THE GRAND OLE OPRY

THE EARLY YEARS, 1925-35

Charles K. Wolfe

THE GRAND OLE OPRY has been a recognised influence on American music for over fifty years. In this book, the origins and formative years of the Opry are studied in detail for the first time. Author Charles Wolfe presents a fresh historical appraisal of the radio show itself and develops detailed profiles of the men who made the Opry. Here are the most exhaustive accounts yet of colorful, legendary figures, like UNCLE DAVE MACON, the banjo-playing "Dixie Dewdrop"; DR HUMPHREY BATE, whose music paved the way for the Opry; UNCLE JIMMY THOMPSON, the white-bearded old fiddler who offered to "play all night" on the first Opry broadcast; DEFORD BAILEY, the diminutive harmonica wizard who was the show's first black star; and GEORGE D. HAY, the "Solemn Old Judge" who first conceived the idea of a Nashville country music radio show.

These and many other early performers are discussed here, in studies based on much new research and illustrated with many rare photographs and documents. The result is a readable yet comprehensive survey of the folk roots of the Grand Ole Opry, and a book which rewrites much of the accepted early history of America's most enduring country music radio show.

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THE GRAND OLE OPRY:
The Early Years, 1925-35

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OLD TIME MUSIC

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Brief sections of this book have appeared, in considerably altered form, in The Devil's Box, Journal of Country Music, JEMF Quarterly and Pickin'.

To Mary Dean and Stacey.

Cover photographs:
front cover, main picture the Ryman Auditorium, 1975; inset pictures Uncle Dave Macon (left) and Uncle Jimmy Thompson;
back cover, top left Dr Humphrey Bate and his Possum Hunters: Dr Bate, Staley Walton, Oscar Stone, Jimmy Hart, Walter Ligget, Oscar Albright; top right George D. Hay, the "Solemn Old Judge"; bottom left Deford Bailey; bottom right the Dixieliners: Sam McGee, Arthur Smith, Kirk McGee.

PREFACE

To a great extent, the history of the Grand Ole Opry is an excellent case of how history becomes transformed into mythology. Until recently, many of the accounts of the development of the Opry have helped to perpetuate a sophisticated form of folklore. Stories about the origin of the Opry have passed down in oral tradition through three and even four generations of Opry performers and fans. Each year leaves fewer and fewer of the veterans who know about the Opry's history firsthand, and each new generation forces the Opry's founding further and further into a dim past. Firsthand sources have become second-, third- and even fourthhand sources, and with each retelling stories are simplified and embroidered. For many of today's Opry performers and management, "the old days" connotes the '50s, not the '20s or '30s.

But the lore about the Opry is not my concern here. The transformation of the Opry from fact into myth is a fascinating process and a study of it will, in the end, tell us more about the cultural impact of the Opry on the South than any other sort of study. But even before that sort of study can be made, we must have some sort of a standard against which to measure the exaggerations of myth and lore. This book is an attempt to provide such a standard. It is an attempt to document, as accurately as possible, the historical story of the Opry during its first ten years. It is a book of dates and figures, chronologies, biographies and narratives. Its generalisations are cautious and tentative. Entirely too much study of folk music today - and especially country music - is long on generalisation and short on evidence. In this book, I have sought mainly to organise and present evidence; it is evidence that invites fuller, more comprehensive interpretation than I have been able to give it here.

There are both theoretical and pragmatic reasons for limiting the study to the Opry's first ten years. In a pragmatic sense, it is these first ten years that are most misunderstood and misrepresented by standard Opry histories; it is a period in the Opry ignored or glossed over by popular writers and media producers. But in a theoretical sense, it is widely recognised that the basic direction of country music did shift in the mid-'30s; it became less a folk music, less an instrumental music, less an informal and carefree music, and more of a commercial art. These changes were certainly reflected on the Opry. In fact, because of its peculiar economic structure, the Opry music was losing its "old time" quality even more suddenly. The country vocal era was upon the Opry by the mid-'30s, and the fiddle and stringband era was on its way out. From 1925 to 1935 was the "old time music" age of the Opry and for many traditional music enthusiasts it was the Opry's Golden Age.

July 1975
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people helped in the preparation and research for this book. Some of these are listed in the acknowledgements following individual chapters, but some special recognition must be given to certain individuals who helped advance the concept of the book as a whole.

Much of my original interest in the book was stimulated by a panel on the Opry at the 1975 Popular Culture Association meeting in St Louis, a panel composed of myself, Bill Malone, Richard Peterson and Bill Ivey. Many of the points developed in this book were discussed formally and informally by this panel, and it was finally Bill Malone who suggested the need for a musical history of the early Opry.

Help in research came from many directions: Danny Hatcher and Bob Pinson of the Country Music Foundation helped me find the right kind of material in the archives and suggested leads and contacts. Marice Wolfe at Vanderbilt made the vast collection of country music memorabilia deposited there available to me. Steve Davis and Bill Harrison were instrumental in certain stages of research. Members of the Tennessee Folklore Society gave advice and leads, and special thanks here to George Boswell, Dick Hulan and Ralph Hyde.

Special thanks must go to the many people who submitted to interviews for the book, and most of these are listed at the end of the appropriate chapters. Some must be singled out for extraordinary patience and cooperation: Mrs Alcyone Bate Beasley, who is the closest thing to an Opry historian we have; Sam and Kirk McGee, who humored me for hour upon hour; and Mrs Katherine Thompson, who went to great lengths to provide me with accurate information about her father-in-law, Uncle Jimmy Thompson.

Special thanks also to intermediaries like David Morton, who helped me piece together the chapter on Deford Bailey, and Lionel Delmore, who generously allowed me to quote from his father Alton Delmore's unpublished autobiography.

In the physical preparation of the manuscript, I must thank Bernice Burns for her constantly goodhumored cooperation; several of my graduate students who double-checked material in newspaper files; and the microtext staff of the MTSU library, who nursed the reader-printer machine through many hours of searching. Editor-publisher Tony Russell must be thanked for his willingness to take on so complex a project, and to whimper only occasionally in face of a barrage of revisions and addenda. My wife must be thanked for her untiring help in interviews and in collating material for the manuscript, as well as for helping proof it.

And finally, a special thanks to my parents, who taught me that a love for this kind of music was nothing to be ashamed of.

Numerous newspaper clippings are reproduced in this book but with the exception of the radio logs on pp 25-30 these have not been dated, nor their source identified, on the pages where they appear. This data follows here. (Items not identified are either adequately identified in nearby text or of unascertainable source or date.)

15: Nashville Tennessean, first week of November 1925. 36-7: all Nashville Banner: left to right, 3/18/28, 5/13/28, 5/27/28, 6/17/28, 8/26/28. 38: Banner, 9/23/27. 39: Banner, unknown date ('20s). 50: National Life magazine, 1936. 58: (left) Tennessean, 12/27/25; (right) Banner, January 1926. 59: Banner, 1/20/26. 68: Tennessean, 4/6/26. 72: (left) Tennessean, 11/4/25, (right) Tennessean, 11/6/25. 74: (top) Tennessean, 12/20/25, (bottom) Tennessean, 1/3/26. 80: Tennessean, 3/23/52. 110: Hickman County News, 7/15/26.

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Lionel Delmore 120 (bottom), 123 (top), 124
Sid Harkreader 68 (bottom)
Bill Harrison 66
L.A. Hayes 55
Dick Hulan 87
Mary Irvin 63 (top)
Jack Jackson 91
Les Leverett 88 (bottom)
Sam & Kirk McGee 90 (bottom), 113, 114
David Morton 84
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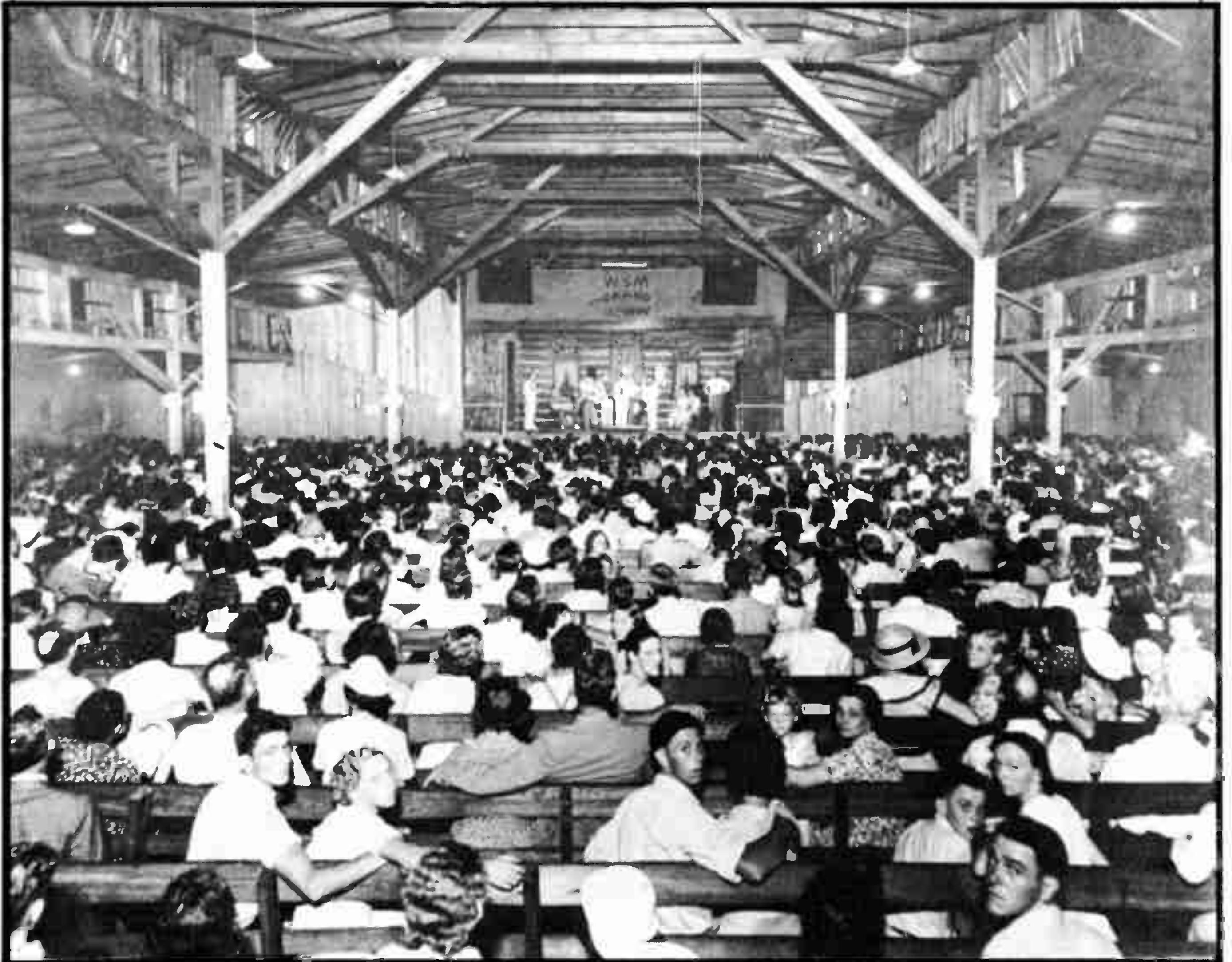
Smithsonian Institution 76, 81
Mrs Fred Thompson 56, 62
Vanderbilt University Joint University Library Special Collection 53; front cover, right inset picture
Charles K. Wolfe 10, 60 (left), 67, 78 (all), 85; record-label photographs (from discs at the Country Music Foundation); front cover, main picture
Mary Dean Wolfe 63 (bottom)

CONTENTS

'A Good-Natured Riot' 11
The Opry in Context: Nashville & Country Music 1926-30 31
Goin' Uptown: Dr Humphrey Bate 41
'Hello Folks! This is Old Uncle Jimmy Thompson' 53
The Great Opry Fiddlers 65
Take it Away, Uncle Dave! 69
Deford Bailey 81
Memories of the Early Opry 85
The Hoedown Bands 89
The Pickard Family 97
When the Skillet-Lickers Came to Nashville 101
The Original Nashville Sound: Nashville's First Recordings 105
The Dixieliners 109
The Transition Years 115
Record Listing 125



The old Dixie Tabernacle on Fatherland Street, one-time home of the Opry, c. 1936.

'A GOOD-NATURED RIOT'

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO LOOK AT THE GRAND OLE OPRY AS IT emerged through its first decade: as a radio show, and as a collection of talented musicians and singers. The distinction, of course, is arbitrary, for one cannot really separate a show's form from its content. But a division can be made for the purposes of study, and in the case of the Grand Ole Opry the "form" includes the complex of geographical, political, commercial and historical factors that caused a Nashville insurance company to found and sustain a controversial radio show. It also includes the public relations genius of a young announcer named George Hay, who established and defined the scope of the show. It must include the temper of the 1920s, the time that spawned such a show, and the way in which the people of that time looked at entertainment and mass media. And it must include the city of Nashville, a city which aspired to become a center of traditional culture and instead became a center of popular culture.

The content of the Opry must include a look at the musicians and their music. What was so special about this particular group of musicians that caught the imagination of the South, when similar groups of similar quality throughout the South dropped into obscurity? What did they think they were doing with their music? And with their show? Who were these legend-shrouded figures like Uncle Jimmy Thompson, Uncle Dave Macon, Dr Humphrey Bate? Most of the men themselves are now gone, but by using modern research techniques we can reconstruct their lives, their careers and their music. And the picture that emerges is fascinating.

In this chapter and the next, we will be examining some of the aspects of the Opry's form and genesis. We will attempt to study the Opry as a single entity, as a whole, and trace its direction and changes. Yet the Opry as a whole is primarily a radio show - a vague and amorphous thing. It is nothing but a collection of individuals and music. Thus for the bulk of this study we will concentrate primarily on individual musicians, with occasional side-trips into relevant historical events. We cannot hope to recapture the essence of the early Opry: its wonderful music. Much of that is, alas, gone for ever. But we can try to recapture the men who made the music, and hopefully gain some fleeting hints as to the nature of that music.

Everyone knows the prototype Opry story. In November 1925, brash young George Hay sits an old white-bearded man before one of his station's new-fangled carbon mikes. He lets him play a few fiddle tunes. The switchboard lights up and telegrams pour in. Uncle Jimmy Thompson plays for an hour, and across the country listeners at the old crystal sets suddenly perk up. Hay gets an idea: why not have a regular weekly show of this sort of stuff? Soon he is besieged by pickers and fiddlers of every variety; "we soon had a good-natured riot on our hands," he recalled. The show was off and running.

In many ways this story is pretty accurate. The founding of the Opry was a dramatic event. But it was dramatic in more complicated ways, and in more details, than even George Hay remembered.

NATIONAL LIFE AND WSM

The National Life and Accident Insurance Company (originally called the National Sickness and Accident Insurance Company) was founded in Nashville shortly after the turn of the century. Two of the founders were brothers Cornelius and Edward Craig, both from Giles County, Tennessee. The business was successful throughout the early years of the century, specialising in industrial health and accident insurance. Soon Cornelius Craig was elected president, and brought his son Edwin into the business after the younger man had graduated from Nashville's Vanderbilt University. In 1919 the company made an important decision to go into the life insurance business, and chose Edwin Craig to head this division. Both decisions were to be important later, for the life insurance move was in a sense to redefine the company's customer appeal.

In early 1924 the National Life Company moved into a new building located on 7th Avenue in downtown Nashville, only a few blocks from the state capitol on a hill commanding most of the town. By this time Edwin Craig had become fascinated by the phenomenon of radio; he had seen it grow into a nationwide fad during 1923, and was fascinated with its potential. He urged the company to start its own station, and to include a studio in the new building. The company's old guard saw little to the idea, but they finally gave in to Edwin Craig and let him have what one of them later referred to as "his toy". Work began on the station, to be located on the fifth floor of the building, in 1925; no expense was spared, and National Life intended, once it had committed itself, to create one of the finest stations in the country.

The station was seen not so much as a corporate investment as simply an elaborate advertisement. The company quickly associated itself with the new station's call letters: WSM meant "We Shield Millions". It wasn't at all uncommon to have one-advertiser stations in early radio; Sears' WLS ("World's Largest Store") was perhaps the most popular station in this regard. Many other stations were owned by newspapers. Edwin Craig's own rationale for starting the station was described by Powell Stamper in The National Life Story

ANNOUNCING OPENING OF WSM

MONDAY NIGHT

(October 5th)

Continuous Program

From 7 P.M. to 2 A.M.

WSM Completed Dream of National Life Insurance Company

WSM, super-power 1,000-watt radio broadcasting station, now being dedicated to Nashville, the home city of The National Life & Accident Insurance Co., is the completed dream of the big insurance company's executives, who when planning the erection of The National's beautiful home building, included in their plans the erection of one of the finest broadcasting stations the country affords.

Following the completion of The National Building, first steps were taken toward the building of the powerful station. Vice-President E. W. Craig (himself an ardent radio fan) was commissioned to begin the task of gathering together the best ideas of the radio world. The National Company earnestly devoted time and study to radio's advantages as exemplified by leading broadcasting stations in the United States, and many trips were made during the past year by Mr. Craig. Consultations were held with radio experts over the country and the best ideas of them all were collected for the purpose of incorporating them in the station that Nashville can proudly boast of as one of the very finest, equaled by only one other southern station, and stronger than eighty-five per cent of all broadcasting stations in the United States.

Many obstacles had to be overcome before a class B wave length could be secured. As there are no exclusive Class B wave lengths obtainable, through the courtesy and co-operation of Dr. James D. Vaughan, owner and operator of station WOAN, a class B station operating on 282.8 meters, at Lawrenceburg, Tenn., arrangement was made by which station WSM could divide time on the air. This proved to be a very fortunate arrangement, as a class B wave length is considered to be the highest class functioning under a standard set by the Department of Commerce at Washington.

Among the many difficult tasks encountered by The National's group was the working out of details in connection with the remote control system. This system was adopted for use by WSM, after investigation upon investigation had been made as to its practicability. The remote control system was chosen for increased efficiency and it is said to be the practice of the most recent radio installations.

Next to be considered was the selection of a suitable site for the giant towers and radio machinery. This had to be found in a section where water pressure is good and a three-phase electric current could be had, also the location had to be available for four private telephone circuits, thus the selection on Fifteenth avenue, south, near Ward-Belmont.

After much thought and toil all of the apparently insurmountable difficulties were mastered and as a result the very latest and most perfect transmitting equipment, one which will carry to the world the worthy presentation of all that Nashville stands for, is now being placed at the disposal of the capital city's as well as the state's best talent by an Insurance Company that has already made her home city famous.

The National Life & Accident Insurance Co.'s Field Force of more than 2,500 working in as many cities and towns in twenty-one states who have never faltered in their efforts to aid in building what is now known as one of America's strongest Life Insurance Companies, are elated over the great station and they are telling thousands daily of the station that is destined to put Nashville on the International Radio Map.

Western Electric Company to Install Loud Speakers for Public

Due to the limited number of persons able to be accommodated in WSM's auditorium, the station regrets that it cannot invite the general public to be present at the studios on opening night, October 5, but in order that those who have no receiving sets who desire to hear the program can do so, the Western Electric Company will install large loud speakers in windows of the National building and as many as care to can assemble in front of the building and enjoy the broadcast.

These horns or speakers forming the Western Electric public address system reproduce the music perfectly and can be heard for more than a block away. Mr. C. S. Powell, sales manager of the W. E. Company in Nashville, is installing the system, and those who would like to hear WSM's inaugural program or part of it may do so through these loud speakers.

After opening night WSM extends a cordial invitation to everybody to visit the new studio during broadcasting hours or between. A comfortable auditorium has been prepared to take adequate care of a normal audience, and visitors will be heartily welcomed after October 5 at any time to listen to the concerts being given by Nashville artists through WSM.

WSM Mammoth Dedication Program 7 P.M. to 2 A.M.

7:00 to 8:00 P. M.

1. Opening Announcement of [illegible] Mr. Edwin W. Craig, Vice-President of the National Life & Accident Insurance Co.
2. Prayer—Dr. George Stoves, Pastor of the West End Methodist Church.
3. Shrine Band—Playing the National Anthem.
4. Dedicatory Message—President C. A. Craig of the National.
5. Music—The Shrine Band.
6. Brief Message—Gov. Austin Peay.
7. Song—Joseph Tant McPherson, Concert Baritone, with [illegible], Piano Accompanist.
8. Brief Message—[illegible]
9. Song—Joseph Tant McPherson, [illegible]
10. Brief Message—[illegible]
11. Song—Joseph Tant McPherson, [illegible]
12. Brief Message—[illegible]
13. Instrumental Trio—[illegible] Olson, Cello; [illegible]

8:00 to 8:30 P. M.

Famous Fisk Jubilee Quartet of Fisk University. Brief Message by Dr. A. F. Shaw, [illegible]

8:30 to 9:00 P. M.

[illegible] Andrew Jackson [illegible]

9:00 to 10 P. M.

Knights of Columbus Vocal Quartet—Including [illegible]

[illegible]

Mrs. Alex Wagoner, Soprano Soloist.
Vincent Kuhn, Vocalist.

10:00 to 11:00 P. M.

Mrs. Daisy Hoffman, Concert Pianist and Duo-Art Artist.
Mrs. Thomas J. Malone, Jr., Concert Soprano.
Mr. Kenneth Rose, Violin Soloist and Director of the Violin Department at Ward-Belmont.
Mrs. Kenneth Rose, Concert Pianist and Member of the Ward-Belmont Faculty.
Mrs. Robert Caldwell, Contralto Soloist of the West End Methodist Church Choir.
Mr. Milton Cook, Baritone Soloist of the First Presbyterian Church Choir.

11:00 P. M. to 12:00 M.

