessee Slicker" and "The Sultan of Goodlettsville" and plays with the Tennessee Mafia Jugband and [Marty Stuart](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marty_Stuart), appeared weekly on ***The Marty Stuart Show*** on [RFD-TV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RFD-TV).

**Bruce C. Molsky** (born 1955, [New York City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City)) is an American [fiddler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiddle), [banjo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjo) player, [guitarist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guitar), and singer. He primarily performs [old-time music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old-time_music) of the [Appalachian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachia) region.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Molsky#cite_note-Lieberman2004-1)

As a young man, Molsky first became interested in [blues](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blues) music, but eventually became absorbed in [old-time music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old-time_music) while **studying engineering at** [**Cornell University**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornell_University) **in** [**Ithaca, New York**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ithaca,_New_York), beginning in 1972. His playing was influenced by the fiddling of [Tommy Jarrell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommy_Jarrell), whom Molsky visited in [North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Carolina) in 1976. He recorded with [Bob Carlin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Carlin) in 1990.

**Carolina Chocolate Drops**

**Formed in November 2005**, **following** the members' attendance at the first **Black Banjo Gathering, held in** [**Boone, North Carolina**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boone,_North_Carolina)**, in April 2005**. The Carolina Chocolate Drops' original three members: Rhiannon Giddens, Don Flemons, and Justin Robinson.

All of the musicians sing and trade instruments including [banjo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjo), [fiddle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiddle), [guitar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guitar), [harmonica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harmonica), [snare drum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snare_drum), [bones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bones_(instrument)), [jug](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jug_(musical_instrument)), and [kazoo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazoo). The group learned much of their repertoire, which is based on the traditional music of the [Piedmont](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piedmont_(United_States)) region of North and [South Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Carolina),[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carolina_Chocolate_Drops#cite_note-4) from the eminent African American old-time fiddler [Joe Thompson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Thompson_(musician)), although they also perform old-time versions of some modern songs such as [Blu Cantrell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blu_Cantrell)'s [R&B](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%26B) hit "[Hit 'em Up Style (Oops!)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hit_%27em_Up_Style_(Oops!))."

The Carolina Chocolate Drops have released five CDs and one EP and **have opened for** [**Taj Mahal**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taj_Mahal_(musician)) **and, in 2011,** [**Bob Dylan**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Dylan).

The original members of the Carolina Chocolate Drops reunited for the inaugural [Biscuits & Banjos](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Biscuits_%26_Banjos&action=edit&redlink=1) festival in [Durham, North Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durham,_North_Carolina) on April 26, 2025.[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carolina_Chocolate_Drops#cite_note-24)

**Members**

* [Rhiannon Giddens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhiannon_Giddens): 5-string banjo, dance, fiddle, kazoo, voice
* [Hubby Jenkins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubby_Jenkins): Guitar, mandolin, 5-string banjo, bones, voice
* Rowan Corbett: Guitar, bones, snare drum, cajon, djembe
* Malcolm Parson: Cello, melodica

Previous

* [Dom Flemons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dom_Flemons): 4-string banjo, guitar, jug, harmonica, kazoo, snare drum, bones, quills, voice
* Adam Matta: Beatbox, tambourine
* [Leyla McCalla](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leyla_McCalla): Cello, tenor banjo, voice
* Justin Robinson: Fiddle, jug, beatbox, dance, voice
* Súle Greg Wilson: 5-string banjo, banjolin, bodhrán, brushes, bones, dance, gourd, kazoo, tambourine, ukulele, voice, washboard

**Learning old-time music**

Players traditionally **learn old-time music by ear; even those musicians who can read music generally learn and play old-time tunes by ear**. Most noted players often improvised and wouldn't play a tune exactly the same way every time.

Players usually learn old-time music by **attending local jam sessions** and by **attending festivals** scattered around the country. **Internet.**

Although it is one of the oldest and most prominent forms of traditional music in the United States and Canada, old-time music (with a few notable exceptions) is **generally not taught in North American primary schools, secondary schools, or universities.** Although square dancing is still occasionally taught in elementary schools (generally with recorded, rather than live music), old-time instruments and dances are not included in the educational system, and must be studied outside the school system.

There are, however a growing number of **folk music schools in the United States**, usually non-profit community based, that have taken up the mantle of providing instruction in old-time music. **The Old Town School of Folk Music in** [**Chicago, Illinois**](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Chicago,_Illinois) is perhaps the oldest of these, having begun in 1957. **The Folk School of St. Louis**, Missouri is one of the many newer schools having opened its doors in 2002 after the movie ***O Brother, Where Art Thou?*** caused an increase in people from urban areas wanting to learn old-time music.

**Camps**

There are a variety of programs, mostly in the summer, that offer **week-long immersions in old-time music and dance**.

**Jams**

Weekly or monthly old-time music jams occur in many communities across the United States as well as in other countries.

**Old Time Herald**

**A Prairie Home Companion**

**New England**

The [New England](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/New_England) states, being among the first to be settled by Europeans, have one of the oldest traditions of old-time music. Although the Puritans (the first Europeans to settle in the region), frowned upon instrumental music, dance music flourished in both urban and rural areas beginning in the seventeenth century. Primary instruments include the fiddle, piano, and guitar, with the wooden flute sometimes also used. As with Appalachian folk, a number of classical composers have turned to New England folk music for melodic and harmonic ideas, most famously [Charles Ives](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Charles_Ives), as well as [Aaron Copland](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Aaron_Copland), [William Schuman](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/William_Schuman), and [John Cage](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_Cage), among others.

**Midwest**

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, when the Midwestern states were first settled by immigrants from the eastern United States and Europe, the Midwest developed its own regional styles of old-time music. Among these, the [Missouri](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Missouri) style is of particular interest for its energetic bowing style. [[3]](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Old-time_music#cite_note-3)

In the Upper Midwest, especially [Minnesota](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Minnesota), *old-time music* most typically refers to a mixture of Scandinavian styles, especially Norwegian and Swedish.[[4]](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Old-time_music#cite_note-4)

**The non-Appalachian South**

The Southern states (particularly coastal states such as Virginia and [North Carolina](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/North_Carolina)) also have one of the oldest traditions of old-time music in the United States.

It is in this region that the music of Africa mixed most strongly with that of the British Isles. Records show that many African slaves (some of whom had been musicians in Africa or the Caribbean, where they had lived prior to the United States) were talented musicians, playing, as early as the eighteenth century, instruments such as the fiddle, [banjo](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Banjo), and piano. Slave documents and advertisements of the time often listed musical abilities of individual African slaves as a selling point, as slaves were frequently asked to perform for their masters.[[5]](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Old-time_music#cite_note-5)

The banjo, an essential instrument for Southern and Appalachian old-time music, is believed to have derived from a West African skin-covered lute; such instruments (generally with four strings) are still played today in [Senegal](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Senegal), [Gambia](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Gambia), [Mali](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mali), and [Guinea](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Guinea), where they are called *ngoni,* *xalam,* or various other names.

States of the [Deep South](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Deep_South) including [Alabama](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Alabama), [Mississippi](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mississippi), [Georgia](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Georgia_(U.S._state)), and [Louisiana](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Louisiana) also have their own regional old-time music traditions and repertoires. Premier old time banjoist Bob Carlin has authored **String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont** with a focus on non-Appalachian styles in that state. While the [music](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Music) of the Louisiana Cajuns has much in common with other North American old-time traditions it is generally treated as a tradition unto itself and not referred to as a form of old-time music.

**Texas and the West**

[Texas](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Texas) developed a distinctive twin-fiddling tradition that was later popularized by [Bob Wills](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Bob_Wills) as "Western swing" music. Fiddle music has also been popular since the 19th century in other Western states such as [Oklahoma](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Oklahoma) and [Colorado](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Colorado). The National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest has been held each year in Weiser, [Idaho](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Idaho) since 1953.

Oklahoma, with its high concentration of [Native American](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States) inhabitants, has produced some Native American old-time string bands, most notably Big Chief Henry's Indian String Band (consisting of Henry Hall, fiddle; Clarence Hall, guitar; and Harold Hall, banjo and voice), which was recorded by H. C. Speir for the Victor company in 1929.

**Canada**

Among the prominent styles of old-time music in Canada are the Scottish-derived tradition of [Nova Scotia](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nova_Scotia) (particularly [Cape Breton Island](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Cape_Breton_Island)), the French Canadian music of [Quebec](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Quebec) and Acadia, the old-time music of [Ontario](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ontario), and the prairie fiddling traditions of the [[Western Canada|central-western provinces. It is here (primarily in [Manitoba](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Manitoba) and [Saskatchewan](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Saskatchewan)) that the fiddle tradition of the Métis people is found. The traditional folk music of Newfoundland and Labrador, though similar in some ways to that of the rest of Atlantic Canada, has a distinct style of its own, and is generally considered a separate genre.

**Native American**

Several distinctive [Native American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States) and [First Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Nations_in_Canada) old-time traditions exist, including [Métis fiddle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9tis_fiddle) and [Athabaskan fiddle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athabaskan_fiddle).

[**Walker Calhoun**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walker_Calhoun) **(1918-2012)**

Several distinctive [Native American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States) and [First Nations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Nations_in_Canada) old-time traditions exist, including [Métis fiddle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9tis_fiddle) and [Athabaskan fiddle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athabaskan_fiddle).