Francis Craig's Columbia Recording Orchestra, with Vocal and Instrumental Soloists.

12:00 M. to 2 A. M.—Jamboree

Miss Bonnie Barnhardt, "The Lady of the Radio," Singer of Southern Melodies.
Jack Keefe, Popular Entertainer.
Joe Combs, Tenor Soloist.
Ted Stover, Syncopating Pianist.
W. J. Kechner, Saxophone Soloist.
Francis Craig's Columbia Recording Orchestra.
Other Features.

The National Life & Accident Insurance Company
(INCORPORATED)

(1968):

> "His insight as to the potential values of the station through such collateral benefits as extending company identity, service to the community, the influence of public relations, and supporting the company's field men in their relations with both prospects and policyholders, activated his interest and support of the idea." (121)

The last reason - support for the field men - was to become vastly important later with the founding of the Opry.

With Craig in charge of the radio project, then, station WSM went on the air on October 5, 1925. It began broadcasting with 1000 watts of power, making it one of the two strongest stations in the South, and stronger than 85% of all the other broadcasting stations in the country at the time (Nashville Tennessean, October 4, 1925). For a time WSM shared its wavelength

assignment (282.8 meters) with WOAN, a smaller station operating out of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee.* WSM also worked out an alternating schedule with two other stations in Nashville, finally giving it a schedule that featured Monday, Wednesday and Saturday nights. (For an account of WSM's relationships with other Nashville stations, see the following chapter.)

The first program broadcast by WSM featured Tennessee Governor Austin Peay, the mayor of Nashville Hilary Howse, National Life president Craig, and noted announcers from other parts of the country: Lambdin Kay of WSB, Atlanta; Leo Fitzpatrick of WDAF, Kansas City; and George D. Hay of WLS, Chicago. The musical entertainment scheduled included several light classical pieces, some quartet singing, the dance bands of Beasley Smith and Francis Craig, assorted tenors, sopranos and baritones, a quintet from Fisk, and a "saxophone soloist". Not a note of old time music was played.

For the first month of operation, the mainstay of the station was Jack Keefe, a popular Nashville attorney who announced, sang and played the piano. Keefe was responsible for broadcasting Dr Humphrey Bate and his band, Uncle Dave Macon and Sid Harkreader, though he did so in a rather random schedule. It was also Keefe who initiated an early "remote" broadcast from the Ryman auditorium in early November, when many of the WSM regulars performed for the policemen's benefit. Keefe was apparently very popular, for when WSM announced, a month later, that it had hired George Hay, it had to assure audiences that Keefe would still be heard on the station. Keefe left the station a few years later and went into politics.**

Other early WSM staff members included Miss Bonnie Barnhart of Atlanta, the program director who also doubled as pianist, singer and story hour hostess. The original engineers were Thomas Parkes of Nashville, John DeWitt, a Vanderbilt student, and Jack Montgomery, who had helped build the station. (Montgomery was also a relative of fiddler Uncle Jimmy Thompson, and is still on the WSM engineering staff.)

Thus by the end of October 1925 all the basic elements for the Opry were in place: a powerful radio station located in an area rich in folk tradition; a backing company with impressive assets and (with Edwin Craig at least) a dedication to principles of commercial radio; and an eager and enthusiastic audience just beginning to turn on to the benefits of a new entertainment medium. All these elements needed was a catalyst, and that they got when, on November 2, 1925, WSM hired George D. Hay to manage the station.

* By a curious coincidence, this station was operated by another man who was to have considerable impact on Tennessee folk music - Dr James D. Vaughan, a publisher of gospel music. Vaughan songbooks were well known throughout the mid-South, and the Vaughan Quartet was one of the most popular early gospel groups. For a time Vaughan even had his own gospel record label in the '20s. The full story of this man and his family, and their music, needs to be explored in detail.

** A favorite story of WSM veterans describes Keefe's departure from the station. One night while announcing, he was standing by for a network feed of an address by President Hoover. Just before the feed, not realising his mike was on, Keefe grumbled aloud, "Who in the hell wants to hear Hoover?" I haven't verified this story, but it has passed into Opry folklore anyway.

GEORGE HAY

Though it has been widely assumed that George Hay was a Southerner, he was in fact born in Attica, Indiana, in 1895. He began his career as a newspaper journalist, and by 1919 was working as a court reporter for the Memphis Commercial Appeal. He soon converted his court reporting into a humorous column called "Howdy Judge", which revolved around dialogues between a white judge and various black defendants. These skits were written in dialect, and are full of the ethnic stereotyping that characterised so much 19th-century vaudeville and blackface humor. The sketches proved immensely popular, and because of them George Hay, even though a young man of 28, acquired the nickname "Judge". Hay published them in book form in 1926 and probably converted many of them into skits which he performed with Ed McConnell on the early days of the Opry.

In 1923 the Commercial Appeal founded station WMC in Memphis, and Hay, somewhat against his will, was "elected" announcer and radio editor for the paper. Hay sensed that radio, like any other mass medium, developed its heroes through audience identification gimmicks. Unlike the newspaper, however, radio was an auditory medium, and thus auditory gimmicks should be stressed. He thus devised a highly stylised form of announcing that was characterised by a deep baritone "chant" introduced by the sound of a steamboat whistle. His toy steamboat whistle, which he named "Hushpuckiny", was used to announce the start of WMC's "entertaining trip down the Mississippi".*

Hay became so successful on radio that the next year, in 1924, he was hired by the Sears company to announce over their new station WLS in Chicago. Hay successfully made the move, and adapted his style; he traded his riverboat whistle for a more appropriate train whistle. He spoke glowingly of the "WLS Unlimited" going over "the trackless paths of the air". Soon he was simply referring to himself as "the solemn old Judge", and his popularity in 1925 was such that regular WLS artists who recorded had Hay introduce them on record. Thus on 1925 recordings by popular singers Ford & Glenn, and by dance band leader Art Kahn, Hay is heard blowing his whistle, chanting "WLS, Chi-ca-go", and introducing the musicians. Hay worked at WLS as an all-purpose announcer and was present when the station inaugurated its famous barn dance program in April 1924. Contrary to popular belief, Hay did not start the barn dance program, but was only its announcer.** He was, however, deeply impressed by the success of the program, and by the way it attracted such a large, loyal and primarily rural audience. He had been earlier impressed with this sort of music when, as a cub reporter, he had visited a backwoods community in Arkansas shortly after World War I; there he had attended a country hoedown in a log cabin. Now Hay saw this same spirit being successfully fitted to the new mass medium of radio, as throughout 1924 and 1925 the WLS barn dance became the first totally successful radio show featuring old time music.

Later in 1924 Hay was awarded a gold cup by the magazine Radio Digest for being the most popular announcer in the US; the winner of the award had been deter-

* Quoted from one of the first wire service stories about Judge Hay (Nashville Tennessean, June 27, 1926).

** See correspondence from various parties at WLS in Hay's file at the Country Music Foundation, Nashville.

"Howdy, Judge"

It has been a long time since readers of The Commercial Appeal have had the pleasure of renewing an acquaintance with George Hay, the "Solemn Old Judge" of years ago. Mr. Hay after leaving The Commercial Appeal went to Chicago and is now in charge of Station WSM at Nashville. He returned to Memphis yesterday to see his old friend, Judge Fitzhugh, again mount the city bench. The Commercial Appeal asked George to get back in harness and write the story. He did.

Judge L. T. Fitzhugh resumed his place in city court yesterday after an absence of four years. He was greeted with genuine friendship by officials, court attaches and the public, as Judge Clifford Davis turned over the gavel before Judge Malcolm R. Patterson, who administered the oath of office. An abundance of flowers acted as tokens of the esteem in which the judge is held. Judge Davis, in a charming greeting, paid tribute to the man who is beginning his third administration of the court which is perhaps nearest in contact with human nature in its most human aspects. The greetings were returned and a short speech outlining his plans for the next four years was made with especial reference to the curbing of pistol toting, the breeder of murders.

Explaining that his only desire was to administer justice with mercy as each case may present itself, Judge Fitzhugh adjusted his spectacles, thanked Mr. and Mrs. Memphis for their confidence in him and instructed the clerk to call the first case. The docket was slight. Old Man Winter has been severe and in spite of the holiday spirit of abandon order to a large extent seems to have prevailed in Memphis for the past few days.

"Two automobile concerns have recently announced that their cars are guaranteed to do 60 miles an hour," the judge pointed out in his warning to traffic violators, "but I would like to see motorists take their word for it and not try to test out new cars on the streets of this city."

"Boy, come in here," boomed the voice of Captain Joe Cole, bailiff of the court for lo these many years. He was referring to Archie Hemingway, a man of color, who eased up to the railing to take his medicine. Archie was of the opinion that one should make the week between Christmas last fully seven days under ideal circumstances. He had been successful even beyond his fondest hopes and was gathering the scattered remnants of what had once been his inner self when an officer came along to help him remember his own name.

"This boy was acting mighty strange on the street yesterday, your honor," advanced the officer. "He said he had been trying to corral a dozen white horses and they had turned out to be mules."

"Archie, what have you to offer in the way of defense?" queried the court.

"Yassuh."

"Go ahead and tell me all about it."

"Dey ain't much to it, jedge. I wus tryin' de bes' I knowed t' git home an' it seemed like eve'ything wus in de way.

"Where do you live?"

"I lives in Binghamton. Runs a fahm for a gen'man an' I come t' town t' git me some supplies."

"Did you get them?"

"Yassuh, but it turned out to be de kin' dat makes a rabbit spit in a bull dawg's face. Deah I wus an' heah I is, jedge. It's New Yeah's an' I wants to kit home to wuk."

"Will you stay home for another year?"

"Suttinly will, yo' honah. Done made up my min' to do dat ve'y thing."

"All right I'll give you a chance. Watch your step."

"Yassuh. Sho do thank yo', boss."

Lee Morris, negro, of Marvel, Ark., took his years savings, which amounted to $70, and determined to see all of the world that Memphis had to offer. He was in a charitable mood when he determined to seek a night's lodging at all costs. Fortunately for Lee, the costs were heavy and saved him from a further sojourn in a city which handed out its cold fist to him. Somebody separated him from his bank roll. The police have their ideas about who did it. The plot thickened and the state will have to unravel the mystery when the grand jury looks into it.

There were others who had celebrated during New Year's. Judge Fitzhugh was in his old time form and gave them his understanding ear. Some fell by the wayside. Others were turned loose. The point is that city court is starting a new year. The trial of human ..., as it appears under trying circumstances, often leads into the court. Captain Cole is rounding out a long service. May he continue in his own way to handle the prisoners as the judge looks them over with kindly, yet keen eyes.

"Oh yes, oh yes this honorable city court, City of Memphis, is now adjourned until 2 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

G. D. H., "Solemn Old Judge."

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mined by votes of radio fans around the country. At this point in his career, it is important to note that, while Hay was the announcer of the WLS barn dance, he was by no means exclusively associated with it, or with country music. He was simply a successful and innovative announcer who had captured the imaginations of thousands of Americans.

Hay was a guest of honor at the October 5, 1925 ceremonies opening WSM and apparently impressed the owners of the station very much. As we have seen, National Life had set up WSM as a deluxe station, and they were prepared to spare no expense in making it a nationally known station in as short a time as possible. Thus it was natural that they should go after one of the leading announcers in the country, George Hay. There is no indication in the newspaper releases of the time that WSM went after Hay because he was an expert in barn dance programs; he was apparently not hired with the intention that he start a country music show. WSM probably offered Hay the job because he had just been awarded the Radio Digest cup and because he was already known to Tennesseans through his work in Memphis. Hay, for his part, saw the move as a step up: he was moving from announcer to "radio director in charge" of the entire station. He would be free to build his own program image and develop his own line of programming. The

George Hay on WLS.

fact that Hay had had considerable experience in dealing with the rural audiences of the Sears station, WLS, was not lost on the National Life Company, who were becoming very interested in rural and working-class customers.

Hay accepted the new job on November 2, 1925, and arrived in Nashville to take over a week later. He found a station that was directing its programming at the rather sophisticated tastes of Nashville itself. Some traditional music was occasionally heard, but a great deal of the fare was light or semi-classical music, dance bands and ladies' string trios. Given WSM's broadcast range potential, which on clear nights could reach both coasts, Hay perceived that a much vaster audience than the Nashville urban area could be reached if the right appeal was made. He reportedly told Eva Thompson Jones that he wasn't entirely satisfied with the programming direction of the station and asked for suggestions.*

He soon decided to expand the audience appeal to include the rural South. He himself changed whistles again, going back to the kind of steamboat whistle he had used in Memphis. This whistle he named "Old Hickory" in honor of Nashville's hero Andrew Jackson. He noted with interest the appeal of hillbilly artists like Dr Bate, Uncle Dave Macon and Sid Harkreader as they played on WSM. (Documentary evidence proves that at least these three musicians had appeared on WSM well before Hay

* This is reported by Don Cummings in The Birth of the Grand Ole Opry.

WSM ENGAGES GEORGE D. HAY

"Solemn Old Judge" Will Be Director in Charge of Local Station.

FAMOUS ANNOUNCER

Jack Keefe Also Will Remain at Microphone — Programs Will Be Greatly Enlarged.

BEGINS NEXT MONDAY

George D. Hay, "the Solemn Old Judge" of the radio world and internationally known master of the microphone, is coming to Nashville next Monday to be radio director in charge of the National Life and Accident Insurance Co.'s broadcasting station WSM. Mr. Hay, who was among other celebrities announced from the local station on its opening night, brings with him something better than a national reputation—that is an international one.

He first came into prominence as the "Solemn Old Judge" when he was down in Dixie." While he and his famous steamboat whistle were on a visit in Chicago, Station WLS of Sears, Roebuck & Co., grabbed him for her own, and since then George and his whistle have become a nightly part of every radio fan's travel through the ether.

Last year Mr. Hay was awarded the beautiful gold cup given by the Radio Digest, Illustrated, for being the most popular announcer in the United States, as decided upon by the votes of radio fans. His unique station signature, his splendid voice, and his lovable personality, have all been influential in making him one of the outstanding figures in the radio world.

KEEFE STILL ON JOB.

The coming of "Judge" in no way affects the position of Jack Keefe, present beloved announcer, who is rapidly gaining himself a national reputation. Jack will be on the air as much as formerly, but the pressing nature of his law practice prevents him from giving the additional time to the station that will be required in its plans for more frequent and more elaborate programs.

The need for someone to take entire executive charge of the station in all its phases has arisen through the desire to get a larger service from the splendid investment of equipment and personnel. There is increasing demand of Station WSM for an organization of increased power, and hence the need for a man like the "Solemn Old Judge" who will devote all of his time and attention to preparing and broadcasting the best possible programs for the patrons of the station. Jack Keefe fans will continue to pour in their letters and telegrams of appreciation from all parts of the country, and George D. Hay fans will merely change the addresses on their epistles from Chicago to Nashville. With two such announcers at the microphone, Station WSM will have one of the best, if not the very best, air services in the entire country. And with George D. Hay as radio director in charge, the entire organization will be an efficiently functioning unit.

arrived in town.) Thus when, on November 28, 1925, Hay sat Uncle Jimmy Thompson down before the WSM microphones to play for two hours, he should not have been as surprised as he says he was at the response. True, telegrams and 'phone calls poured into the station, many requesting special numbers. But this same syndrome had already occurred at almost every other station in the area when they programmed old time music; it had happened with WLS in 1924, with WSB in Atlanta in 1923, and with several other stations. Hay, a nationally known announcer, must have been aware of this sort of possible reaction. He had also had time to note the kind of response Dr Bate and Uncle Dave Macon had gotten for their playing. Uncle Jimmy's response was probably more dramatic and more extensive, but it was part of a pattern. Probably the main effect of the November 28 program was to verify in Hay's mind that the audience for old time music existed in the mid-South as much as it did in Georgia or the Midwest. He could well have exaggerated his surprise at the response for two reasons. First, it was a good story and could be dramatised effectively in press releases; second, it could help convince a reluctant National Life and a skeptical Nashville that old time music filled a definite need for "the people".

Uncle Jimmy played on November 28 without being formally scheduled through newspaper listings or announcements. (The November 28 date is verified only through a December 26 Tennessean story which mentions that Uncle Jimmy had made his first WSM appearance almost one month earlier.) The barn dance program was thus not formally established on that night, though Uncle Jimmy returned the next week to play again. In neither case did Hay bill it, through the newspapers, as any sort of special old time program. Probably during December the idea for such a program was taking shape in Hay's head. It may have been during this time that Hay told Obed Pickard's brother that "he was going to start something like the National Barn Dance in Chicago and expected to do better because the people were real and genuine and the people really were playing what they were raised on."* This quote, presuming it is accurate, gives us our clearest notion yet of what Hay was planning to do with the barn dance.

Whatever the case, Hay's formal announcement of the establishment of a regular program devoted to old time music and to be held on Saturday nights came late in December 1925 when the station announced: "Because of this recent revival in the popularity of the old familiar tunes, WSM has arranged to have an hour or two every Saturday night, starting Saturday, December 26." (Tennessean, December 27, 1925). The Grand Ole Opry, as a deliberately structured old time music show broadcast regularly over WSM, would thus have to date from December 1925.

HAY AND FOLK MUSIC

None of this, though, tells us much about Hay's real motives for starting the barn dance program. What his own personal attitude toward old time music? How did he see such music functioning in his world of 1925? Did he go to old time music simply because it was proving popular across the South and the nation as a whole during the mid-'20s? Or did he go to it, like Henry Ford, out of a genuine idealism about the music's ability to reflect and sustain traditional American values? Or was he simply pragmatic, going to the music because he felt it would attract the kind of audience National Life wanted to sell insurance to? Since virtually all the statements we have from Hay are in the nature of press releases or public posture statements, it may be very hard to determine what he really thought about the music. But certain patterns do emerge, even from the public statements.

Judging from the contemporary newspaper accounts of the early Opry, which were obviously supplied by the station and in the early days probably written by Hay himself,** Hay originally tried to promote the music because it was so popular and so commercially successful. He suggests this in his first public statement about old time music, his December 27, 1925 announcement that Uncles Jimmy Thompson and Dave Macon would play. "Old tunes like old lovers are the best, at least judging from the applause which the new Saturday night feature at Station WSM receives from its listeners in all parts of the country, jazz has not completely turned the tables on such tunes as 'Pop Goes the Weasel' and 'Turkey in the Straw.' America may not be swinging its partners at a neighbor's barn dance but it seems to have the habit of clamping on its ear phones and patting its feet as gaily as it ever did when old-time fiddlers got to swing." The public, thus, is demanding the old time tunes. But the proper citizens of Nashville still resented the idea of having hillbilly music on their new station, and two months later (Tennessean, February 26, 1926) the tone of Hay's press release had become even more apologetic. "Much has been said for and against the old time tunes but the fact remains they are taking the country by storm. There is some delightful little folk strain that brings us all back to the soil, which runs through each of the numbers." The appeal of the music cannot be denied; like jazz, its appeal is emotive, but unlike jazz it plays on the healthy and natural, as opposed to base, emotions. But here again popularity is the central defense of the music. This was made evident in an interview with Hay published in the July 7, 1929 issue of the Knoxville (Tennessee) News-Sentinel. Here Hay is stressing the number of musicians who come to the show wanting to play, and he concludes by saying: "There are so many we just can't stop. In fact, we've been expecting that each year would be the last of this series. But we can't give it up. There's too much of a demand for the old folks and their tunes."

But if the contemporary accounts suggest that Hay started the Opry primarily because the people demanded it, there are also hints that he saw the music in more philosophic terms. At first Hay seemed to make no clear distinction between "old time tunes" and "folk tunes": the former he seemed to see as any older, 19th-century, pre-jazz-age music, with its appeal not so much to

* Ed Kahn, "Tapescript: Interview with Charlie, Bubb, and Lucille Pickard", JEMFQ IV:4, no. 12 (December 1968), 134.

** There is no definite proof of this, but in several instances wording in early Tennessean press releases is almost duplicated in Hay's later history of the Opry. In any event, the releases were bound to reflect Hay's feelings, since he was the station manager and responsible for them. The most useful statements come from the Sunday papers, when they devote an entire column to previewing the week's fare on WSM and commenting on it.

cultural geography as to simple nostalgia. (This philosophy was later evidenced by the fact that the early Saturday-night programs contained band music, barbershop quartets, bird imitators and other acts that were "old time" mainly by virtue of their nostalgia content.) But gradually Hay began to focus his definition of what he meant when he said "Keep it down to earth". He began to use the term "folk" to describe some of his musicians; Uncle Dave, in an April 1926 story (Tennessean), sang "folk-songs" which seemed "to strike home". Even the February 1926 story cited above mentions a "folk strain" that "brings us all back to the soil". A year later a release refers to the fact that "the old time tunes of the Tennessee hills are presented the way they were handed down through the generations" (Tennessean, November 27, 1927). The 1929 Knoxville story insists that "the songs they play - and at times sing - are known only to the backwoods region from which they come. They're the American folk tunes of Tennessee." A 1931 story by Hay refers to "old hill-billy tunes, as they are called" which "have been handed down through many generations. . . . Of course, the tunes are distinctly elemental in construction." (Banner, February 22, 1931)

But Hay's vision of himself as a preserver of American folk culture did not really emerge fully until after the Opry had become an established institution. In his book, written in the late '40s, he stresses this idealistic motive for starting the show. "Radio station WSM," he writes, "discovered something very fundamental when it tapped the vein of American folk music which lay smoldering and in small flames for about three hundred years." Later he echoes the old Ford philosophy of folk music echoing basic American values. "After all, we try to keep /the Opry/ 'homey'. . . . Many of our geniuses come from simple folk who adhere to the fundamental principles of honesty included in the Ten Commandments. The Grand Ole Opry expresses these qualities which come to us from these good people." Hay asserts that he had perceived the value of traditional music as early as 1919, when he made his trip into the Arkansas Ozarks. Perhaps so, but his posture in the earliest days of the Opry was to maintain hillbilly music was significant simply because it was popular; the idealism came after the program had established itself.

From his references to "Turkey in the Straw" and "Pop Goes the Weasel", it might seem that Hay had a rather superficial notion of what real folk music was. He might have had originally, but his years of experience in working with musicians on the show - who were, before 1930, nearly all amateur native Southerners - soon taught him a great deal about the folk transmission process. Evidence suggests, in fact, that Hay understood the full dimension of Southern folk tradition better than did most of the respectable "academic" folklorists of the day. Scholars like Cecil Sharp, for instance, were willing to allow into the folk canon only songs passed totally by oral tradition down through generations, and emphasised only the vocal music. Modern folklorists are just beginning to appreciate the full extent to which popular Tin Pan Alley music of the 19th century passed into oral tradition in the South. But Hay knew it. "The line of demarcation between the old popular tunes and folk tunes is indeed slight," he wrote in his history. Later, as cowboy singers and barbershop quartets crowded on to the Opry, Hay expanded his definition of "folk" music to include folk music from areas outside the South; "any folk tune is okay," he said.

His notion of folk music expanded even further in the '40s and '50s, as the Opry became more commercial and began using more composed songs. During this time the show was often introduced as featuring genuine folk music or "music in the folk tradition". This became especially noticeable in the early '40s after NBC began broadcasting an Opry segment nationwide, and when the Armed Forces Radio Services (AFRS) began to syndicate the show to a nationwide audience. The term "folk" could make the music more acceptable to a mainstream audience; it certainly had better connotations than the adjectives "hillbilly" or "old time".

Whatever he personally thought about the music, Hay sensed that it was very popular with Southern audiences and sought ways to exploit this popularity. Others who had exploited the music had done so by creating hillbilly stereotypes. In California the Beverly Hillbillies were "discovered" rusticating up in the mountains; in Washington, Al Hopkins and his Hill Billies dressed in overalls; in Atlanta a sophisticated jazz-tinged fiddler named Clayton McMichen was made lead fiddler in a band called the Skillet-Lickers and participated in skits about moonshine and "revenooers". Thus by the late '20s Hay had plenty of patterns to follow as he decided to start image-building for his Opry musicians.

It is interesting to trace Hay's deliberate attempt to "rusticate" the show. Very few of the show's regular members originally fit the hillbilly stereotype (nor, in fact, did most of the successful country entertainers of the 1920s). Many of them worked in Nashville at lower- and middle-class trades; others were farmers from the Davidson County middle-Tennessee area, of the soil but hardly cut off from the world. They were not professionals by any means (except Uncle Dave), but few of them were naive hill folk preserving an exclusive and rare heritage. That is, until Hay began building the Opry image. An important first step was his renaming the barn dance the Grand Ole Opry in 1927. Unlike the rather neutral term "barn dance", "Grand Ole Opry" suggested a deliberate rustic burlesque of formal and classical music. Hay also came up with colorful names for the Opry stringbands; Paul Warmack's band became the Gully Jumpers, and the Binkley Brothers stringband became the Binkley Brothers Dixie Clodhoppers. He devised tag lines to be associated with each performer: Deford Bailey, "the harmonica wizard"; "Sam and Kirk McGee, from sunny Tennessee"; Uncle Dave Macon, "the Dixie Dewdrop". He also changed the physical appearance of the show. Early photos of the Opry players - such as the 1925 one of Dr Bate, or the one of the entire cast made in 1928 - show them dressed in business suits. But the picture of Dr Bate made in 1933 shows him in a cornfield dressed in overalls, and the next Opry group shot shows most of the gang in hats and overalls. Alcyone Bate Beasley, daughter of Dr Humphrey Bate, has recalled that she hardly ever saw anyone not in a suit on the early programs, and that the costumes came in when the groups started touring and playing a lot before live audiences.

In addition to creating images through names and visuals, Hay began to stress the hillbilly image in print in the late '20s. The July 1929 Knoxville News-Sentinel story, which was probably syndicated nationally, stated that "every one of the 'talent' is from the back country," and the music represents "the

The earliest known group photograph of the Opry cast, about 1928. Key: 1, Obed Pickard; 2, Roy Hardison (Gully Jumpers); 3, Obed Pickard Jr; 4, Charles Arrington (Gully Jumpers); 5, Bill Etter (Crook Bros); 6, Clarence Minton (Crook Bros); 7, Burt Hutcherson (Gully Jumpers); 8, Julian Sharp (Poplin's Band); 9, William (Bill) Batts (Poplin's Band); 10, Matthew Crook (Crook Bros); 11, Pete Batts (Poplin's Band); 12, Fred Shriver; 13, Claude Lampley (Fruit Jar Drinkers); 14, Staley Walton (Possum Hunters); 15, Tom Givans (Crook Bros); 16, Oscar Albright (Possum Hunters); 17, Homer Smith; 18, Howard Ragsdale (Fruit Jar Drinkers); 19, Walter Ligget (Possum Hunters); 20, Jimmy Hart (Possum Hunters); 21, Oscar Stone (Possum Hunters); 22, Harry Stone (WSM announcer); 23, Mrs Obed Pickard; 24, Mamie Ruth Hale; 25, Theron Hale; 26, Paul Warmack (Gully Jumpers); 27, Ed Poplin; 28, Ed Poplin Jr; 29, Dr Humphrey Bate; 30, Herman Crook (Crook Bros); 31, Ruth Pickard; 32, Arthur Smith; 33, George Wilkerson (Fruit Jar Drinkers); 34, Elizabeth Hale; 35, George D. Hay. (Numbering and identification by Alcyone Bate Beasley.) Note, behind the curtains, the glass panel through which audiences viewed the early shows.

unique entertainment that only the Tennessee mountaineers can afford." He went out of his way to stress the genuine picturesque qualities of Uncle Jimmy Thompson and Uncle Bunt Stephens. But ironically the greatest push toward rustication came in the early '30s, when some of the Opry's genuine traditional musicians were being replaced by fulltime professionals. Also influencing this move to promote a rural hillbilly image was the beginning of Opry tour groups, and the increasing movement toward appealing to the live studio audience as well as the radio audience. By 1935 the image of the Opry as a rustic hillbilly show was well entrenched.

THE OPRY'S FIRST YEAR

Part of the image that Hay fostered for the Opry was that the show was completely informal and improvised, that every Saturday night a bunch of good ole boys would bring their fiddles and banjos into the big city and sit around picking tunes. Hay in 1931, for instance, talked about "the informality with which the program is presented. It is a distinctly human affair which may be termed a big get-together party of those who listen in. Messages have been announced which have brought old friends and even members of families together after absences of many many years" (Banner, February 22, 1931). By some standards, the Opry was probably informal and loosely structured; for instance, historians report that any sort of ad lib talk was virtually banished from NBC by early 1927.* But as early as January 1926

*See Erik Barnouw, A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. 1 (Oxford Univ. Press, New York, 1966).

the program was pretty tightly structured, to the point of knowing what artist would be on at what time, and for what duration. The programs were mapped out well enough in advance that Hay was able to provide to the two Nashville papers a detailed preview of the coming week's programs for publication in Sunday's papers. These preview columns are among the best documentary sources for information about the shows and artists, and form the basis for much of this next section.

The chart reproduced here, then, shows exactly who was scheduled to play on the Saturday night "barn dance program" during each week of the year 1926. One of the things that becomes immediately evident is that the program was not initially confined to old time music. In fact, the term "barn dance" seems to have been used as a general descriptive term for elements on the Saturday night program, rather than the name of the program itself. In news listings in early 1926, the show is sometimes referred to as simply as "the Saturday night program", "general good time and barn dance party" (January 9), a program that "includes barn dance features" (May 7), and as late as September, "the popular and barn dance program" (September 4, 11). These titles indicate that the makeup of the show was by no means fixed throughout most of the year. Though hillbilly music was emphasised often, the Saturday night program featured popular music of all types. For instance, the jazz bands of Dutch Erhart and Harry Bailey, as well as a dixieland combo called the Blue Grass Serenaders (from Gallatin), appeared often. Other band music came from appearances by the Castle Heights Military Academy Orchestra and the Saxophone Sextette from the Tennessee Industrial School. There were popular tenors like Jack Eagan, Marshall Polk and Little Jack Little, as well as popular pianists like Doc Byrd Jr, the Wandering Pianist. Happy Jack Haines and announcer Jack Keefe often played and sang as well. Hawaiian music was very much in evidence, with groups like Fields and Martin and the Silver String Hawaiians, and barbershop and gospel quartets often appeared.* Either George Hay at this time did not have a clear notion of what hillbilly music was, or he didn't yet have the courage to schedule a full night of hillbilly programming. But the early Opry was by no means as "pure" as some popular notions would have it.

The following chart lists the old time artists appearing on WSM's Saturday night barn dance program during 1926. Source for the information is the radio logs of the Nashville Tennessean and Banner. In addition to the Saturday evening listings, which were usually quite detailed, WSM released a "preview" of their week's activities each Sunday. These two sources of information have been coordinated with other material drawn from interviews and other data. One word of caution: the fact that artists were scheduled to appear does not necessarily mean that they did, and during this time the barn dance schedule was still informal and flexible and performers might well have been added on the spur of the moment. However, this is the only source of information we have, and we must assume that it reflects at least the relative popularity of artists involved.

* A serious case could be made, though, for quartet singing and Hawaiian music being a legitimate part of hillbilly music; Hawaiian music was especially influential on guitar styles of the '20s and '30s, and most record companies routinely released gospel quartet singing in their hillbilly and old time series.

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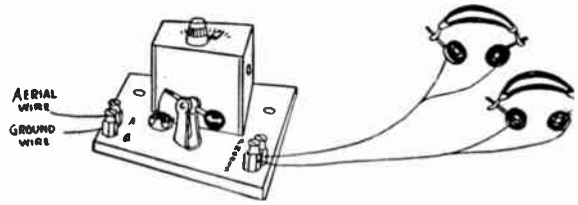

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KEY: an underlined name indicates a first appearance on the program. Numbers in parenthesis indicate time-length of each artist's segment of program. For instance, Bandy (1) means that Bandy was scheduled to play one hour. For obscure artists instrumentation is given: (f) = fiddle; (bj) = banjo; (g) = guitar; and (Fh) = French harp. All names given verbatim as in source.

UJT = Uncle Jimmy Thompson; UDM = Uncle Dave Macon; Bate = Dr Humphrey Bate's old time band; DfB = Deford Bailey; OP = Obed Pickard.

JANUARY 2 Happy Jack Haines, Bate (1)
9 UJT, Charlie the French Harp King ("general good times and barn dance party")
16 UJT, Gallatin Blue Grass Serenaders (entire show: 2 hours)
23 Wild Cat Tom's fiddlers (1), Happy Jack Haines ($\frac{1}{2}$), Nolen Dawson and barn dance team, UJT (1)
/Opposite on WDAD this night: Bate (2)/
30 Dixie Volunteers (dir. by Tom Ridings), UJT, Jack Eagan (vocal), Bate, Fulton Mitchell (f)

FEBRUARY
6 UJT, J. Crook, Wm. Baker (f) with Miss Nell Clark, Bate
13 UJT, M.G. Smith (f) and W.L. Totty (bj), Chesterfield Four (vocal)
20 UJT (1), Wild Cat Tom's Fiddlers (1), Bate ("and others")(2)
"Barn dance program and other features (about four hours)."
27 UJT (1), O.L. Wright's barn dance orchestra, Bate (1) *

MARCH 6 UJT (1), A.J. Brady and barn dance team of Adairville, Ky., Bate
13 UJT (1), Henry L. Bandy, Petroleum, Ky., Carthage fiddlers /Robert King (f), Jerry Gardenhire (Fh), T.K. Fort (g), J.F. Reed (g)/, Bate
20 UJT (1), Harry Baily's Southern Serenaders, Bate
27 UJT (1), J.R. Trout's barn dance orch from Gallatin, J.W. Deason's barn dance orch, Bate (1)

APRIL 3 Carthage fiddlers under direction of Jerry Gardenhire, Macie Todd's string trio from Murfreesboro, Marshall Clayburn (f) with E.D. Haines (?), Bate (1). /UJT in Missouri for fiddling contest./
10 UJT (1), Winchester String Band, Harry Baily's Southern Serenaders, Wild Cat Tom's Fiddlers, Bate (1)
17 UJT (1), Henry Bandy (f, 1$\frac{1}{2}$), Marshall Clayburn ($\frac{1}{2}$), UDM (1)
23 UJT, Marshall Clayburn (f), Henry Bandy (f), UDM

MAY 1 UJT, UDM, Carthage fiddlers, Henry Bandy (f), Bate
8 UJT, Bate, Obed Pickard. Show to "include barn dance features".
15 UJT (1), Bate ($\frac{1}{2}$), UDM (1)
22 Jack Keefe (v), OP (f,g,Fh), Smith County String trio of Chesnut Mound, Tennessee, Henry Bandy (f), Chester Zahn ("ukelele artist"), Bate, UDM
29 (Classical music until 10:30.) Bate ($\frac{1}{2}$), William Miller (Haw'n g, $\frac{1}{2}$), UDM ("banjoist and character singer", $\frac{3}{4}$)

JUNE 5 UDM, Bate's Hawaiian band, Smith County string trio, OP, Keefe
12 ("Saturday night program will include many variety acts.") Keefe, OP, Bate's Haw. orch., Cliff Curtis and John Brittain, harm. players, Blue Grass Serenaders
19 UDM ($\frac{1}{2}$), Carthage Quartet ($\frac{1}{2}$), Bate ($\frac{3}{4}$), Deford Bailey ($\frac{1}{4}$), J.J. Lovel (bj) and Perry DeMoss (f)($\frac{1}{2}$), Keefe ($\frac{1}{2}$)
26 UDM ($\frac{3}{4}$), Bate ($\frac{1}{2}$), Keefe ($\frac{1}{2}$), Curtis and Brittain (fh), Henry Bandy (f), Marshall Polk (v), DfB ($\frac{1}{4}$)

JULY 3 UJT, UDM, Bate, DfB, Keefe
10 UJT, UDM, OP, Carthage Quartet (spirituals), Henry Bandy, J.B. Carver (f) with Elmer Coffey (bj), DfB
17 UDM, UJT, Bate, J. Frank Reed (f) with A.C. Dukes (g) of Donnelson, Tenn., Polk (v), DfB, Keefe
24 UJT, DfB, OP, Crook Brothers, Neelds Joy Boys, Polk (v), Fulton Mitchell and his Old Hickory orchestra
31 Keefe, Bate, DfB, OP ("with Mrs Pickard at the piano"), UJT ($\frac{1}{2}$), Silver String Hawaiians, J. Frank Reed (f) with A.C. Dukes (g)

AUGUST 7 Old Hickory orchestra, DfB ($\frac{1}{4}$), Crook Bros ($\frac{1}{2}$), Keefe, UDM with Sid Harkreader ($\frac{1}{2}$)
14 Not available
21 Not available
28 Not available

* On Monday, March 1, Uncle Bunt Stephens made a special broadcast not part of the barn dance. Uncle Bunt had recently won a blue ribbon playing for Henry Ford, and WSM publicity billed him as "world's greatest old-time fiddler".

SEPTEMBER

4	"Popular and barn dance program" - no details available
11	Not available
18	Not available
25	(Special remote broadcast from Nashville State Fair grounds.) Bate, Sid Harkreader (f) with Hick Burnett (g), UJT, DfB, OP, Silver String Hawaiians

OCTOBER

2	Not available
5	Special Tuesday-night one year anniversary program, with many artists including the following old time performers: OP, UJT, Bate, Silver String Hawaiians
9	Not available
16	Not available
23	Henry Bandy (f), UDM, Bill Barret (f) with Walter Ligget (g), OP, Happy Jack Haines
30	("many new features which have not yet been broadcast":) Mazy Todd's string trio of Readyville, Theron Hale and daughters Elizabeth and Mamie Ruth, Evening Star Quartet, W.G. Hardison (f) with W.R. Hardison (bj), Bate, DfB, OP, Charlie the French harp king

NOVEMBER

6	Special Shrine minstrels, Smith County String trio, Little Jack Little, Municipal Five
13	("a few additional features") Will Barret (f) with Walter Legget (bj), Theron Hale, Binkley Bros., Fields and Martin (Haw. guitarists)
20	(Regular program with "several new artists":) no details available
27	UJT, others unknown

DECEMBER

4	UJT, OP, Crook Bros., Binkley Bros., DfB

On December 5, WSM ceased broadcasting for the year in order to install a new 5000-watt transmitter.

1.16.26

Saturday.

6:30 p. m.—Concert by Francis Craig and his orchestra will be broadcast from the Hermitage Hotel (1½ hours).

7:00 p. m.—WSM bedtime story interlude.

8:00 p. m.—Program will be given by Uncle Jimmy Thompson (2 hours).

10:00 p. m.—Gallatin Blue Grass Serenaders (1 hour).

Once we get beyond the "impurities" of the programs, though, what about the old time content of the first year's programs? Such content seems to have been indeed substantial, but often coming from artists who are obscure and even unknown to popular historians of the show and the music. True, artists like Uncle Jimmy Thompson, Uncle Dave Macon, Dr Humphrey Bate, Deford Bailey and Obed Pickard were the mainstays of the show. All these performers have been recognised as Opry pioneers (though Dad Pickard's important role has not been fully appreciated); but who recalls Henry Bandy, Wild Cat Tom (Ridings)'s Fiddlers, the Smith County String trio, Fulton Mitchell and his Old Hickory orchestra, Jerry Gardenhire's Carthage Fiddlers or Marshall Clayburn? These and many others played on the show several times in 1926; in fact, the wellknown Opry hoedown bands like the Crook Brothers, the Binkley Brothers and Theron Hale and his daughters - the only ones of the hoedown bands that joined the show before 1927 - did not join the program until fall of 1926. Artists appearing on more than three of 1926's 39 regular logged barn dance programs included: Dr Humphrey Bate (29 times), Uncle Jimmy Thompson (27), Uncle Dave Macon (14), Obed Pickard (13), Deford Bailey (11), Jack Keefe, as a performer (9), Henry Bandy (6) and Wild Cat Tom (Ridings)'s Fiddlers (4). It is likely, of course, that these figures are only relative, but they probably do give us an indication of the musicians' popularity.

George Hay has written that "during the first two or three months of the year 1926 we acquired about twenty-five people on the Opry," leading to speculations that there was some sort of original charter Opry roster. If so, it is not borne out by these radio schedules; at least 33 different hillbilly <u>acts</u> (as opposed to <u>people</u>) appeared during 1926, and over 20 popular acts. While there were certainly regulars in 1926, and favorites who repeated, the idea of a well-defined Opry roster probably didn't take root until 1928, when the station began paying performers.

There was a certain amount of controversy over the show in 1926 and at one time thought was given to discontinuing it. In the summer, when radio reception was poorer anyway, the Nashville papers announced: "WSM will continue the barn dances through the month of May, but beginning June 1 will probably discontinue the old time music for the summer, unless the public indicates its desire to have them continued throughout the hot weather. An announcement will be made Saturday night putting the matter up to the radio listeners, and the majority will determine the policy on that subject" (<u>Tennessean</u>, May 9, 1926). One reason for the threat was that Nashville residents were becoming more and more vocal about their discontent with the spectre of hillbilly music emanating from "the Athens of the South". But an overwhelming response to keeping the program on the air would give the station the mandate it needed to defy these demands. And it came. Barely a week later, on May 16, the same paper reported:

> "Recently an announcement was made putting the question of barn dance programs up to the radio public. So far the replies have been very much in favor of continuance of these barn dance programs throughout the summer. The contest will close June 1. While some of the Nashville listeners seem to prefer the so-called popular tunes of the day instead of the old-time music, they have not indicated their wishes in the mail at any extent.

However, the studio programs during which are presented the compositions of the masters continue to please, according to the barometer which is brought every morning by Uncle Sam."

The barn dance stayed on during the summer, but this incident reflected the gulf between WSM's "two audiences" - the Nashville one and the rural one. The tension between the groups was to affect the Opry in subtle ways throughout most of its history. But it is noteworthy that the first-year anniversary show of the station, on October 5, 1926, had at least a few strains of old time music: a "barn dance feature" was included in the "Frolic" portion of the show, and aired about midnight.

CONSOLIDATION

The next two years saw the Opry move from this rather confused, loosely defined format to a form it was to retain for over four decades. Yet even this development was not sudden or deliberate, but rather the effect of a number of changes occurring both on the stage and behind the scenes.

In the spring of 1927 the NBC national radio network was formed with WSM as a subscriber for many of the network's programs.* The alluring Saturday-night network fare brought new pressures against the locally produced barn dance show, and for a time in the fall of 1927 the barn dance was cut back to as little as an hour and a half to accomodate new network fare. When the popular Philco show came on at 8.00 Saturdays, the barn dance was moved up to 9.00, and usually had only five or six acts perform. In the fall of 1927, Dad Pickard usually opened the barn dance, and other regulars included Paul Warmack and his band (not yet dubbed "the Gully Jumpers"), Dr Humphrey Bate, Theron Hale, and harmonica-players Clarence and Grady Gill, as well as Deford Bailey. Uncle Jimmy Thompson wasn't playing so much now, nor was Uncle Dave Macon. Yet the show flourished. A typical show in October "received over 200 messages from 32 states" (Tennessean, October 24, 1927), though newspapers commented that the appeal of the show "seems a mystery to a number of people" (Tennessean, September 18, 1927).