Old-time music has also been adopted by individual [Native American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States) musicians including [Walker Calhoun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walker_Calhoun) (1918-2012) of Big Cove, in the [Qualla Boundary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qualla_Boundary) (home to the [Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Band_of_Cherokee_Indians), and Matthew Kinman of the Apache Tribe. Calhoun played three-finger-style banjo and sang in the [Cherokee language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherokee_language).

**The Old Originals Project: A Look Back after 50 years**

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Luther Davis and Huston “Hus” Caudill, at Luther’s house in Delhart, Virginia. Photo by Tom Carter, February 1974.

“The old tunes, like the *old originals*, they are all about gone.” This is the way fiddler N.H. Mills of Boones Mill, Virginia, put it to us that summer day in 1973. He was referring to the old-growth chestnut trees that had been killed off by disease during the 1920s and ‘30s, the “old originals” he called them. And I guess he considered the new music, whether it was bluegrass or country, as a similar kind of blight, slowly but surely killing off the old music, the fiddle tunes and songs he had known all his life. The tree analogy resonated with us, for back in the late 1960s and early ‘70s it did seem that the traditional music of the Southern mountains was slowly disappearing, replaced by new sounds coming in on radio, records, and TV. We were wrong, of course; the music seems stronger now than ever. But at the time, without the benefit of foresight, we felt a pressing need to record as much of it as we could before it all ended.

The New Lost City Ramblers led the way. Not only did they insert old-time music into the folk revival and introduce so many of us to the likes of Charlie Poole, Gid Tanner, and Uncle Dave Macon, but early on Mike Seeger and John Cohen began to seek out the performers on the old records, folks like Dock Boggs, Maybelle Carter, and Eck Robertson, and introduce them to city audiences. Others followed: Ralph Rinzler scouted out Clarence Ashley and in the process met Doc Watson; Charlie Faurot and Dave Freeman went looking for Ben Jarrell of DaCosta Woltz’s Southern Broadcasters and instead found his son Tommy. And then there was Alan Jabbour, whose fieldwork throughout the Upland South and particularly with fiddler Henry Reed not only fed material to his Hollow Rock String Band bandmates but also inspired others to do the same. The idea was to head out and visit traditional musicians, learn to play like them, and then bring the music back home to teach to your friends. Or in some cases, to stay on and live the mountain life! I’m thinking here of people like Ray Alden, Bruce Greene, Paul Brown, Andy Cahan, Alice Gerrard, Brad Leftwich, and Linda Higginbotham, to name just a few among many who became both players and collectors.

Fuzzy Mountain String Band, Duke University, Spring 1972. L to R: Malcolm Owen, Dave Crowther, Bill Hicks, Tom Carter, and Sharon Sandomirsky. Photographer not known.

I knew the drill a little from my college days in Rhode Island. I had done an ethnomusicology paper on a fiddler from Vermont and then visited and recorded a family of fiddlers in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, but the player/collector thing really started for me when I moved to Chapel Hill during the summer of 1971 to start folklore graduate school. I moved into an old house in Hollow Rock and began playing banjo with the Fuzzy Mountain String Band, a kind of loose jam band whose members were fully committed to the “find it and play it” ideal. This was what the Fuzzies were all about, and I spent many a long weekend with Malcolm and Blanton Owen at Tommy Jarrell’s, fetching Fred Cockerham for a session, eating tomato sandwiches at Kyle Creed’s store (and buying a banjo), sleeping in a freezing truck outside Taylor Kimble’s, and being surprised that the famous Gaither Carlton was eager to sit down and play with me. It was all great fun.

But I was in folklore school and a historian by nature, and for me there was an academic side to it as well. The music fascinated me, and I was curious about where it had come from, how it varied over time and space, and what it all meant. It wasn’t rocket science to figure out that Patrick County, Virginia, playing was not the same as music in Low Gap, North Carolina, or Galax, and it seemed like the place to start lay in mapping out the various local styles within the central Blue Ridge. And then there was the history thing, which was puzzling. Joe Caudill, an 87-year-old fiddler from Ennice, North Carolina, started it all by telling me that he didn’t play the old-time music that his father Sidney had played. “These new tunes,” Joe told me late in 1972, “they wasn’t in style when he was playing. Tunes we play now, back in his day, he didn’t play them.” By new tunes he meant dance pieces like “Sally Ann,” “Holliding,” and “Pretty Little Gal,” which he distinguished from older more complex tunes like “Piney Woods Girl,” “Belles of Lexington,” and “Waves on the Ocean.” I started asking more questions, visiting others like Joe’s older brother Huston and their neighbor Luther Davis, who backed up Joe’s chronology. It seemed that in the old-time music I knew there were both old and new tunes and I thought it would be worthwhile to figure out what had happened. Alan Jabbour had just introduced me to the Emmett Lundy recordings at the Library of Congress and these, made in 1941 when Mr. Lundy was in his 80s, provided the best evidence of what the old-style Galax playing was like. I just needed a better idea of what had changed when younger players, those I was meeting who were then in their 70s and 80s, had been learning.