It was about this time that the show changed its name from simply "the barn dance" to "the Grand Ole Opry". Judge Hay's account of how this came about is well known. Hay and the Opry cast were waiting for a network show, the NBC Music Appreciation Hour with noted conductor Walter Damrosch, to end so they could come on with the locally produced show. As he concluded, Damrosch made a comment about "there being no place in the classics for realism" and conducted a short classical piece depicting a train ride. Hay, coming on seconds later, proclaimed: ". . . from here on out for the next three hours we will present nothing but realism. It will be down to earth for the 'earthy'." He then introduced Deford Bailey, who did his depiction of a train ride, "Pan American Blues". Afterwards, Hay said, "For the past hour we have been listening to the music taken largely from the Grand Opera, but from now on we will present the Grand Ole Opry."

Newspaper documentation cannot verify Hay's version of the story, though it does not seriously challenge it; there had been a lot of talk in the fall of 1927 about the new NBC broadcasts of Grand Opera on Wednesday night and the term was in the air, even if Hay misapplied it to Damrosch's Music Appreciation Hour. The first refer-

She will be accompanied by Miss Frank Hoollowell. Jack Keefe, of the WSM staff, will also appear on this program. Christine Lamb, contralto, will appear at 9:30, followed by Miss Emma Kaufman, coloratura soprano, at 9:45.

A program of spirituals by the Golden Echo quartet will be presented on Thursday night at 10 o'clock. The regular weekly pipe organ concert by F. Arthur Henkel, will be given at 10:30.

Performers appearing on the Saturday night "Grand Old Op'ry" will be as follows: Obed Pickard, the One-Man Orchestra; Theron Hale and daughters playing fiddle, banjo and piano; W. M. Baker, fiddle; W. R. Hardison, banjo, and Mrs. Wakefield, piano; G. W. Wilkerson with his "Fruit Jar Drinkers," Poplin's Barn Dance orchestra from Lewisburg, Tenn.; DeFord Bailey, the harmonica wizard, and the Binkley Brothers Barn Dance orchestra.

Seventy-five per cent of all the rubber produced in the world is consumed in the United States.

ence in print to the show as Grand Ole Opry was published in the December 11, 1927 Sunday Tennessean (see illustration). The name caught on quickly, though for the next six months the show was alternately called by both names, barn dance and Grand Ole Opry.

During this time important changes were taking place at WSM and at National Life that were profoundly to affect the Opry. At the start of 1927 the station's power was increased fivefold to 5000 watts; even though radio stations were now cropping up all over the country, this much power still gave WSM a listening area that enveloped half the country. The next year, with the formation of the Federal Radio Commission, WSM was assigned a national "clear channel" status, and given a new low wavelength of 650.

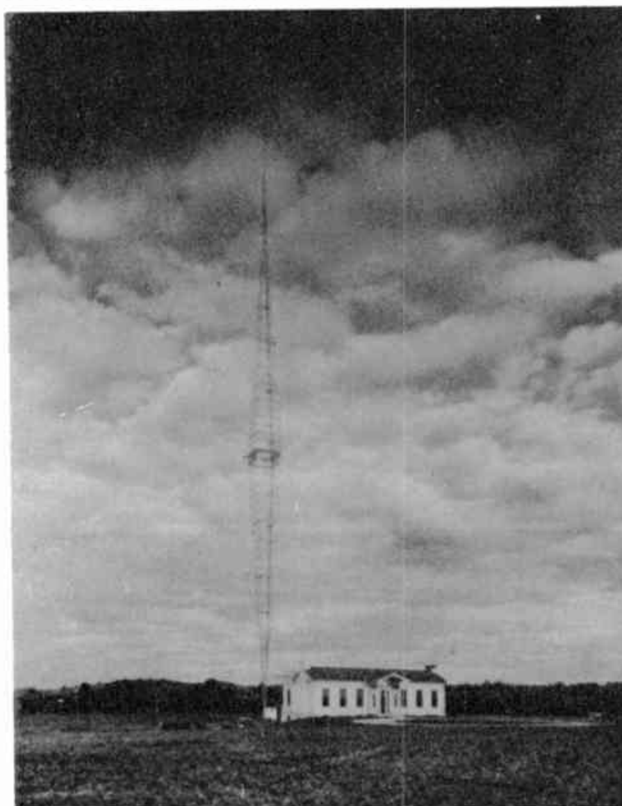
WSM also began to shift the format of the Opry from a purely radio show toward a stage show performed before a live audience. The earliest Opry programs originated from Studio A on the fifth floor of the National Life building. This was a room about 15 by 20 feet, draped with heavy curtains, with one wall glassed so people could watch a show from the hall. Crowds soon filled this hall, so the show was moved to another studio which could hold a small audience of 50 or 60 in addition to the hall observers. Finally, the station built the auditorium studio, Studio C, which had a portable stage and could hold 500. The overflow crowds still continued (no charge was made for attending the show) until one night when two National Life executives tried to get into the building to do some late work. They found the building jammed with Opry fans who refused to move aside, and the angry executives finally ordered all the audience out. For a time the show broadcast without any audience, and Hay feared that the whole thing would be discontinued. But he argued that "a visible audience was part of our shindig" and finally the show moved to

* This was a one-way feed, from NBC to WSM. None of the Opry broadcasts were picked up on the network until 1939, though the WLS National Barn Dance was picked up by the network as early as 1933. The ultimate effect of this on both radio shows remains to be fully assessed.

the Hillsboro Theater in the center of Nashville. There was still no charge for tickets, though National Life agents were allowed to give them away. At the Hillsboro the stage aspect of the Opry became strong enough to influence the radio aspect for the first time; because of the rather small size of the theater, each show played to two audiences, and many performers found themselves on radio for two 15-minute segments instead of one half-hour segment. This platoon system of the Opry has continued even today.*

In 1928 National Life itself became interested in the Opry for more pragmatic reasons than "public service". About this time the company figured out a way to sell life insurance on monthly premiums, instead of annual semi-annual premiums. Any monthly premium under $10 would be collected by agents in the field and forwarded to the main office. This new installment system opened up a new market for insurance: the working class, and the rural middle- and lower-middle-class people who had thitherto been unable or unwilling to purchase insurance with large lump-sum payments. National Life found that it had a ready-made entree to this market in the Opry. It was not coincidence that

* After the Hillsboro Theater, the Opry moved to the Dixie Tabernacle in east Nashville in 1936, and stayed there for a couple of years. Then it moved to the downtown War Memorial Auditorium (seating capacity 2200), near the National Life Building. Here for the first time tickets were sold. Finally the show moved to the Ryman Auditorium, the "Grand Ole Opry House", and thence to Opryland in 1974.

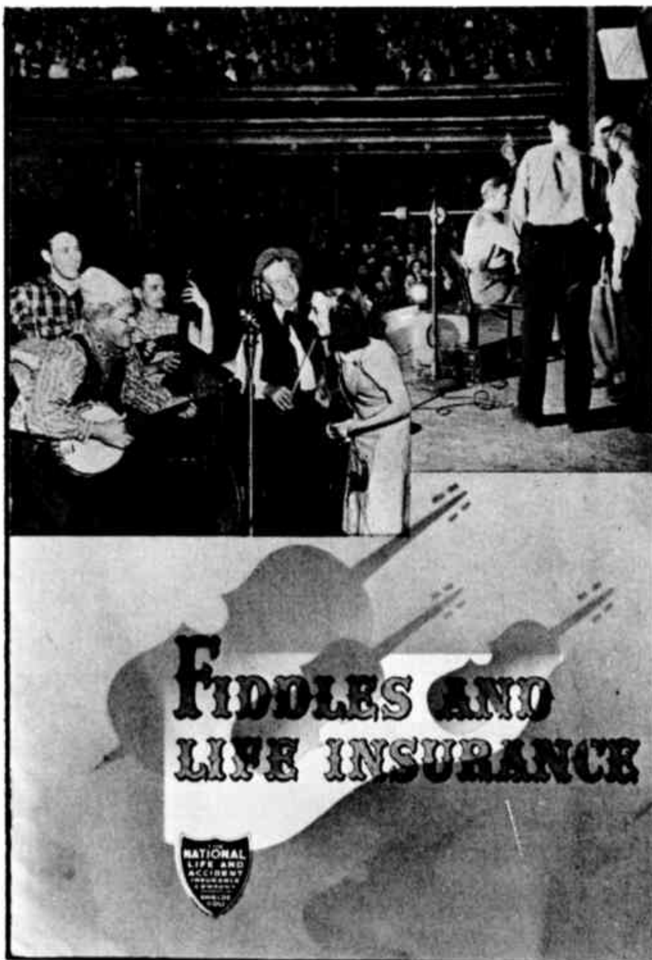


At top, the original Opry studio: Studio A of the National Life building. Below, the WSM transmitter, located 14 miles out of Nashville, with its 878' tower, which when first built was the tallest in the world.

agents were given Opry tickets to distribute in the early '30s, or that at this time Hay began his campaign to emphasise the rustic, hillbilly aspects of the show.* A popular pamphlet soon appeared, Fiddles and Life Insurance, published by National Life; it was essentially a picture-book of the early Opry. Hay's orphan show was proving to have very lucrative connections indeed.

Other changes soon followed in the show itself. By 1928 the other Nashville stations, wanting a piece of the hillbilly action, had started rival barn dance programs, often using the same musicians as WSM (see next chapter). Partly because of this, WSM decided in 1928 to start paying their performers; the pay wasn't great, $5 per show, but it was appealing supplementary income for many performers, and it assured WSM of a stable roster of talent. It also meant an even tighter structuring of the show, and to this end Hay hired Harry Stone to take over the duties of the general manager. By the early '30s Stone was working as MC of the show. Harry's brother David was hired to help relieve Hay announcing the Opry, and Vito Pellettieri (who had been leading a jazz band at the station) was appointed music librarian. About 1933 the Artists Service Bureau was also formed, headed by David Stone, to help WSM acts get personal appearance bookings. Such bookings were necessary if the station was going to attract any full-time professional talent.

By 1928 the typical Opry show was running to 3½-4 hours, and had 7 to 8 "slots" averaging 15 or 30 minutes each. Most of the stringbands were still allowed 30 minutes; the soloists, like Deford Bailey or Dad



Pickard, were given 15 minutes. For this year, by a fortunate circumstance, the official WSM logbook has been preserved, and offers the most accurate insight yet into the show's makeup. Dr Humphrey Bate usually opened the show, and often Ed McConnell closed the program with "songs and stories" which were more in the tradition of vaudeville than old time music. In between was still a variety of acts, still with a smaller but distinct percentage of non-hillbilly acts. Acts appearing on more than 10 of the year's shows included: Deford Bailey (49 shows), Arthur & Homer Smith (29), Paul Warmack and his Gully Jumpers (28), Dr Bate and his Possum Hunters (25), Binkley Brothers and Crook Brothers (22 each), Burt Hutcherson in separate appearances from his stints with Bate or Warmack (22), Obed Pickard (20), Theron Hale (16), Mrs G.R. Cline (dulcimore, 14), Ed McConnell (Uncle Wash)(12), and trick fiddler Whit Gayden (12). The Fruit Jar Drinkers, the Ed Poplin band, Uncle Joe Mangrum and Fred Shriver, Uncle Dave Macon and Henry Bandy appeared less often. Special guests appearing only once included Uncles Bunt Stephens and Jimmy Thompson, Columbia recording star Tom Darby, the Young Brothers Tennessee Band (who also recorded for Columbia, and were from the Chattanooga area), popular singer Nick Lucas, and Henry Bone, later manager and harp-player with the Perry County Music Makers.

The informal 1928 roster of regulars was to remain remarkably constant until 1935. One has only to compare the sample program logs for each year (see illustrations) to see that, though the format of the program shifted somewhat, the basic performers did not. What changes there were were in the form of additions: the Vagabonds, the Sizemores, the Delmore Brothers, Smilin' Jack and his Mountaineers, the Dixieliners. This caused the slots - the individual program segments allotted to a certain act - to jump from 7-8 in 1928-9 to 10-11 in 1931-2, 16-18 in 1933, and 24-5 in 1934-5. (However, because of the increasing practise of platooning artists and having them do repeat slots, the number of different acts on a mid-'30s show seldom exceeded 15 or 16.) The slots shrunk in size from 30 minutes down to 10-15 minutes in late 1934. Also, as we shall later see, the musicians began to become more professional and more aware of the business side of music.

By 1935 the program had lost much of its innocence and serendipity. It was becoming increasingly professional and structured. Though most of the content was the same - the same hoedown bands and cornerstones like Uncle Dave and Dr Bate remained - the time was past when musicians could leisurely answer requests, or when an outsider could casually drop in for a song or two. The music was still a reasonably accurate definition of what most Southerners themselves defined as "old time" or "folk" music. But the increasing professionalisation of the show forecast important changes to come in this area. In a few years performers like Roy Acuff and Pee Wee King were to shift the show away from the old time mold toward modern country music.

In order to assess this content more accurately, we need to turn to the individual musicians themselves - the men who made the Opry, and sustained it during these important first 10 years. But before we can understand the musicians, we must know something of the environment which nourished them - the Nashville of the 1920s.

* For further details of Opry-National Life relationship, see Richard Peterson's studies cited in Sources.

10.30.26

SATURDAY'S PROGRAM.

WSM (282.8 Meters).

6:45—Dinner concert by Andrew Jackson hotel orchestra, directed by Beasley Smith (1 hour).
7:15—Bedtime story interlude (¼ hour).
8:00—Mazy Todd's string trio (½ hour).
8:30—Theron Hale and daughters, Elizabeth and Mamie Ruth, fiddle and piano (½ hour).
9:00—Evening Star quartet (½ hour).
9:30—W. G. Hardison, fiddler, and W. R. Hardison, banjo (¼ hour).
9:45—DeFord Bailey, harmonica wizard (¼ hour).
10:00—Dr. Humphrey Bate and his barn dance orchestra (½ hour).
10:30—Charlie, the French harp king (¼ hour).
10:45—Obed Pickard, one-man orchestra (¼ hour).

WBAW (236 Meters).

6:00—Organ concert from the Capitol theater by Leon Coles (1 hour).
8:00—Program presented by Atwater Kent Radio dealers of Nashville (1 hour).

WDAD (226 Meters).

11:45 a. m.—Home service talk (¼ hour).
12:00 m.—Market and weather report (¼ hour).
12:15—Service from the Central Church of Christ (¾ hour).
3:00—Variety musical program (1½ hours).
8:00—Variety musical program (1 hour).

6.18.27

SATURDAY'S PROGRAM.

WSM (340.7).

7:00—Announcements and bedtime story (¼ hour).
7:15—Dinner concert from the Andrew Jackson hotel (¾ hour).
8:00—Obed Pickard, the one-man orchestra (½ hour).
8:30—Vincent Kuhn, baritone (½ hour).
9:00—C. W. Wilkerson, fiddle; T. J. Givens, banjo; H. G. Ragsdale, guitar (½ hour).
9:30—Dr. Humphrey Bate and his orchestra (½ hour).
10:00—Frank Pressley, banjoist and fiddler (¼ hour).
10:15—R. W. Lawhorn, fiddle; J. T. Lawhorn, banjo; D. Jordan, guitar (½ hour).
10:45—DeFord Bailey, harmonica wizard (¼ hour).
11:00—Paul Womack, mandolin; Odie Callis, fiddle; Roy Hardison, banjo; Raymond Harper, guitar (½ hour).
11:30—Sid Harkreader and Grady Moore, old-time dance music (½ hour).

3.5.27

Nashville Radio

SATURDAY, MARCH 5

WSM (282.8 Meters)

6:15 p. m.—Announcements.
6:30 p. m.—Bedtime story.
6:45 p. m.—Dinner concert from Andrew Jackson hotel.
7:15 p. m.—Jack Keefe, studio program.
7:30 p. m.—Dinner concert from Andrew Jackson hotel.
8 p. m.—Carthage quartet.
8:30 p. m.—J. H. Robinson, violinist; L. H. Ingram, guitar and W. M. Rucker, banjo.
9 p. m.—W. B. Kingery, guitar; T. J. Givens, banjoist; W. B. McKay, harmonica; M. R. Hughes, banjoist, and M. H. Bowers, fiddler.
9:30 p. m.—Dr. Humphrey bate and his barn dance orchestra.
10 p. m.—Theron Hale and his daughters, Elizabeth and Mamie Ruth, fiddle, banjo and piano.

10.1.27

SATURDAY'S PROGRAM

WSM (340.7-880.)

7:00—Announcements and bedtime story.
7:15—Dinner concert.
8:00—Barn dance program: Obed Pickard, one-man orchestra; Theron Hale and daughters, fiddle, banjo and piano; Paul Womack and his band, Clarence and Grady Gills, harmonicas; Jim Osborne, pianist; DeFord Bailey, harmonica; Burt Hutchison, guitar.

3.-.28

SATURDAY'S PROGRAM

WSM (336.9-890).

6:15—Dinner concert.
7:00—R. C. hour from N. B. C. studios.
8:00—Philco hour from N. B. C. studios,
9:00—Obed Pickard, one-man orchestra.
9:30—DeFord Bailey, harmonica.
9:45—Clarence and Grady Gill, harmonicas.
10:00—Arthur Smith, fiddle; Homer Smith, guitar,
10:30—Henry L. Bandy, fiddle
11:00—DeFord Bailey, harmonica.
11:30—Binkley Brothers' barn dance orchestra.

5.5.28

RADIO BY-THE-CLOCK

Nashville Radio

SATURDAY'S PROGRAM

WSM 336.9-890)

6:00—Radio revue to select All-American broadcast team, from N. B. C. studios.
8:30—DeFord Bailey, harmonica.
8:45—Dr. Humphrey Bate and his Possum Hunters.
9:30—Clarence and Grady Gill, harmonica players.
9:45—Willie Pharris, violinist, and Floyd Pharris, guitarist.
10:00—Gladeville trio.
10:30—DeFord Bailey, harmonica player.
10:45—Obed Pickard, "One-Man Orchestra."
11:30 — Smith brothers and Wair's old-time band.

WLAC (225.4-1330)

6:45 a. m.—Physical exercises; devotional service; news reports; stock, bond and market reports; music.
12:20—Produce and live stock market reports.
12:25—Service from the Central Church of Christ.
6:00—Studio.
7:00—Orchestral concert.
7:30—Alton E. Wheeler, piano and mandolin; Buford Jones, ukelele.
8:00—Baseball reports.
8:03—Orchestral concert.
8:30—Frank Claude and Hal at the piano.
9:00—Sunny Tennessee quartet.
10:00—Southern Ramblers.

10.13.28

SATURDAY'S PROGRAM.

WSM (336.9-890).

2:10—Vanderbilt-Texas game from Nashville Banner.
6:15—Girls' Week talk by Lain Moore.
6:30—Francis Craig's orchestra.
7:00—Gov. Smith's Louisville speech from N. B. C.
8:00—Theron Hale and his daughters, playing fiddle, banjo and piano.
8:30—W. M. Baker, fiddle; Claiborne Campbell, guitar.
9:00—DeFord Bailey, harmonica.
9:15—W. E. Poplin's orchestra.
10:00—Arthur and Homer Smith, fiddle and guitar.
10:30—DeFord Bailey, harmonica.
10:45—Binkley brothers, Clodhoppers.

10.12.29

WSM

10:15—Radio Household institute from NBC studios.
11:30—National Farm and Home hour from NBC
12:15—World series from Philadelphia, NBC feature.
1:30—Minnesota-Vanderbilt football detail
6:00—Bulova watch time.
6:01—International Sunday school lesson.
6:15—Phil Spitany's music, NBC feature.
6:45—Bulletins.
7:00—The Lyric Challengers—from NBC studios.
7:30—Laundryland Lyrics, from NBC studios.
8:00—Dr. Humphrey Bate and his "Possum Hunters."
8:45—DeFord Bailey, harmonica wizard.
9:30—Weather report by Williams Oil-O-Matic.
9:31—Paul Womack and his "Gully Jumpers."
10:00—Bulova watch time.
10:01—Burt Hutchison(guitarist and singer.
10:15—Studio program.
10:45—Theron Hale and daughters—playing fiddle, banjo and piano
11:30—Crook Bros. barn dance orchestra.

3.1.30

WSM

9.30 a. m.—Hits and Bits, NBC feature.
10:00—The Recitalists, NBC feature.
10:15—Radio Household Institute from NBC studios.
10:30—The Recitalists, NBC feature.
11:00—The Luncheon Five, NBC feature.
11:45—National Farm and Home hour from NBC.
12:30 p. m.—Keystone Chronicle from NBC studios.
6:00—Correct time.
6:00—Floyd Williams, tenor, NBC feature.
6:15—RCA Theremin Ether Wave Music from NBC.
6:30—Boyd Weather bulletin.
6:31—International Sunday school lesson.
6:45—Bulletins.
7:00—Aladdin Lamp Lighters.
7:30—Laundryland Lyrics from NBC studios.
8:00—Dr. Humphrey Bate and his "Possum Hunters."
8:25—Uncle Dave and Dorris Macon.
8:50—DeFord Bailey, harmonica wizard.
9:00—W. E. Poplin and his orchestra.
9:25—Paul Womack and his "Gully Jumpers."
9:50—Burt Hutchison, guitarist.
10:05—Correct time.
10:06—Weather bulletin.
10:07—Arthur and Homer Smith, violin and guitar.
10:30—Amos 'n' Andy from NBC studios.
10:45—Theron Hale and Daughters.
11:15—DeFord Bailey, harmonica.
11.30—Crook Bros. Barn Dance orchestra.

Daily Radio Program

10.18.30

Nashville Radio

WTNT

[illegible] a. m.—Morning musicale.
[illegible]—Weather report.
[illegible]—Dance music.
[illegible]—Market reports.
[illegible]—Luncheon dance music.
[illegible]—Gruen time through B. H. [illegible] company.
[illegible] p. m.—Afternoon program.
[illegible]—Tennessean Bulletins.
[illegible]—Sunset Minutes.
[illegible]—Tea Time Tunes.
[illegible]—Leon Taylor Roofing company [illegible] report.
[illegible]—Gruen time through B. H. Stief [illegible]pany.
10:[illegible]—Gruen time through B. H. [illegible] company.
[illegible]—Program from the Midway [illegible].
10:30—Louie's Hungry Five.
[illegible]:45—The Nightingale Serenaders.
11:[illegible]—Organ program from Loew's [illegible]ter.
[illegible]:15—Studio program

WSM

[illegible] a. m.—Uncle Mack's Health and [illegible]ty club.
[illegible] a. m.—The Quaker Early Bird [illegible].
[illegible] a. m.—Cheerio—NBC.
[illegible] a. m.—Quaker Crackleman—NBC.
[illegible]:15 a. m.—Top o' the Mornin'.
[illegible] a. m.—The Manhatters—NBC.
[illegible]—Uncle Mack's Kiddies' Party.
10:[illegible] a. m.—The Recitalists—NBC.
[illegible] a. m.—Radio Household Insti[illegible]—NBC.
[illegible] a. m.—The Recitalists—NBC.
[illegible] a. m.—Organ Melodies—NBC.

11:30 a. m.—National Farm and Home Hour—NBC.
2:30—First half of Alaama-Tennessee football game.
3:30—Pop Warner football talks.
3:45—Last half of Alabama-Tennessee football game.
5:45 p. m.—Uncle Abe and David—NBC
6:00 p. m.—Bulova watch time.
6:15 p. m.—International Sunday School lesson.
6:30 p. m.—Dinner concert.
7:00 p. m.—Jack and Bill, The Aladdin Twins.
7:30 p. m.—Knockout Riley.
7:45 p. m.—Hawaiian Shadows.
8:00 p. m.—Dr. Humphrey Bate and His "Possum Hunters."
8:30 p. m.—DeFord Bailey, harmonica.
8:45 p. m.—Jack and Bill.
9:00 p. m.—Crook Bros. Barn Dance orchestra.
9:30 p. m.—Paul Warmack and His "Gully Jumpers."
10:00 p. m.—Bulova watch time.
10:01 p. m.—Weather bulletin.
10:02 p. m.—Theron Hale and Daughters.
10:30 p. m.—Amos 'n' Andy—NBC.
10:45—p. m.—Jack and Bill.
11:00 p. m.—DeFord Bailey, harmonica.
11:15 p. m.—Uncle Joe Mangrum and Fred Shriver.
11:35 p. m.—G. W. Wilkerson and His "Fruit Jar Drinkers."

3.7.31

NASHVILLE RADIO

WSM

7:15—Uncle Mack's Health and Safety club.
7:30—Cheerio—NBC.
8:00—Quaker Early Birds, Gene and Glenn—NBC.
8:15—Top o' the Mornin.'
8:45—A. and P. Food program—NBC.
9:00—Dance Miniature—NBC.
9:30—Uncle Mack's Kiddies' party.
10:00—Celebrated Sayings—NBC.
10:30—Keys to Happiness—NBC.
11:00—Vocal Varieties—NBC.
11:30—National Farm and Home Hour—NBC.
12:30—Keystone Chronicle—NBC.
5:45—Uncle Abe and David—NBC.
6:00—Bulova watch time.
6:15—International Sunday school lesson.
6:30—Jim Brown's party.
7:00—Francis Craig's orchestra.
7:45—The Duckhead quartet.
8:00—Dr. Humphrey Bate and his "Possum Hunters."
8:45—DeFord Bailey, harmonica.
9:00—Crook Bros. Barn dance orchestra.
9:30—Paul Warmack and his "Gully Jumpers."
9:59—Weather bulletin.
10:00—Amos 'n' Andy—NBC.
10:15—Bulova watch time.
10:16—Theron Hale and Daughters.
10:45—DeFord Bailey, harmonica.
11:00—Uncle Joe Mangum and Fred Shriver.
11:30—G. W. Wilkerson and his "Fruit Jar Drinkers."

10.10.31

Nashville Radio

WSM

7:00 a. m.—On the 8:15, NBC.
7:15—Laymen's morning devotion.
7:30—Cheerio, NBC.
8:00—Top o' the Mornin'.
8:30—Radio Research program, NBC.
8:45—Food program, NBC.
9:00—Dance Miniature, NBC.
9:45—Ford and Wallace, NBC.
10:00—Kiddie club.
10:30—Keys to Happiness, NBC.
11:00—Black and Gold Room orchestra, NBC.
11:30—Farm and Home hour, NBC.
12:30 p. m.—Midday musicale, NBC.
1:00—Gainsborg-Ludlow Recital, NBC.
1:30—Organ, NBC.
1:45—Northwestern-Notre Dame football game, NBC.
5:00—Orchestra, NBC.
5:30—Mexican orchestra, NBC.
5:45—The Town Crier.
6:15—Laws That Safeguard society, NBC.
6:30—International Sunday school lesson.
6:45—Tuneful Tales.
7:00—Civic concerts service program, NBC.
7:30—Francis Craig's orchestra.
7:45—Smiling Ed McConnell.
8:00—Dr. Humphrey Bate and his "Possum Hunters."
8:25—Uncle Dave Macon and Dorris.
8:50—DeFord Bailey.
9:00—W. E. Poplin and his Barn Dance orchestra.
9:30—Paul Warmack and his "Gully Jumpers."
10:00—Amos 'n' Andy, NBC.
10:15—The Vagabonds.
10:30—G. W. Wilkerson and his "Fruit Jar Drinkers."
11:00—Theron Hale's band.
11:25—DeFord Bailey.
11:35—Crook Bros. Barn Dance orchestra.

3.5.32

WSM

7:00—On the 8:15, NBC.
7:15—Laymen's Morning Devotion.
7:30—Cheerio, NBC.
8:00—Gene and Glenn, NBC.
8:15—Phil Cook, NBC.
8:45—Chatter from Hollywood.
8:50—Miracles of Magnolia, NBC.
9:00—Harold Stokes' Orchestra, NBC.
9:30—Our Daily Food, NBC.
9:45—CPA News Bulletins.
10:00—Kiddie Club.
10:30—Keys to Happiness, NBC.
11:00—Black and Gold Room Orchestra, NBC.
11:15—The Real George Washington, NBC.
11:30—National Farm and Home Hour, NBC.
12:30—Don Pedro's Orchestra, NBC.
1:00—National Security League, NBC.
1:15—Radio Troubadours, NBC.
1:45—Smack Out, NBC.
2:00—Organ Melodies, NBC.
2:30—Opera "Manon," NBC.
3:30—Saturday Matinee, NBC.
4:00—Musical Moments, NBC.
4:15—America at Work, NBC.
4:45—Landt Trio, NBC.
5:00—William Hard from Geneva, NBC.
5:15—Waldorf Astoria Sert Room orchestra, NBC.
5:30—Palais D'Or Orchestra, NBC.
5:45—Martin College program.
6:00—Word Hunt.
6:05—The Town Crier.
6:15—News Bulletins.
6:25—Limerick Parade.
6:30—International Sunday School Lesson.
6:45—Francis Craig's Andrew Jackson Hotel orchestra.
7:00—Danger Fighters, NBC.
7:30—National Advisory Council on Radio in Education, NBC.
7:45—Songs of the Old Homestead by The Vagabonds.
8:00—Dr. Humphrey Bate and his "Possum Hunters."
8:25—Uncle Dave Macon and Dorris.
8:50—DeFord Bailey.
9:00—Crook Bros. Barn Dance orchestra.
9:30—Paul Warmack and his "Gully Jumpers."
10:00—Amos 'n' Andy, NBC.
10:15—The Vagabonds.
10:30—Theron Hale's Band.
11:00—DeFord Bailey.
11:10—Binkley Bros. "Dixie Clodhoppers."
11:30—G. W. Wilkerson and his "Fruit Jar Drinkers."

3.18.33

4:30—Genia Zellinska, soprano, NBC.
5:00—King Oliver and His Recording Orchestra.
5:30—King Kong, NBC.
5:45—Bill and Bob.
6:00—International Sunday School Lesson.
6:15—Talk by Merle Thorpe, NBC.
6:30—Twenty Fingers of Harmony, NBC.
6:45—Octavus Roy Cohen, Murder Mystery, NBC.
7:00—Southern Radio Carnival.
7:30—The Vagabonds.
8:00—Dr. Humphrey Bate and His "Possum Hunters."
8:25—Uncle Dave Macon and Dorris.
8:50—DeFord Bailey.
9:00—Four Boys.
9:05—Obed Pickard.
9:15—Asher and Little Jimmie.
9:30—Theron Hales Band.
9:50—Paul Warmack and His "Gully Jumpers."
10:15—The Vagabonds.
10:30—Arthur Smith and His "Dixie Liners."
10:50—Obed Pickard.
11:00—Four Boys.
11:05—DeFord Bailey.
11:15—Binkley Bros. "Dixie Clodhoppers."
11:30—G. W. Wilkerson and His "Fruit Jar Drinkers."

9.9.33

WSM

(Copyright by WSM)

Saturday, September 9.

6:30 a. m.—Leon Cole, organist.
6:45—Asher and Little Jimmie.
7:00—Laymen's Morning Devotion.
7:15—Breakfast Club, NBC.
7:30—Cheerio, NBC.
8:00—Pollack and Lawnhurst, NBC.
8:15—Morning Parade, NBC.
9:00—The Vass Family, NBC.
9:15—Program, NBC.
9:30—Down Lover's Lane, NBC.
10:00—Salt and Peanuts, NBC.
10:15—American Legion National Trade Revival Campaign, NBC.
10:30—Syncopators, NBC.
11:00—Vic and Sade.
11:15—Palmer House Ensemble, NBC.
11:30—American Farm Bureau Federation, NBC.
12:30 p. m.—Farm Flash.
12:45—Concert Echoes, NBC.
1:00—Tennessean News Flash.
1:05—Words and Music, NBC.
1:30—Wealth of Harmony, NBC.
2:00—Carnival Orchestra, NBC.
2:30—Harry Sosnick and His Orchestra, NBC.
3:00 p. m.—Dance Masters, NBC.
3:30—Soloist, NBC.
3:45—Gotham Gaieties, NBC.
4:00—Xavier Cugat and His Tango Orchestra, NBC.
4:30—Drake's Drums, NBC.
5:00—Hotel St. Regis Orchestra, NBC.
5:30—Tennessean News Flashes.
5:35—Kaltenmeyer's Kindergarten, NBC.
6:00—London Terrace Orchestra, NBC.
6:25—Sports Reporter.
6:30—International Sunday School Lesson.
6:45—Nashville Voice of NRA.
7:00—Antobal's Cubans, NBC.
7:30—K-7, NBC.
8:00—Dr. Humphrey Bate and His "Possum Hunters."
8:10—Uncle Dave Macon and Dorris.
8:20—Crook Bros. Barn Dance Band.
8:30—DeFord Bailey.
8:40—Paul Warmack and His Gully Jumpers."
8:50—Asher and Little Jimmie.
9:00—WSB 50-KW Christening, NBC.
10:00—Dr. Bate and His "Possum Hunters."
10:10—Uncle Dave Macon.
10:20—W. E. Poplin and His Orchestra.
10:30—Delmore Brothers.
10:40—G. W. Wilkerson and His "Fruit Jar Drinkers."
10:50—Chuck and Ray.
11:00—Crook Bros. Band.
11:10—Sports Reporter.
11:15—Jack Jackson.
11:30—Paul Warmack and His "Gully Jumpers."
11:40—DeFord Bailey.
11:50—Fruit Jar Drinkers.

10.–.34▶

bunches	.45@ .50
Sweet potatoes, Nancy Hall, bushel	.75@ .80
Tokay grapes	1.45@1.55
Malaga grapes, lug	1.50@1.60
Concord Grapes, 4 qt. basket	.18@ .19
Florida grapefruit, all sizes, box	3.25@3.50
Cranberries, ¼-bbl. boxes	3.85@2.95
Same, per pound	.13@ .14

HOME GROWN
(Dealer's Buying Prices.)

Pole Beans, lb.	.04@ .05
Squash, white and yellow	1.50@2.00
New potatoes, 100 lbs. (No. 1)	1.25@1.50
Beets, doz. bunches	.40@ .50
Parsley, doz. bunches	.25@ .30
Carrots, doz. bunches	.40@ .50
Turnips, doz. bunches	.25@ .35
Home grown apples, bu.	.75@1.25
Tomatoes, bu.	1.00@1.50
Field corn, dependent upon quality, doz.	.10@ .15
Black-eyed peas, gallon	.40@ .50
Butterbeans, gallon	.50@ .75
Nancy Hall sweet potatoes, bu.	.60@ .75
Turnip greens, bu.	.25@ .35
Spinach, bu.	.50

FIELD SEEDS
(Wholesale Quotations)

Crimson clover, lb.	.12½c
Sweet clover, lb.	.9c
Alfalfa, lb.	.16c
Timothy, lb.	.22c
Red Top, lb.	.18c
Orchard Grass, lb.	.16c
Blue grass, lb.	.23c
Rye grass, lb.	7½c
Lawn grass, lb.	.25c
Bermuda grass	.24c
Vetch, lb.	.10c
Seed rye, bu.	$1.15
Seed barley, bu.	1.05
Seed wheat, bu.	1.35
Winter turf oats, bu.	.95

Perkins Says Nation Needs More Paid Entertainers

CHICKASHA, Okla., Oct. 12—(AP)—Secretary of Labor Perkins wants to see more people employed as "entertainers."

Addressing the Oklahoma College for Women here today, she explained:

"I am interested in seeing more people employed in the production of non-consumer goods.

"We might, in a slang expression, call them "entertainers." Such a civilization would offer greater opportunity for the cultural and social America.

"The great civilizations of the past have been built by those who have had leisure time to cultivate their own personalities. We now have a conception of a greater number of people working fewer hours each day with more leisure time."

PEABODY CLASS ELECTS

Election of officers of the Junior class of George Peabody college was held Friday afternoon in the auditorium of the Social Religious building. Those elected are as follows: George Hampton, president; Margaret Prevatt, vice-president; Forrest Smith, secretary, and Robert Dunkerly, treasurer.

A resolution to meet the second and fourth Tuesday of every month was approved by the class.

DEEP SNOWFALL REPORTED

AUGUSTA, Me., Oct. 12—(AP)—A fourteen-inch snowfall at Presque Isle was reported to Forest Commissioner Neil L. Violette today by one of his fire wardens.

He was also told six to eight inches of snow had fallen at Patten, and that telephone connection with Van Buren was broken by the storm.

12:55—Esther Velas, CBS.
1:00—Danny Russo's Orchestra, CBS.
1:30—Roundtowners, CBS.
2:00—Chansonette, CBS.
2:30—Saturday Syncopators, CBS.
3:00 p. m.—Ann Leaf, CBS.
3:30—Allen Leafer's Orchestra, CBS.
4:00—Saturday Syncopators, CBS.
4:30—Song Bag, WBS.
5:00—Leon Belasco's Orchestra, CBS.
5:15—Uncle Ray Reads the Funnies.
5:30—Central Church of Christ.
6:00—Weather Report.
6:01—To be announced, CBS.
6:15—Musical Auction, WBS.
6:30—Today's Favorite Music, WBS.
6:45—Sports Review.
7:00—Roxy Review, CBS.
7:45—Harold Culver.
7:50—Fats Waller, CBS.
8:00—Grete Stueckgold, CBS.
8:30—Carefree Capers, WBS.
9:00—Jimmy Gallagher's Orchestra.
9:30—Saturday Syncopators, CBS.
10:00—Sylvia Froos, CBS.
10:15—Ozzie Nelson's Orchestra, CBS.
10:45—Al Kavelin's Orchestra, CBS.
11:00—Rube Wolf's Orchestra, CBS.
11:30—Beasley Smith's Orchestra.

WSM
Saturday, October 12.

6:30 a. m.—Rise and Shine.
7:30—Cheerio, NBC.
8:00—Laymen's Morning Devotion.
8:15—Leon Cole, organist.
8:30—Breakfast Club, NBC.
9:00—Edward McHugh, the Gospel Singer, NBC.
9:15—Morning Parade, NBC.
9:45—News Service, NBC.
9:50—Originalities, NBC.
10:00—The Honeymooners, NBC.
10:15—The Vass Family, NBC.
10:30—Down Lovers' Lane, NBC.
11:00—Armchair Quartet, NBC.
11:15—Genia Fonariova, mezzo soprano, NBC.
11:30—American Farm Bureau Federation, NBC.
12:30 p. m.—Tennessee Farm Bureau program.
12:45—Words and Music, NBC.
1:15—Tennessean News Flash.
1:16—Song Fellows, NBC.
1:30—Hawaiian Orchestra from Century of Progress, NBC.
2:00—Hotel Syracuse Orchestra, NBC.
2:30—Week-end Revue, NBC.
3:30 p. m.—Palmer Clark and his orchestra, NBC.
4:00—Plaza Tea Music, NBC.
4:30—Our American Schools, NBC.
5:00—One Man's Family, NBC.
5:30—Tennessean News Reporter.
5:35—Twenty Fingers of Harmony, NBC.
5:45—John Herrick, Baritone, NBC.
6:00—WSM Musical Score Board.
6:30—International Sunday School Lesson.
6:45—Freddie Rose.
7:00—Art in America, NBC.
7:20—Grace Hayes, popular singer, NBC.
7:30—Jamboree, NBC.
8:00—Dr. Humphrey Bate and his "Possum Hunters."
9:10—Uncle Dave Macon.
8:20—Paul Warmack and his "Gully Jumpers."
8:30—Nap and Dee.
8:40—Crook Bros. Band.
8:50—Zeke Clements and his Bronco Busters.
9:00—Asher and Little Jimmie.
9:15—Lasses and Honey.
9:30—Dr. Humphrey Bate and his "Possum Hunters."
9:40—Uncle Dave Macon.
9:50—Zeke Clements and his Bronco Busters.
10:00—Delmore Brothers.
10:10—Arthur Smith and his "Dixie Liners."
10:20—Crook Bros. Band.
10:30—G. W. Wilkerson and his "Fruit Jar Drinkers."
10:40—DeFord Bailey.
10:45—Robert Lunn.
10:50—Arthur Smith and his "Dixie Liners."
11:00—Binkley Brothers "Dixie Clodhoppers."
11:10—Paul Warmack and his "Gully Jumpers."
11:20—Delmore Brothers.
11:30—G. W. Wilkerson and his "Fruit Jar Drinkers."
11:40—DeFord Bailey.
11:50—Binkley Brothers "Dixie Clodhoppers."

flesh. She loved him.

"Hi, Owl!" she greeted. And because she could not stem the flow of affection that welled up in her heart, she swooped across the room, plumped herself on Raoul Reynal's lap and took such a strangle-hold about his neck that the elderly gentleman was hard pressed for breath.

"Well, well, well," Uncle Raoul gasped, when he had extricated himself from imminent danger of strangulation. "To what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

Sandra's heart skipped a beat, then raced on. Why couldn't she come to see the Owl because she wanted so desperately to see him? Why must she come with itching palms and despicable intention? Gimme, gimme, gimme.

"No honor about it, darling." Sandra pushed aside a mass of papers to perch on the edge of the desk at which Raoul Reynal sat. She knew the Owl, knew he liked his jolts straight from the shoulder. She determined to plunge.

"We're in debt to the hilt. Supplies cut off. Wolf gulping doorknob. Over the hill to the poorhouse. Awful mess."

Her uncle pushed back his chair, studied her through shaggy brows. "I'm not bringing you news, am I?" Sandra hurried on. "No, I thought not. Don't ask me how it happened. I don't know. It just did."

Uncle Raoul cleared his throat. Steel points in Sandra's eyes, it seems, were a heritage from the Reynals.

"What do you expect me to do about it?"

Sandra swung her legs. She must appear nonchalant. She could not realize, as the Owl did, that her lips were quivering.

"It's what you are willing to do that I've come to see you about."

Raoul Reynal rose, paced back and forth across the thick pile rug that had once adorned the seraglio of a pasha. His head was thrust forward, his hands clasped behind him. Sandra knew the signs. They meant battle, with only a fair chance of her winning. He began:

"Last March—it was March, wasn't it?—um—yes—last March, in this room, I personally supervised the apportionment of a sum that would see you and the other two through the year. Rather handsomely, too—eh?" Uncle Raoul stopped, his eyes fixed on Sandra.

"Not handsome," she said helping herself to a cigarette to hide her confusion. "Sufficient."

He paced a few steps from her, then wheeled and barked, "If it was sufficient, why are you here for more? More, always more!"

"Hoot-hoot yourself, Owl." Sandra thrust her chin out at an angle amusingly like that of the lectured man. "I told you not to ask me riddles. I've exactly ninety-five cents between me and the breadline. If you don't sweeten my purse, darling, I shall have to camp right here until some one comes and rescues me."

Raoul Reynal returned to his chair, drawing it closer to Sandra. "Now you're talking sense, my child," he said, and the harshness

RADIO PROGRAMS

WSM

Saturday, November 7.