My professor at the University of North Carolina, Dan Patterson, urged me to apply for a youth grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This would have been in the winter of 1972. I proposed a survey of musicians in a four-county study area along the central Blue Ridge, with a goal of identifying the main stylistic subregions while at the same delving more deeply into the music’s history. The plan was to systematically cover a defined geographic area, recording as many players as possible, and see what patterns emerged. Remarkably, I got the grant, and it was a lot of money for those days. I had included my friend and banjo mentor Blanton Owen in the project, so there was enough for both of us to move to the mountains –  Blanton to Sparta, North Carolina, where he could cover the west side of the study area, and me the east. I first lived “down the mountain” in a primitive log cabin (no water, power, or plumbing) in Claudville, Virginia, outside Stuart. But by late August of 1973 my wife and I had moved up to a real house in Meadows of Dan. Wearing overalls and heating with wood were mandatory!

By late summer Blanton and I were busy visiting and recording various musicians. We continued hanging out with Tommy, Fred, and Kyle, but branched out, following up leads on a wide range of players. Some of the most memorable ones for me are hardly household names today, but each brought something special to the project. There was Frank Dalton, my barber (he “cut by hat size”) and a fine clawhammer banjoman (this is how locals said it). Frank played G tunes, which was rare (he used the gGADE tuning) and dropped his thumb over to the third string which was also something we didn’t see very much. I also loved my sessions with Dent Wimmer and Sam Connor, who played some great music but also lived down the road in Floyd County from three bachelor brothers, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (seriously!). And then there were the Spanglers from Meadows of Dan. Wallace Spangler, who had died in 1926, had been sort of the Emmett Lundy of Patrick County. He left no recordings but was remembered in the music of players like Jesse and Pyrus Shelor of the famous Shelor Family, two sons, J.W. (Babe) and Charles (Tump), and a nephew Dudley (also called Babe). Tump was 90 and had a hard time playing but wanted to give me some of Wallace’s tunes, so he hummed or “doodled” them, and with his rich baritone voice these are some of my favorite recordings. And then through a wonderful local guitarist, Maggie Wood, I got hold of some home recordings of the two Babes. I convinced Dave Freeman to put them out on his County label.

I think one of the reasons I got the government money was because Rounder Records (who we knew from the Fuzzy Mountain days) had agreed to issue LPs of our fieldwork discoveries. The person we worked with was Bill Nowlin, and I must thank him for greatly supporting the project. With him we produced, using Mr. Mills’ tree reference for the title, the two-volume *The Old Originals: Old-time Instrumental Music Recently Recorded in North Carolina and Virginia* (Rounder 0057 and 0058) set. Volume 1 (Fig. 9) featured players I found in Patrick and parts of Floyd and Franklin counties, while Blanton assembled the second (Fig 10), covering Carroll and Grayson Counties.

*The Old Originals* records focused primarily on outlining and describing subregional traditions; the history question I tackled in a separate project which involved writing the notes for the Emmett Lundy LP I produced in 1976 with the eminent old-time music scholar Tony Russell. I’m not sure how it happened, but somehow Tony found out I was looking to issue these seminal recordings and he agreed to put them out on his London-based String label. The notes read like the Indiana University term paper they were, but basically in them I tried to explain how the music had changed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. I blamed it all on the banjo, which hasn’t always gone over so well with banjophiles (one almost punched me at the Breaking Up Winter festival!). But I was convinced then, and remain so today, that as the fiddle-banjo ensemble/band gained in popularity, older more individualized and complicated tunes slowly dropped away. These tunes didn’t fit either the more formulaic and rhythm-driven band style or the limited melodic capabilities of the fretless banjo. At the time, I didn’t have the musical training to back up my hypothesis, but years later I convinced my friend and fiddle-ologist Tom Sauber to help me lay it out more clearly in the essay “’I Never Could Play Alone’: The Emergence of the New River Valley String Band, 1875-1915,” in the book *Arts In Earnest: North Carolina Folklife* (Duke University Press 1990).

**Old Time Herald**

**Nashville Old-time String Band Association**

1. <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/hillbilly_music/biographies/polk-c--brockman>. Feb. 25, 2025. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)