6:30 a. m.—Musical Clock.
7:00—Morning Devotion, NBC.
7:15—Good Morning Melody, NBC.
7:30—Cheerio, NBC.
8:00—Breakfast Club, NBC.
9:00—Press-Radio News, NBC.
9:15—Home Maker's Chat.
9:30—Morning Moods.
9:45—Originalities, NBC.
10:00—Our American Schools, NBC.
10:15—Turf Comments.
10:20—Doc Whipple and Piano Impressions, NBC.
10:30—Magic of Speech, NBC.
11:00—Arlington Time Signal, NBC.
11:01—Chasins Music Series, NBC.
11:30—National Farm and Home Hour NBC.
12:45 p. m.—Old Skipper and His Radio Gang, NBC.
1:00—Words and Music, NBC.
1:30—Whitney Ensemble, NBC.
1:45—Vanderbilt - Sewanee Football Game.
4:00 p. m.—Top Hatters, NBC.
4:30—Webster Hall Presents Buzzy Kountz' Orchestra, NBC.
5:00—Dance Hour.
5:15—Otto Thurn's Orchestra, NBC.
5:30—International Sunday School Lesson.
5:40—Sports Review.
5:45—Community Chest Program.
6:00—Red Grange Football Interview, NBC.
6:15—Hampton Institute Singers, NBC.
6:30—Thank You, Stusia.
6:45—Musical Memory Time.
7:00—Hilltop Harmonizers.
7:15—Delmore Brothers.
7:30—Jack and His Missouri Mountaineers.
7:45—Georgia Wildcats.
8:00—Possum Hunters.
8:10—Uncle Dave Macon.
8:20—Gully Jumpers.
8:30—Dixie Liners.
8:40—Curt Poulton.
8:50—Jack and Missouri Mountaineers.
9:00—Honey Wilds.
9:10—Fruit Jar Drinkers.
9:20—Delmore Brothers.
9:30—Georgia Wildcats.
9:40—Crook Brothers.
9:50—Sarie and Sallie.
9:55—Deford Bailey.
10:00—Dixie Liners.
10:10—Uncle Dave Macon.
10:40—Crook Brothers.
10:30—Possum Hunters.
10:37—Delmore Brothers.
10:45—Robert Lunn.
10:50—Delmore Brothers.
11:00—Deford Bailey.
11:05—Binkley Brothers.
11:13—Curt Poulton.
11:20—Sid Harkreader and Band.
11:30—Gully Jumpers.
11:40—Sam and Kirk McGee.
11:50—Binkley Brothers.

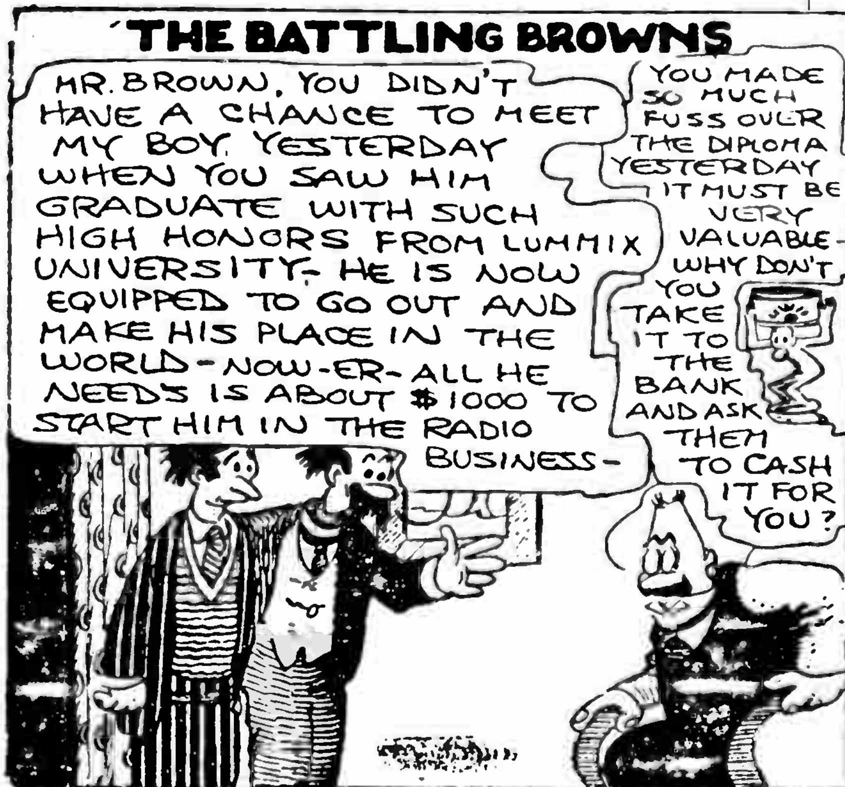
11.-.35

SOURCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The basic written source for much of the material about the start of the Opry is George Hay's own pamphlet, *A Story of the Grand Ole Opry* (various publishers, 1945 and 1953). Hay does not pretend to be writing a factual history, and repeatedly admits throughout the memoir that he is writing informally from memory. Nonetheless he is remarkably accurate with his facts and perceptive about the development of his show. Other basic written sources include Powell Stamper's *The National Life Story* (New York, 1968), a good history of the company that founded the Opry. An early study of news files which apparently drew on interviews with Eva Thompson Jones is Don G. Cummings, *The Birth of the Grand Ole Opry*. A general appraisal of broadcasting of the time is Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Vol. 1, to 1933* (New York, 1966). Pioneering studies of the National Life-Opry relationship include Richard A. Peterson & Paul Di Maggio, "The Early Opry: Its Hillbilly Image in Fact and Fancy", *The Journal of Country Music* IV:2 (Summer 1973) 39-51; this study also reprints a summary of the 1928 Opry log at Vanderbilt. Peterson's fullscale study of the development of country music in Nashville is scheduled for publication next year by the University of Illinois Press.

Thanks also to the following individuals: Bill Malone, Herman Crook, Alcyone Beasley, Katherine Thompson, Sam and Kirk McGee, Arch Macon, and the staff of the Country Music Foundation in Nashville.

Among the most fruitful of printed sources are the newspapers of the time, the Nashville *Tennessean* and *Banner*. Microfilm copies of these papers rest in the Tennessee State Library and Archives in Nashville.



THE OPRY IN CONTEXT: NASHVILLE & COUNTRY MUSIC 1926~30

WHETHER ONE STUDIES COUNTRY MUSIC FROM THE STANDPOINT OF folklore or popular culture, he cannot deny the viability of the concept of context: the cultural, historical and economic matrix which produced the music. For the folklorist the sense of context in early country music defines to a large degree its folkloristic nature; for the student of popular culture, the sense of context is the prime modifying force on traditional aesthetic assumptions. Serious study of country music in the past has generally proceeded from one of two points of view. The first approach centers on the artist; perhaps because so many early students of country music have been record collectors and fans, and most scholarship up until the last five years has been oriented almost exclusively to this approach; the individual artist is studied, and artist discographies are prepared. A second approach in recent years has been to study the songs themselves, either as reflections of social class attitudes or as folk song families; the history of songs is traced and song discographies are prepared.* Context is certainly not neglected in studies of other American musical forms, such as jazz and blues; indeed, blues studies have until very recently been almost exclusively oriented toward social context. The neglect of contextual approaches in country music study has resulted in several curious blind spots, and one of these is the study of the development of the Opry.

The early history of the Opry and of early country music in Nashville is a prime example of the limitations of the two traditional approaches to old time music. One cannot account for the spectacular success of the Opry either by studying the individual recording artists or by studying the song family. For instance, it would be very difficult to explain Opry success on the basis of recordings, though, to be sure, the Opry roster of 1925-30 made recordings. Deford Bailey, Uncle Jimmy Thompson, Uncle Dave Macon, Dr Humphrey Bate and the Possum Hunters, Sid Harkreader, the Binkley Brothers Dixie Clodhoppers, Whit Gayden, Jack Jackson, Theron Hale, Obed Pickard, the Crook Brothers, the Poplin-Woods Tennessee String Band and the McGee Brothers had all recorded before 1930.

However, with the exception of Macon and perhaps Bate, none of these artists could have been called recording stars. Many of them recorded only a few sides, and some of these were cover versions of songs done by other artists. Also, Uncle Dave Macon began his recording career in 1924 and was already an established recording artist by the time the Opry went on the air; by the time he first broadcast on WSM, Uncle Dave had already recorded over 30 sides for Vocalion. One only need compare the recorded output of other Opry artists with the really popular hillbilly recording artists of the day to see the relative insignificance of the early Opry recorded output. By 1930, Uncle Dave had recorded well over 100 sides; the Skillet-Lickers had made about 70 sides; Jimmie Rodgers 77 sides; the Carter Family, 44 sides. Contrast these figures with the recorded output of the Opry regulars before 1930: the Binkley Brothers had released 6 sides, the Crook Brothers 4 sides, Theron Hale 4 sides, Uncle Jimmy Thompson 2 sides, Jack Jackson 4 sides, Poplin-Woods 2 sides, Whit Gaydon 2 sides. Next to Macon, the Opry performers most frequently recorded before 1930 were the McGee Brothers (at least 18 sides), Dr Humphrey Bate (12 sides) and Deford Bailey (11 sides).

These figures are not meant to constitute a comprehensive discography of the pre-1930 Opry; rather, they are only illustrative, and it must be noted that some artists who appeared on the early Opry apparently did not record at all. In 1928, when Victor held the first recording session in Nashville and recorded many of the early Opry stars and regular Nashville radio performers, out of the 69 sides recorded only 36 were released, and of these 36 sides 14 were either gospel or mainstream popular music. Judging from the records from this session released by Victor, and from one or two unreleased masters that have surfaced, the music was quite good. Apparently, however, the records did not sell well, so many were not released. (The release pattern suggests, for instance, that a second Theron Hale record was released only after the first one had sold reasonably well.) None of the other major phonograph companies that recorded so widely on location throughout the South in 1927-30 came to Nashville to record, and Victor did not return. In fact, aside from some Library of Congress recordings, no further country music records were made in Nashville until after World

* See, for example, Archie Green, Only a Miner: Studies in Recorded Coal-Mining Songs (Urbana IL, 1972) and Judith McCulloh's unpublished studies of "In the Pines".

War II, when the modern recording industry began. The relationship between Nashville country music and recordings would therefore seem to be a comparatively recent development. At least it did not seem to be significant during the formative years of the Opry.

Without a significant body of recorded evidence, it is also difficult to study Nashville old time music development via the song or song family. A body of assorted song folios and promotional material from the pre-1930 period apparently exists, though no one has made a systematic study of it. It would seem improbable, however, that the success of Nashville old time music could be attributed to song types.

In short, neither traditional approach to old time music can explain the rise of the Opry and Nashville-based country music. The reason, of course, is that the Opry utilised a different medium, radio, instead of phonograph records, oral tradition or print. It is much more difficult to comprehend the success of a radio show than to understand the success of a singer, a song or a record. One can interview a singer, study the song text, listen to a record; one can base study on the tangible folkloristic or artistic product itself. One cannot do this with older radio shows. These are intangible, and rather ephemeral, folk-art elements, and to a certain degree one can never hope to understand why the Opry became popular in its first five years, simply because no one will ever be able to listen to an Opry program from that period. Yet this intangible element, the radio Opry, was apparently a prime force in the popularisation and development of country music. The problem is how to study it without access to primary sources.

One solution may lie in the contextual approach to old time music. If we grant, for instance, that old time music recordings are important as folklore or popular culture, then we must admit that the social, artistic and economic contexts within which these recordings were made are equally important in assessing the value of the recordings. It is sometimes a major problem to reconstruct the context in which such recordings were made, but when done it can tell us a great deal. It is akin to reconstructing the setting for a stage play, except that in the case at hand we lack the play itself - the Opry. But we do have the potential to reconstruct the context of these broadcasts, and, perhaps, learn something about why they became so popular.

This chapter is a movement toward establishing such a contextual approach to the early Opry. It is not meant to be definitive, but illustrative of how such an approach might proceed. It seeks to explore the relationship between Nashville and country music during the important formative years of 1925-30, and to shed some light on the Opry as an institution and the place of old time music (as country music was called in the '20s) in the Nashville of the '20s.

There are two major problems concerning the use of historical evidence in studying old time music. The first is simply a lack of basic historical data on which to base generalisations about early country music. Even today the serious study of country music is in an extremely primitive stage, for we don't know many basic names, dates, biographies, personalities, and there does not even exist a comprehensive country record discography. In most cases those scholars who wish to test theories about the nature of country music's early development are forced to turn researcher in order to document their assertions. A second problem concerns the use of evidence concerning the Opry itself. It would be easy to rely entirely upon oral testimony from the many early pioneers who are still alive; but memory is tricky at best, and when one deals with an institution which has almost become a legend itself, such as the Opry, one finds that the later success of the institution influences in subtle ways the memories of those actually involved in its early history. I have found, for instance, that the later success of the Opry has caused some informants to see it as the only force in the development of early Nashville country music, though contemporary documentation indicates that the Opry was in fact only one of several such forces.

In an attempt to deal with these two problems, then, this chapter is, first, a combination of evidence (i.e. historical data) and interpretation, and secondly is based, whenever possible, upon sources from the '20s rather than upon the memories of informants. We shall consider Nashville's relationship to early country music as manifested in three areas: radio, phonograph recording as an industry, and newspaper coverage.

Probably the earliest station in Nashville to broadcast old time music was WDAD, popularly known in the '20s as "Dad's". The station was managed by L.N. Smith and operated in connection with Dad's Radio Supply Store, 164-6 Eighth Street North, in downtown Nashville. "Dad's" newspaper advertising of the time emphasises radio equipment and shows a photo of "Radio Dad", possibly Smith himself. WDAD began broadcasting about September 13, 1925, about a month before the dedication program of WSM. The coverage of WDAD was quite impressive; two weeks after its first broadcast, the station was claiming a transmitting radius of 2000 miles and was receiving mail from New York, Philadelphia, Des Moines, Atlanta and Dayton. According to a story in the September 27, 1925 Tennessean, "There is no want of talent, officials of the station said, and so many artists have volunteered that sufficient room could not be found by them." Though no printed evidence has yet been discovered to prove that WDAD broadcast old time music during this pre-WSM month, several Opry veterans, including Sid Harkreader and Herman Crook, have stated that they first broadcast country music on "Dad's". In view of the above newspaper account about volunteers wanting to broadcast, it would seem likely that among these volunteers were some old time musicians. The program schedule of WDAD during this first month is unsettled and vague, not printed with regularity in the papers; many entries read simply "Musical program".

On Monday night at 7.00 pm, October 5, 1925, WSM went on the air, giving WDAD its first competition, which it met with a spirit of cooperation. "Dad's" took out advertising and used the new station to urge its customers to buy more radio equipment. A week after WSM began WDAD announced a change in programming so it would not conflict with WSM in night programming; the two stations agreed to alternate night programs.

WDAD (226)

11:45 a. m.—Home service talk by Mrs. Gordon Parman (¼ hour).
12:25—Services from the Central Church of Christ (½ hour).
9:00—"Sweet Memory" Hour with the Sunny Tennessee quartet (1 hour).

Before the end of October 1925 both stations had certainly broadcast old time music, for evidence appears in radio schedules of the time.* The first old time performer whose appearance on Nashville radio has been documented through newspapers was Dr Humphrey Bate "and his string quartet of old-time musicians, from Castalian Springs". Dr Bate and his band, the "Possum Hunters", later a mainstay of the early Opry, appeared in radio schedules of both WDAD and WSM through November 1925. He is the only old time musician to appear in these early listings.

By early December, then, both stations were broadcasting old time music. Uncle Jimmy Thompson, "the South's champion barn dance fiddler, and Eva Thompson Jones, contralto" presented a program "of old-fashioned tunes" on Saturdays over WSM. On December 12, WDAD staged an old fiddlers' contest on the air, in which listeners voted for their favorites by 'phone. This contest was a success, and WDAD made a point of noting that "even though other local stations were on the air, 360 telephone calls were taken over Dad's two telephones in two hours' time, which were all the calls that could be accomodated". (The other Nashville stations were WSM and WCBQ, the radio station of the First Baptist Church.) WSM, meanwhile, stressed the mail Uncle Jimmy was receiving. Obviously a rivalry between the stations was developing, and both were discovering that a substantial audience for old time music existed. Certainly the local success of WDAD with old time music was one factor responsible for Hay's decision to present a regular Saturday-night hillbilly show. By early 1926 the WSM barn dance was established, and, though WDAD still broadcast old time music - including programs directly opposite the WSM show, the agreement to alternate night programs having been abandoned - WSM was clearly attracting a larger share of the audience. WDAD was thus the first of several Nashville stations to compete unsuccessfully with the Opry. WDAD apparently continued to broadcast until late 1927, though its later schedules reveal little or no old time music. The early history of WDAD is extremely shadowy, however, and more complete research is necessary before we can assess its exact role in the development of country music in Nashville.

More competition for WSM's old time music market was to come from two other new radio stations that opened in Nashville in the late '20s, WLAC and WBAW. WLAC went on the air November 28, 1926; WBAW followed almost two years later, on November 2, 1928.

From 1926 to 1930 (when it began to broadcast many CBS network shows), WLAC flirted with old time music and tried to establish some sort of competition for the increasingly successful WSM barn dance. By March 1927, four months after it went on the air, WLAC was making some tentative gestures toward offering old time music on Saturday nights. A few groups, such as the Gladis String Band of Murfreesboro, were presented for short programs. There was no long string of old time music performers such as on the barn dance. But in early 1928 WLAC began a serious effort to capture its share of the country music audience by initiating a regular show on Friday nights that featured artists like Dr Humphrey Bate and the Crook Brothers - established artists who also appeared (and continued to appear) on WSM on Saturday nights. This must have worked well, for in June 1928 WLAC initiated direct Saturday-night competition with WSM, and abandoned its Friday-night show. This venture was not overly successful, probably

WBAW (230.9-1250).

10:00 a. m.—Studio.
11:00 a. m.—Mrs. Gordon Parman's housewife talk.
11:15 a. m.—Stock report.
6:00—Financial talk.
6:05—Sport summary.
6:30—Leon Cole, organist.
7:00—Uncle Jimmy with the kids.
7:30—Request record program.

WLAC (225.4-1330).

6:45 a. m.—Setting-up exercises.
7:06—Devotional by Dr. John L. Hill.
7:20 a. m.—News items; stock, bond, market and weather reports.
7:35 a. m.—Music.
12:30—Live stock market report.
12:35—Service from the Central Church of Christ.
6:00—Sunday school lesson by E. H. Ijams.
6:30—Dinner concert.
7:00—The Wilson serenaders.
7:30—J. J. Lovell, banjo; M. G. Smith fiddle; Everett Crouch, guitar.
8:00—Talk by George C. Fisher, city smoke inspector.
8:05—Henry Bandy, fiddler.
8:25—Tom Andrews, fiddle; Mrs. Andrews, piano.

because it put a strain on the available supply of musicians. Schedules of the time reveal that the same bands and artists appeared on both shows, on alternating Saturday nights; one week an artist would perform for WSM, the next week for WLAC. By September WLAC was back to a Friday-night show, competing against WSM's Friday schedule of NBC network fare. But late that year WLAC ran into still more competition in the form of WBAW, which also decided to start a Friday-night old time music show. For a time WLAC and WBAW fought it out on Friday nights, sharing or perhaps fighting for many of the same artists that continued to appear regularly on the WSM barn dance. WLAC attempted to buck the Saturday Opry again in 1929, but finally gave up and by mid-1930 was broadcasting CBS network fare on both Friday and Saturday nights.

WBAW was quick to see the commercial value of old time music, and promptly started an old time barn dance program on Thursday nights. Thus, for a time in late 1928, a listener could hear old time music from Nashville three nights in succession: WBAW on Thursday, WLAC on Friday and WSM's Opry on Saturday. Again, the radio schedules of the era show many of the same popular groups, such as the Fruit Jar Drinkers, the Crook Brothers, the Smith Brothers and Dr Bate, appearing on these

* See Norm Cohen, "Materials Toward a Study of Early Country Music on Radio. I. Nashville," JEMF Newsletter IV:3, no. 11 (September 1968), 109-13. Cohen simply reprints all articles and notices dealing with old time music from the Tennessean during the period of October 18, 1925 to January 17, 1926; he presents them without comment, and his is a useful compilation for the reader who does not have access to the Nashville papers. But his starting date is rather late, and he does not include material from the Banner.

different shows. But by the end of 1928 WBAW shifted its old time barn dance to Friday nights, and began to compete directly with WLAC's Friday-night show, apparently feeling it was rather hopeless to compete against the Opry. In early 1929 WBAW started a Friday-night show called "Capitol Theater Owl Club" (later to become the "Strand Theater Owl Club"), a late-running show that devoted much of its time to the "old-time barn dance". This was apparently successful, for by April 1929 WBAW had the Friday old time music audience to itself; WLAC was forced to switch its old time music back to Saturday and go up against the Opry again. Perhaps encouraged by the success of its Friday-night barn dance, WBAW even made some attempts to program live old time music on Saturday nights too, but the effort was shortlived.

In the end, of course, the rivals of the Opry lost out; by the middle of 1930 WBAW did not even appear in the radio listings, leaving only WSM and WLAC. On Thursday and Friday nights, both stations carried network fare; on Saturday only WSM carried old time music, the Opry, while WLAC carried CBS network shows. The Depression, of course, hit radio stations as hard as other institutions, and across the country network radio was busy destroying the interesting, quirky heterogeneity of local radio stations. Both of these reasons may help explain why Nashville radio rivals to the Opry failed. WSM also had a year's head start on WLAC and two years' on WBAW, and thus had the advantage of audience listening habit. But this alone cannot fully explain why the other shows, often using the same stars, could not attract listeners as successfully as the Opry. Another factor possibly bearing on the success of WSM was the assignment, in November 1928, of its new wavelength, which put it into national radio class and permitted it to be heard regularly throughout the US, Canada, Mexico and even Cuba. The possible effect of this wavelength assignment on the overall development of country music and radio needs further exploration.

This brief survey of the various Nashville radio old time music shows suggests several things about the early musical climate of the city. First, the old time music shows must have been attracting listeners, or the other stations would not have tried so doggedly to imitate the WSM Opry. Second is the peculiar fact that, while Nashville itself might have been cosmopolitan enough in the late '20s to support numerous good jazz bands, and while the initial programs of WSM seemed oriented to jazz, orchestral and semi-classical music, as the stations began to realise their broadcasting audience they gradually shifted to old time music. It would almost seem (though this is an almost untestable hypothesis) that the stations were programming not so much for Nashville taste as for the taste of that vast rural audience beyond Nashville.

But despite Nashville's musical sophistication, another conclusion to be drawn from the multiplicity of old time music shows is that there was an impressive supply of folk musicians in and around Nashville in the late '20s. Most of the early Opry performers lived in the middle Tennessee area and many of them were content to stay in the area; few did like Obed Pickard, who made the jump to network radio.

We have already noted that phonograph records cannot explain the success of Opry performers, but a brief look at the relationship between country records and Nashville radio can give us important insights into the cultural and economic matrix of the Opry's development.

By 1927 several key figures of the Opry cast had already made records, and an article appeared on the subject in the Tennessean of April 17, 1927 (reproduced here). It sheds particular light on one of the more intriguing questions about early country music: which medium was more prestigious for an artist, radio or recordings? The implication in the article is that radio popularity was directly responsible for the recordings, and in these instances that is probably accurate. The records would not have existed without radio, yet the records seem more prestigious; the statement that WSM was "holding its own as regards

WSM ARTISTS MAKING RECORDS

Station's Players Fast Are Becoming Popular.

WSM artists are meeting with unusual success in the field of musical records as a result of their broadcasting from the National Life and Accident Insurance Company's station. Several performers have made records and others have recently contracted to do so.

The demand for old-time music is very large. The Columbia Phonograph Company recorded four numbers by Uncle Jimmy Thompson and his niece, Eva Thompson Jones, a few months ago. The latest acquisitions on Columbia records are Obed Pickard known as the "One-Man Orchestra," a star of the barn dance programs, and the Golden Echo quartet composed of William Gillespie, Sam Thomas, Eugene Hall and G. R. O'Grady, who sing negro spirituals.

In addition to those who have recorded for Columbia, contracts have been signed with the Brunswick people to record the efforts of DeFord Bailey, the harmonica wizard, and Dr. Humphrey Bate and his old-time band. Uncle Dave Macon, the banjo picker and singer of old-time songs, has been making Brunswick and Vocalion records for some time. Outside of New York it is easy to see that WSM is holding its own as regards representatives on the big records. The cases mentioned above are as a direct result of broadcasting. There are several other artists who interpret classical music who have been making records for some time in another field.

representatives on the big records" suggests that radio stations might have seen recordings by their artists as a barometer of their success as stations.

As Read & Welch point out in their history of recording From Tin Foil to Stereo (1959), the growth of radio in the early '20s nearly ruined the recording industry, and as late as the '30s there was still hostility toward the playing of phonograph records on the air. Recordings were scorned as "canned music" and generally seen as a sort of fraud on the public.* In the '20s, the radio listener assumed he was hearing live music as a matter of course. Today the situation is completely reversed, with live music the exception rather than the rule. Yet radio stations seemed glad to have their artists record, not suspecting that the broadcast of recordings would one day be widespread. In fact, local stations such as WNOX in Knoxville served as recording studios for some of the first old time music recorded in Tennessee. Several participants in the Victor Nashville recording session of 1928 have said they think one of the local stations had something to do with Victor's decision to record in Nashville, but this has not been documented or verified.

We do know that traveling recording crews would come to town at the request of local radio stations, and there are several instances of companies doing custom recording for stations. For example, according to Dixon & Godrich, in February 1930 the Okeh field unit visited Shreveport, Louisiana, to do some recording at the request of a local radio station,** and the recordings by Obed Pickard and the Golden Echo Quartet on Columbia referred to in the Tennessean article bore the legend "(OF STATION WSM, NASHVILLE, TENN.)" after the artist's name on the label. This has led some scholars to feel that these 1927 Columbia records were made in Nashville, but master files reveal that they were recorded in Atlanta. In late March 1927 several WSM artists journeyed to Atlanta to record. They may have gone as a group, and included Obed Pickard, the Golden Echoes and Deford Bailey. (The records by Bailey were for some reason not released, hence the Tennessean article refers to his upcoming Brunswick session, from which several titles were released.) The meaning of the station identification on the labels is not clear. It might indicate that the station sponsored the trip to Atlanta; it might be the result of the artists wanting to be identified with the station. If the latter, it might indicate that the artists felt their radio affiliation was more important than their recording. Such radio station identification on pre-1930 labels is by no means uncommon, but whether it was done because of the artist or his employing station is not yet clear.

Finally, one must note that despite the prejudice toward broadcasting recorded music, some Nashville stations were doing this, in a limited way, before 1930. On April 4, 1927 WLAC announced that it would begin broadcasting a program of the "latest Victor releases" for an hour each week. The name and number of each record would be carefully announced before and after each selection. Later WBAW had a similar program featuring the latest Brunswick releases. We have no way of knowing how much, if any, old time music was broadcast over such shows, but the shows were apparently sponsored by the record companies and were by no means anything like modern disc-jockey programs. Further research is needed to explore the extent of such programming across the nation. At this time we simply do not know to what extent the shows were controlled by the record companies but Nashville listening audiences were receiving "canned" music as early as 1927.

As we have already seen, newspapers play an important role in determining the response of a community to early country music. They provide, in most instances, the only solid documentary evidence about an art form whose history defies traditional written documentation. In addition to the radio schedules described in the first chapter, Nashville papers offer several other barometers with which to measure Nashville's reaction to old time music. These include record reviews, record advertisements, columns about folklore, and accounts of musical events.

By the middle of 1928 the Tennessean was running a regular column of record reviews in which some old time music, including several records by Nashville radio personalities, was reviewed. The column appeared in the Sunday paper in a section called "The Firing Line", a section, oddly enough, devoted primarily to business news. The column was generally unsigned and was called variously "Reviewing Brunswick Records" or "Latest Brunswick Releases". Either Brunswick was sending the reviewer weekly batches of new records, or the column was supplied gratis by the company to those newspapers that would accept it. The only indication that the reviews were not written as publicity releases is the frequent misspelling of performers' names and an occasional hostile review. It may be reflective of Nashville's taste in 1928 that the reviews regularly included jazz, light opera, popular, dance bands, and various novelty numbers; old time records were almost invariably mentioned last in the review, and at times it seems as though space limitations caused them to be

* See, for instance, a story in the Knoxville News-Sentinel of November 4, 1928, "Canned Music Has Friends in Radio".

** R.M.W. Dixon & John Godrich, Recording the Blues (New York, 1970), 62. Though Dixon and Godrich do not mention it, a record from that Shreveport session illustrates even better the willingness of record companies to do custom recording, even for their supposed archrival, radio. Some collectors have copies of a record labelled Hello World 001, bearing master numbers W403814B and W403810A, which identify the disc as an Okeh recording in spite of the fact that Okeh does not appear on the label. One side is "Hello World Song" by Blind Andy Jenkins, the other is a speech, "Hello World", by W.K. (Old Man) Henderson. Henderson was owner of the Shreveport station KWKH, and according to Blind Andy's song about him, "Every night he gives his warning/To his friends in every state;/If you send your money to Wall Street/You'll surely meet your fate." The Old Man's speech is apparently a simulated broadcast, and begins as follows: "Hello world. It's eight o'clock and this is Old Man Henderson talkin' to you. This is a phonograph record and I'm havin' this record made in order that the people throughout the United States may know conditions why they cannot hear us on radio." The speech goes on to condemn the big chain stations which are knocking out Shreveport's signal; the Old Man leaves the strong impression that the chains (networks) are deliberately jamming him so his message won't get through to the people.

NASHVILLE ON

NEW BRUNSWICK RECORDS THE LATEST RELEASE

Charley Straight and his orchestra reappear on Brunswick list with two delightful dance selections entitled "My Ohio Home," and "Everywhere You Go." These two popular dance numbers are played in Charley Straight's usual high-class style with attractive vocal chorus by Frank Sylvano.

A great western orchstra also appears on the list with "Ella Cinders" and "Let a Smile Be Your Umbrella on a Rainy Day," two popular dance selections now in much demand. These two tunes are played by Herb Wiecoft and his orchestra in the Pacific Coast style with vocal refrains by Leon Lucas.

"Golden Gate" and "Four Walls," were written by that great show man Al Jolson. The composer with Wm. F. Wirges and his orchestra have recorded these two hit songs and they are fine examples of Al Jolson's art.

One of the sweetest tenor voices in the profession is that of Franklyn Baur. Evidence of this fine voice is displayed in Baur's last release in "My Heart Stood Still," from "A Connecticut Yankee," and "Wherever You Are," from "The Sidewalks of New York."

"Among My Souvenirs," is the sensation of the season. The last manner in which it has been recorded is by Eddie Dunstedter [illegible] popular organist.

The old-time portion of this week release is done by McFarland and Gardner the blind musicians of the south in that beautiful old religious melody, in 'Rock of Ages" and "The Old Rugged Cross," also Frank and James McCravy, termed the "sweetest singers of the south" in two spirituals "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" and "When They Ring the Golden Bells."

Brunswick Release

Joe Ri[illegible]s and His Orchestra is a new band with a new style playing "One More Night" and "Anything to Make You Happy." In these two selections strict rhythm is adhered to and makes a great dance record.

"Rain or Shine" and "Forever and Ever" from the musical show "Rain or Shine" is played in fine style by Bernie Cummins and his orchestra.

Hal Kemp and his orchestra typify the youthful trend of modern music in "Who's Blue Now?" and "Didn't I Tell You." These lads were formerly of the University of North Carolina. Their style is the last word in dance music.

Red Nichols and His Five Pennies play a 12-inch record in which they crowd [illegible] of the new and more modern tricks in modern music. The pieces are "Poor Butterfly" and "Can't Yo' Head Me Callin' Caroline."

The "Song of Safari" is a beautiful tune and used as the theme song of the African. Hunt movie "Simba" that is touring the country. This is a 12-inch record with both vocal and orchestra arrangement.

Eddy Thomas, the sweet voiced tenor sings two beautiful numbers. They are "The Church Bells Are Ringing For Mary" and "Every Evening."

Vaughn De Leath is heard in the best sob ballad of the decade in "After My Laughter Came Tears." The coupling is a delightful little tune entitled, "Bluebird, Sing Me a Song."

Howard Herlick directs the A. & P. Gypsies through the "First Love" waltz and "The Old Gypsy."

Bascom Lamar Lunsford "The Minstrel of the Appalachians" tells two interesting sto[r]ies to banjo accompaniment in "Mountain Dew" and "I Wish I Was a Mole In the Ground."

Brnuswick Release

The worlds greatest commedian Al Jolson sings "Ol' Man River." that delightful and melodious number from the musical production "The Show Boat." He also sings one of his own compositions. "Back In Your Own Back Yard."

Wendell Hall "The Red Headed Music Maker," also sings one of his own compositions entitled "Will You Remember" and a fitting coupling is "I Told You I'd Never Forget You."

In the ball room of the Mount Royal Hotel of Montreal. Canada, Jack Denny and his orchestra satisfied hundreds of dancers every evening with just such numbers as "I Can't do Without You" and "Moments With You," just recently recorded.

The Clevelanders assisted by Scrappy Lambert who sings the vocal chorus play two exceptionally hot and dancy fox trots entitled "I Don't Know What to Do" and "Gee! I'm Glad I'm Home."

Two of the best tunes from the operett "The Three Musketeers' are played by the famous Arnold Johnson orchestra. The titles of the tunes are "Ma Belle" and "March of the Musketters."

Kenn Sisson. the arranger extraordinary, makes excellent use of his ability in the record of "Wings" and "When."

The Hawaiian Instrumental trio contributes "Indiana March" and "Sweet Hawaiian Moonlight." Both of these numbers are played in striking dance tempo and have much appeal.

Leopold Godowsky the master pianist remakes one of his demand records, "The Rustle of Spring" and "Witches' Dance."

Jules Herbuveaux the Chicago orchestra leader contributes "Forevermore" and "What Do You Say?" two exceptionally fine dance selections with vocal chorus by Frank Sylvano.

The old-time portion of this weeks' release is done by J. L. McGhee and Frank Welling in the selection "He Abides" and "Hide Me." The opening prayer is by Rev. Joseph W. Hagan

omitted entirely. The October 14, 1928 review discussed, in this order, records by operatic baritone Richard Bonnelli, Wendell Hall, popular singer Ailen McQuahae, a dance orchestra called The Hotsy Totsy Gang, Benny Goodman's Boys ("Jungle Blues", one of his first records), the Royal Hawaiians ("direct from the Islands"), the United States Military Academy Band, Buell Kazee, the Brunswick International Orchestra, Red Nichols and his Five Pennies, the Vagabonds, Joe Green's Novelty Marimba Band, and "the old-time portion of this week's release", tunes by the Kessinger Brothers and McFarland & Gardner.

The reviews of old time music reflect a slight degree of condescension, for they are nearly always placed last and at times are quite critical. For instance, note the treatment of McFarland & Gardner on November 11, 1928:

> "For those who like punch in their religion, Lester McFarland and Robert A. Gardner offer a 'whoopee' version of 'Sweet Hour of Prayer' and 'In the Garden' (No. 4055). Brazen voices are assisted by mandolin and guitar in the first instances and full-fledged fiddle band in the second, a background which, with choppy waltz time, leaves no vestige of the prayerful or reverent. But there are probably some who like their hymns served up thus."

Not all reviews are this hostile, and indeed several are quite laudatory of old time music, but overall the reviewer does not discuss old time music releases

THE FIRING LINE

Brunswick Release

In powerful dramatic style Harry Richman the great comedian of Geo. White Scandals sings, "Laugh Clown Laugh" which is more than just another song a travesty on life itself. A jazzier number is on the reverse of this record entitled. "I Just Roll Along."

"Speedy Boy" and "Borneo" two fast stepping fox trots are given dancy renditions by Ben Bernie & His Hotel Roosevelt Orchestra.

A perfect instrumental picture of "I Still Love You." is painted by Jack Denny & His Orchestra. "Whisper Sweet and Whisper Low" is the fitting coupling with the vocal chorus by "Scrappy Lambert.

"Sweet Sue—Just You" and "Sentimental Baby" are done in great fashion by Charley Straight & His Orchestra, in these two brand new numbers. The vocal work is done by Frank Sylvano.

"Together" was first released in the Waltz selection. Now comes Arnold Johnson & His Orchestra playing this melody number in the Fox Trot rhythm with some splendid instrumental and vocal effects. The reverse is "Happy Go Lucky Lane," also done in unsurpassed style.

Vincent Lopes & His Orchestra glorify two of the hottest tunes of the last decade by playing them in popular concert style. "St Louis Blues" and "The Birth of the Blues" are the titles. To hear these selections is to desire them for those who like popular concert music. Harmony, and how!

Ed Smalle and Dic. Robertson out do even their capable selves in "Collegiana" a hot collage number and "Hum and Strum." The accompaniment is done by violin and piano in the smart original style.

Vaughn De Leath with the expressive voice does "Little Mother" (Mutter chen) a beautiful mother song and "Lou'siana Lullaby." the sentiment of these two beautiful ballads has protrayed Miss De Leath perfectly.

The Record Boys, who are in every-day life. Tom Ford, Frank Kamplain and Lew Cobey, unfold a flock of new gags in two comedy tunes entitled Yeedle Deedle Lena" and "Hokum Smokum Yodelin' Indian Man."

The old timer for this week demonstrat some remarkable string playing in "Chinese Breakdown" and "Ground Hog" done by Jack Reedy and His Walker Mountain String Band.

Brunswick Release

The sign of the true artist is simplicity, and in Marie Tiffany's latest recording of "Darling Nellie Gray" and "Ol' Car'lina", she proves her artistry in these beautiful old negro plantation songs. Miss Tiffany is assisted by male trio, and there is one certain chorus which is delightful for its humming arrangement.

Frank Sylvano's singing of "Sweetheart O'Mine" and "Last Night I dreamed You Kissed Me" is the last word in vocal recordings. There is a soft sobbing moaning blues accompaiment with splendid obligato by the saxphone, and some exquisite vibraphone effects in the arrangement.

Sizzling, scorching hot dance arrangemtns of two "hot" dance tunes are played by Abe Lyman's Sharp and Flats. The titles are "Weary Weasel" and "San." There are some jazz effects in these recordings that can not be surpassed, and are novelty in themselves.

Dave Rubinoff, the popular vaudeville violinist plays in great fashion two splendid numbers — "Stringing Along" and "Last Night I Dreamed You Kissed Me". Popular dasplay of every known technical violin stunt, hamonics, pizzicati, wierd double stops, and a long drawn bowing effect, are evident in these recording.

Jimmy Joy's Orchestra play a thrilling martial fox trot based on the French national hymn, and entitled "Chilly Pom-Pom-Pee". The coupling is a happy-go-lucky sort of thing, entitled "Today is Today". Both selections fine for dancing.

"Moonlight Lane" and "Sweetheart Lane" played by Joe Green's Nevelty Marimba Band are beautiful, quiet nocturnal waltzes, which are evident of all the grace and sweep of hoopskirt and ballroom days. There are guitar and vibraphone introductions followed by violins and melodious saxophone passages. Each side has a vocal cherous.

A great novelty vocal record is "Mock the Mocking Bird" and "Try to Behave Mister Moon." This record is sung by the Record Boys who have with them a yodeler of high calibre.

Two old time favorites with some great vocal haromonies reminiscent of college-barber-shop days, are sung by Frank and James McCravy. They are entitled "Mandy Lee" and the "Trail of the Lonesome Pine".

Mario Chamlee, the popular operatic tenor sings two beautiful sentimental songs. "For Yop Alone" and "Dreams of Long Ago."

This week Eddie Dunstedter, the popular movie organist steps down from the movie organ console and mounts the organ concert platform, playing two of the most appealing standards in musicdom, "Kiss Me Again" from Mlle. Modiste and "Toselli's Serenade." These beautiful soles are done in masterful style by Dunstedter.

Once in a "blue moon" a dance tune is invented which is original enough to survive the usual short lived run of popular music. "Whispering" is such a number, and now Red Nichols and His Five Pennies play it in their original style, which is much to the liking of the younger dance set.

"The Cowboy's Dream" is a clever parody on "Bring Back My Bonnie To Me" an old time favorite melody, which has been long popular. "When the Work's All Done" is just as droll and morbid, is sung with guitar accompaniment by Marc Williams, the Cowboy Crooner.

(which included many of the top names of the old time music pre-1930 era) in as much detail as he does "mainstream" records. In several instances recordings by Nashville radio artists, such as Uncle Dave Macon and Dr Humphrey Bate, are reviewed and absolutely no mention is made of the fact that they represent local talent.

Both Nashville papers routinely carried advertisements for records during this period, but I have not yet discovered any cases where records made by Nashville artists or even made in Nashville were singled out for special emphasis in the advertising. It is unclear how reflective local record advertising was of local taste. Some stores may have advertised simply the latest releases, or releases suggested by the companies, or may have actually emphasised those records which were selling well locally. Occasional ads appear emphasising

old time music, such as one in the Banner, June 3, 1927, in which H. Brown and Company, a small mail order firm, describe 12 Columbia releases, all of which were in the 15000-D or old time series. But other ads list jazz, blues and popular records as well as hillbilly. Without a complete survey of these ads, it is hard to conclude much about Nashville's record-buying tastes, and thus its musical tastes.

Throughout much of the '20s the Banner ran a weekly feature called "The Banner Query Box", which printed old song lyrics, poems, historical notes, bits of folklore and superstitions, and nearly anything else that its readers wrote in inquiring about. Most requests were for song lyrics, and the Query Box either printed the text (if the editor knew the song or where he could find the words) or asked the readers for help. Frequently readers submitted song texts and the editor printed these along with the reader's letter and name. The feature is extremely useful for the collector of traditional folk songs and for those who wish to ascertain which popular songs were gaining favor, or in some cases were actually in tradition, in the middle Tennessee area. But frequently there are requests for songs associated with old time music and here the editorial policy seems confusing at best. For example, the editor printed the text of "New River Train" and "Jesse James", but refused a request for "Blue Ridge Mountain Blues", replying in rather haughty tones, "The Query Box does not print blues songs." In other cases he rejects requests because the song is "too new". But the number of requests that the Query Box received reveals that there was substantial interest in tradition, in old songs, and in what can loosely be called folklore. That the editor frequently had to refuse requests may indicate again the split between the Nashville urban community, of which the editor was a member, and the rural community, from which many of the letters came.

Finally, one can turn to the Nashville papers for their coverage of various live musical events that occurred in the city. Here too a pattern emerges, for most of the music coverage in the papers was related to the Nashville symphony or to classical music. George Pullen Jackson, later to become famous as the author of the pioneering folklore study White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands, regularly reviewed music for the paper, and while he on numerous occasions defended jazz as serious music (a rather brave act in the '20s), we have not yet found evidence in his reviews of any similar sympathy for old time music. The lack of coverage of some events tells us as much as coverage of others. Thus it may be significant that when Victor came to Nashville in October 1928 to make the first recordings in the city, the papers did not run a word about the event. (At least, intensive research has failed to uncover such a story.)

All the Latest Hits in

Columbia New Process Records

MAIL ORDERS A SPECIALTY

Two Black Crows, Part 1. / Two Black Crows, Part 2. By Moran and Mack — 935-D 10-Inch 75c

Dixie / Run, Nigger, Run By Gid Tanner and His Skillet Lickers, with Riley Puckett — 15138-D 10-Inch 75c

Till We Meet Again / I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles By Bob Nichols and Riley Puckett — 15161-D 10-Inch 75c

Mississippi Heavy Water Blues / Mamma, You Don't Suit Me By Barbecue Bob — 14222-D 10-Inch 75c

Louisiana Bo-Bo / The Steamboat By Birmingham Quartet — 14224-D 10-Inch 75c

The Great Day of His Wrath Has Come / Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews By Rev. J. C. Burnette — 14225-D 10-Inch 75c

On My Way to Jesus / Music in My Soul By Bush Family — 15137-D 10-Inch 75c

Jesus Prayed / Life's Railway to Heaven By Smith Sacred Singers — 15159-D 10-Inch 75c

The Highwayman / Hungry Hash House By Charlie Pool with the North Carolina Ramblers — 15160-D 10-Inch 75c

The Old Gray Mare / The Girl I Left Behind Me By Gid Tanner and His Skillet Lickers — 15170-D 10-Inch 75c

Pearl Bryan / The Death of Lura Parsons By Al Craver — 15169-D 10-Inch 75c

Skidd Moore / Soldiers' Day By Blue Ridge Highballers — 15168-D 10-Inch 75c

Baby Lou / Football Rag By Gid Tanner and Fate Norris — 15165-D 10-Inch 75c

The Airship That Never Returned / I Know There Is Somebody Waiting (In the House at the End of the Lane.) By Vernon Dalhart and Charlie Wells — 15163-D 10-Inch 75c

Lock and Key / Trombone Cholly By Bessie Smith — 14232-D 10-Inch 75c

Orders Filled Same Day Received

FREE!

A Plush Record Brush FREE with all orders of three or more records.

This offer good as long as brushes last. Order early as we only have a limited number of these brushes.

BANNER FURNITURE CO., Nashville, Tenn.—Gentlemen: Please send me the above Records, Parcel Post, C. O. D., marked X.

Name ....

Address ....

NOTE—Pay postman when records are delivered. All orders are given prompt attention.

Banner Furniture Co.

HOME FURNISHERS

208 Third Avenue, North

Banner Query Box

"A READER," Lafayette, Tenn.:
"I would like to have the address of the National Headquarters of the Girl Scouts."

A. Girl Scouts, Inc., 670 Lexington Avenue, New York, N. Y.

"R.," Lebanon, Tenn.
(1). "Print the words of the old song 'Lorena.'"

A. The words follow:

The years creep slowly by, Lorena,
The snow is on the grass again;
The sun's low down the sky, Lorena,
The frost gleams where the flowers
have been;
But the heart throbs on as warmly
now
As when the summer days were nigh.
Oh! the sun can never dip so low,
A-down affection's cloudless sky!

A hundred months have passed,
Lorena,
Since last I held that hand in mine;
And felt that pulse beat fast, Lorena,
Though mine beat faster far than
thine;
A hundred months—'twas flowery
May,
When up the hilly slope we climbed,
To watch the dying of the day,
And hear the distant church bells
chime.

We loved each other then, Lorena,
More than we ever dared to tell,
And what we might have been,
Lorena,
Had but our loving prospered well—
But then, 'tis past, the years are gone,
I'll call not up their shadowy forms;
I'll say to them, "Lost years, sleep on,
Sleep on, nor heed life's pelting
storm."

The story of that past, Lorena,
Alas, I care not to repeat,
The hopes that could not last,
Lorena,
They lived, but only lived to cheat;
I would not cause e'en one regret
To rankle in your bosom now;
For "if we try, we may forget,"
Were words of thine long years ago.
Yet, these were words of thine,
Lorena,
They burn within my memory yet;
They touch some tender chords,
Lorena,
Which thrill and tremble with regret;
'Twas not the woman's heart that
spoke,
Thy heart was always true to me—
A duty, stern and pressing, broke
The tie which linked my soul to thee.

It matters little now, Lorena,
The past—is in the eternal past,
Our heads will soon lie down, Lorena,
Life's tide is ebbing out so fast.

There is a future—O, thank God—
Of life this is so small a part;
'Tis dust to dust beneath the sod,
But there, up there, 'tis heart to heart.

(2) "Also the words of 'Paul Vane.'"

A. The words follow:

The years creep slowly by, dear Paul,
The winters come and go,
The wind sweeps past with mournful
cry, dear Paul,
And pelts my face with snow.
But there's no snow upon the heart,
dear Paul,
'Tis summer ever there;
Those early loves throw sunshine over
all
And sweeten mem'ries dear.
I thought it easy to forget, dear Paul,
Life glowed with youthful hopes,
The glorious future gleamed yet, dear
Paul,
And bade us clamber up.
They, frowning said, "It must not,
cannot be;
Break now the hopeless bond!"
And, Paul, you know well that bitter
day
I bent to their commands.
I've kept you in my heart, dear Paul,
Through good and ill;
Our souls could not be torn apart,
dear Paul,
They're bound together still.
I never knew how dear you were to
me
Till I was left alone;
The day they told me you were gone,
I thought my poor, poor heart would
break
Perhaps we'll never, never meet, dear
Paul,
Upon this earth again;
But there where angels greet, dear
Paul,
You'll meet Lorena there.
Together up the ever-shining way
We'll press with ever-hoping heart,
Together through the bright eternal
day,

And nevermore to part.

"F.," Belvidere, Tenn.:
"Where can one

alms. With loyal heart and with the purest hands he faithfully discharged all public trusts.

"He was a worshiper of liberty, a friend of the oppressed. A thousand times I have heard him quote these words: 'For justice all place a temple, and all seasons, summer.' He believed that happiness is the only good, reason the only torch, justice the only worship, humanity the only religion, and love the only priest. He added to the sum of human joy, and were everyone to whom he did some loving service to bring a blossom to his grave he would sleep tonight beneath a wilderness of flowers.

"Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word; but in the night of death hope sees a star and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing.

"He who sleeps here, when dying, mistaking the approach of death for the return of health, whispered with his latest breath, 'I am better now.' Let us believe, in spite of doubts and dogmas, of fears and tears, that these dear words are true of all the countless dead.

"The record of a generous life runs like a vine around the memory of our dead, and every sweet, unselfish act is now a perfumed flower.

"And now, to you, who have been chosen, from the many men he loved to do the last sad office for the dead, we give his sacred dust.

"Speech cannot contain our love. There was, there is, no gentler, stronger, manlier man."

"READER," Greenbrier, Tenn.:
"To whom should one write a letter of application for a position as telephone operator at Nashville?"

A. Write the district traffic manager, Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company, 183 Third avenue, north, Nashville, Tenn.

"R.," Big Sandy, Tenn.:
"Print the poem by Henry Van Dyke, 'God of the Open Air.'"

A. The poem follows:

These are things I prize
And hold of dearest worth;
Light of the sapphire skies,
Peace of the silent hills,
Shelter of forests, comfort of the
grass,
Music of birds, murmur of little rills,
Shadows of cloud that swiftly pass,
And after showers,
The smell of flowers
And of the good, brown earth—
And best of all, along the way, friendship and mirth.
So let me keep
These treasures of the humble heart
In true possession, owning them by
love:
And when at last I can no longer move
Among them freely, but must part
From the green fields and waters
clear,
Let me not creep
Into some darkened room and hide
From all that makes the world so
bright and dear;
But throw the windows wide
To welcome in the light,
And while I clasp a well-beloved
hand,
Let me once more have sight
Of the deep sky and the far smiling land —
Then gently fall on sleep,
Then breathe my body back to Nature's care,
My spirit out to thee, God of the open
air!

"Z.," Nashville, Tenn.:
"Tell me something about Barry Benefield, the author."

A. A sketch is not available.

"N.," Huntingdon, Tenn.:
"Who can tell me the requirements for joining the 105th Observation Squadron?"

A. Maj. John C. Bennett, Moon-Bennett Grain Company, 141 North First street, Nashville, Tenn.

"M.," Christiana, Tenn.:
"Where can I get the music to the song, 'The Cat Came Back'?"

A. A local music dealer could probably secure it for you.

"T.," Nashville, Tenn.:
"What year did the man get killed who wrote 'Lucky Strike' in the air, and when did he write it in the air here?"

A. Capt. Derece Shepperson, Er

But there where angels greet, dear
Paul,
You'll meet Lorena there.
Together up the ever-shining way
We'll press with ever-hoping heart,
Together through the bright eternal
day,

And nevermore to part.

"F.," Belvidere, Tenn.:
"Where can one get a copy of the fifty most famous paintings that appeared in the Banner?"

A. We do not know that the articles have been put in book form or will be. You can ascertain by writing the Publishers Syndicate, 30 La Salle street, Chicago, Ill.

"L.," Chapel Hill, Tenn.:
"Publish Ingersoll's tribute to brother."

A. Robert G. Ingersoll's tribute to his brother, Eben C. Ingersoll, dated Washington, May 31, 1879, follows:

"Dear Friends: I am going to do that which the dead oft promised he would do for me.

"The loved and loving brother, husband, father, friend, died where manhood's morning almost touches noon, and while the shadows still were falling toward the west.

"He had not passed on life's highway the stone that marks the highest point; but being weary for a moment, he lay down by the wayside and using his burden for a pillow, fell into that dreamless sleep that kisses down his eyelids still. While yet in love with life and raptured with the world, he passed to silence and pathetic dust.

"Yet after all, it may be best, just in the happiest, sunniest hour of all the voyage, while eager winds are kissing every sail, to dash against the unseen rock, and in an instant hear the billows roar above a sunken ship. For whether in midocean or 'mong the breakers of the farther shore, a wreck at last must mark the end of each and all. And every life, no matter if its every hour is rich with love and every moment jeweled with a joy, will, at its close, become a tragedy as sad and deep and dark as can be woven of the warp and woof of mystery and death.

"This brave and tender man in every storm of life was oak and rock; but in the sunshine he was vine and flower. He was the friend of all heroic souls. He climbed the heights, and left all superstition far below while on his forehead fell the golden dawning of the grander day.

"He loved the beautiful, and was with color, form and music touched to tears. He sided with the weak, the poor and wronged, and lovingly gave

MOTHER!

Child's Best Laxative is "California Fig Syrup"

Hurry, Mother! A teaspoonful of "California Fig Syrup" now will thoroughly clean the little bowels and in a few hours you have a well, playful child again. Even if cross, feverish, bilious, constipated or full of cold, children love its pleasant taste.

Tell your druggist you want only the genuine "California Fig Syrup" which has directions for babies and children of all ages printed on bottle. Mother, you must say "California."

A local music dealer could probably secure it for you.

"T.," Nashville, Tenn.:
"What year did the man get killed who wrote 'Lucky Strike' in the air, and when did he write it in the air here?"

A. Capt. Derece Shepperson, English aviator and "skywriter," arrived here Sept. 15, 1928. He flew over Nashville skywriting. A few minutes later in preparing to make a landing at Blackwood field, a wing of his plane caught in a tree and the plane crashed.

"READER," Monterey, Tenn.:
"Print the words of the song 'The Fatal Wedding.'"

A. The words follow:

The wedding bells were ringing on
The moonlight winter's night,
The church was decorated,
All inside was gay and bright;
The mother with her baby came,
She saw those lights aglow,
She thought of how those same bells
chimed
For her three years ago.
"I would like to be admitted, sir,"
She told the sexton old,
"Just for the sake of baby,
To protect him from the cold."
He told her that the wedding there
Was for the rich and grand,
And with the eager, watching crowd,
Outside she'd have to stand.

CHORUS

While the wedding bells were ringing,
While the bride and groom were
there,
Marching up the aisle together,
While the organ pealed an air,
Telling tales of fond affection,
Vowing never more to part;
Just another fatal wedding,
Just another broken heart.

She begged the sexton once again
To let her pass inside,
"For baby's sake, you may step in,"
The gray-haired man replied.
"If anyone knows reason why
This couple should not wed,
Speak now or hold your peace forever,"
Soon the preacher said.
"I must object," the woman cried
With voice so meek and mild;
"The bridegroom is my husband, sir,
And this our little child."
"What proof have you?" the preacher
asked?
"The infant," she replied.
She kneeled to pray, then raised the
babe—
The little one had died.

The parents of the bride then took
The outcast by the arm;
"We'll care for you through life," they
said,
"You saved our child from harm."
The parents, bride and outcast wife
Then quickly drove away;
The husband died by his own hand
Before the break of day.
No wedding feast was spread that
night,
Two graves were made next day,
One for the little baby and
In one the husband lay.

This story has been often told,
By fireside warm and bright,
Of bride and groom and outcast wife,
And fatal wedding night.

Correspondence.

"Put My Little Shoes Away"

To the Query Box:
I am sending the words of a song "Put My Little Shoes Away," asked for Sunday. DELL BRADFORD, Elkmont, Ala.

Mother, dear, come bathe my forehead,
For I'm growing very weak;
Let one drop of water, mother,
Fall upon my burning cheek;
Tell my loving little playmates,
That I never more will play,
Give them all my toys, but mother,
Put my little shoes away.

CHORUS

I am going to leave you, mother,
So remember what I say,
Do it, won't you please, dear mother,
Put my little shoes away.

Santa Claus he gave them to me
With a lot of other things,
And I think he brought an angel,
With a pair of golden wings.
Mother, I shall be an angel,
By perhaps another day,
So you will then, dearest mother,
Put my little shoes away.

Soon the baby will be larger,
Then they'll fit his little feet

When field recordings were made in other cities in Tennessee during this time, such as Bristol, Johnson City and Knoxville, the event was considered a major news story and treated by the papers accordingly. This makes the neglect of the story by Nashville papers even more striking.

When the Nashville papers wrote about old time music other than in the radio columns, they presented it as a social happening rather than a musical event. An interesting case in point is the treatment of the All-Southern Fiddlers' Convention, held in spring 1927 at Ryman auditorium. Coverage of the event was complete, but stressed the color of the convention, the beauty contest, the gimmicks and the crowd more than the music involved. This is all the more remarkable in the light of the fact that the musicians present included the Skillet-Lickers, with Riley Puckett and Clayton McMichen, who were among the most famous old time musicians in the country at that time. (For a more detailed account of this event see the chapter "When the Skillet-Lickers Came to Nashville. . ." /p. 101/.)

This chapter was meant to serve as an illustration and example of the kind of information about old time music that can be gathered without direct reference to music and musicians. It does not pretend to be a definitive approach to Nashville's early attitudes toward what was to become one of its major products, country music. But the available evidence does suggest several hypotheses. One is that the audience for the country music that developed in Nashville was less within the city itself than in the outlying rural communities reached by the powerful radio stations. Nashville itself, at least as reflected in the media, preferred more sophisticated music: the symphony, opera, and, in the popular field, jazz and dance music.* Another hypothesis is that while early Nashville was culturally unwilling to accept country music, it was willing to embrace it economically, as shown by the radio rivals to the WSM barn dance. A third conclusion is that Nashville had a surprising supply of competent old time musicians who, though not successful as recording artists, were immensely successful as radio artists, and were strongly attached to the middle Tennessee community, seldom trying to exploit their careers beyond its boundaries. A fourth hypothesis is that the success of the WSM Opry, whatever it can be attributed to, cannot be attributed to the program's uniqueness in presenting country music. Even at the local level the Opry had rivals, and on a national level it had many more.

* The full history of jazz in Nashville of the '20s needs to be researched, not only for its relevance to country music but for its bearing on the history of jazz. Nashville had many extremely competent jazz musicians and orchestras in the '20s: for instance, the famous Beasley Smith band was a training ground for artists like Phil Harris, Ray McKinley and Matty Matlock.

GOIN' UPTOWN

DR HUMPHREY BATE DEAN OF THE OPRY

ANY CONSIDERATION OF THE MUSICIANS OF THE EARLY OPRY - the men who made the Opry - must begin with Dr Humphrey Bate. Bate, whom George Hay called the "dean" of the Opry, was probably the first musician to play country music over WSM, and probably the first to play such music over Nashville radio in general. His role has been overshadowed by Uncle Jimmy Thompson, the traditional "founder" of the Opry. But had not Dr Bate paved the way, and shown that audience interest in old time music existed, Uncle Jimmy might never have been allowed to play on his famous November 28 broadcast. Indisputable documentary evidence exists that Dr Bate played on WDAD a full month before WSM even started, and played on WSM weeks before George Hay even arrived on the scene.

Dr Bate, described by Hay as "a very genial country physician from Sumner County, Tennessee", wasn't as colorful or as eccentric as Uncle Jimmy, and he might not have evoked the immediate and dramatic audience response that Uncle Jimmy did. But his role in the early Opry's development is actually as great as, if not greater than, that of Uncle Jimmy. He recorded more, and in many ways his music was more accessible and less complex than Uncle Jimmy's. Certainly Dr Bate was on the air more regularly than Uncle Jimmy, especially after 1926; in fact, in terms of airtime, Dr Bate was probably on the early Opry more than any other band. In 1926, for instance, he was on 29 out of 39 logged shows, and in 1928 on 25 out of 52 logged shows. (A logged show is one for which we have at least a tentative line-up.) Often he performed for as much as an hour, and often twice a night. Dr Bate was in the first Opry tour group sent out in 1931, and he was one of the few early artists who saw the full potential of the Opry's development. He repeatedly told his daughter Alcyone: "Honey, you know we may have really started something down there."

But even if Dr Bate had not been historically important, he would have been musically vital to the development of the show. His band had one of the most individual sounds in old time music, and reflected the characteristic middle-Tennessee stringband tradition, with its emphasis on the harmonica sharing the lead with the fiddle. His music influenced many other Opry regulars, from the Crook Brothers to Uncle Dave Macon. His repertoire, which has been preserved (see below), was one of the most extensive and, in folkloristic terms, authentic of any Opry performer. Yet it included a refreshingly eclectic variety of other numbers, from ragtime to Sousa marches. Dr Bate's own harmonica style was clean, pure and exact, reminding one more of a fiddle than a blues harp. His style anticipated the later Nashville stylings of artists like Jimmy Riddle and Charlie McCoy. But most important, perhaps, was the fact that his band was a team. They were no pickup group, and had relatively few personnel changes for over 15 years. They created a collective ensemble sound not unlike that of early New Orleans jazz, and there was nothing quite like it in old time music.

Like most other performers on the early Opry, Dr Bate did not make his living with his music. For most of his career he was a fulltime practicing physician who saw music as a hobby and as a means to relax. He was born in 1875 in Sumner County, Tennessee, some 40 miles northeast of Nashville, and about halfway between Nashville and the Kentucky state line. His father before him had been a physician for about 40 years at Castalian Springs, near Gallatin, Tennessee, and young Humphrey took over his practice about the turn of the century. He had graduated from the Vanderbilt medical school just prior to the Spanish-American War of 1898, and served in the Medical Corps during the war. Young Dr Bate reportedly turned down several offers to practice in nearby cities, preferring the life of a country doctor and the rustic pleasures of hunting and fishing.

Though the Bate family, which originally came from North Carolina, had boasted no outstanding musicians in its branches, Dr Bate was from the first interested in music. He had formed his first band by the turn of the century, a curious unit which included a fiddle, harmonica, guitar, banjo and a cello played like a string bass. As early as 1919 this band was acquiring a notable regional popularity. On October 2, 1919, a clipping from the Sumner County newspaper reports that the band won a contest at nearby Lebanon, Tennessee. "The Castalian Springs Band, composed of Dr Humphrey Bate, Sewall Chenault, P.D. Belote and A.C. Womack, won the string band contest and the Cotton Town band won the second prize. Dr Humphrey Bate captured the prize in the harp contest. . . . The prize for 'Girl I Left Behind Me' was won by M.F. Chenault of Castalian Springs."

As a boy Humphrey Bate would board the steamboats that ran excursions up and down the Cumberland River and

Dr Humphrey Bate (second from left) with what may have been his first band: A.C. Womack, fiddle; Sewall (Rabbit) Chenault, guitar; -. Womack, banjo; and P.D. "Boss" Belote, 'cello.

would play on them. His daughter recalls: "At first, it was just him playing harmonica solos. Later I'm sure he may have carried others, but at first it was just him and his harmonica. It worried my grandmother because he would go to the river." But an even more important influence on him than the riverboat experience was an old ex-slave who had worked for the Bate family for years. Alcyone Bate remembers: "I have heard him say that most of the tunes he learned, he learned from this old Negro who was an old man when he /Humphrey/ was a little boy. I don't know whether this old Negro sang these songs to him, whether he played them on an instrument, or what. But looking over Daddy's list of tunes that he played confirms that . . . for so many of the tunes on Daddy's list nobody else ever played." (A couple of the tunes which might well have come to Dr Bate from black tradition are the funky-sounding "Old Joe" and "Take Your Foot Out of the Mud and Put It in the Sand", which seems related to the familiar "Casey Jones" melody line.)

But while Dr Bate eagerly embraced traditional material, he was no purist in what he listened to or what he played. His daughter recalls: "We were exposed to all types of music: classical, popular, folk. . . . We always had a Victrola and we always had good records to listen to. But it's funny, I can't remember him ever having a country-type record in the house. But we had lots of band music, and light opera, classical singers." Dr Bate himself was very fond of Sousa's band, and would take his family to Nashville to see it whenever it toured the area. And though he could not read music himself, he would listen to light classical numbers on the Victrola or played on the piano, and adapt them for harmonica. He could play a little on any instrument, though he usually played harp, guitar or piano.

In the years after World War I, when Alcyone was a little girl of four or five, she began to sing with her father's various bands, and occasionally to travel with them. The band played at schoolhouse concerts, for steamboat excursions, for picnics, and for a time as an intermission feature in a silent movie house in Gallatin. Oddly enough, for a band that supposedly specialised in "barn dance" music and flavored its breakdowns with dance calls, it didn't play many dances. However, it apparently played a variety of music, from Italian waltzes to marches. And by 1925, when the two Nashville radio stations came on the air, the band had enough of a regional reputation to attract offers from both.

Apparently Dr Bate was acquainted with a Bill Craig, a cousin to the Craigs who owned National Life. Some months before WSM went on the air, when it became evident that the station would be started, Craig had asked Dr Bate and his band to perform regularly on the air. But before WSM began broadcasting, WDAD opened, and they too asked him to perform. Mindful of his commitment to Craig, Dr Bate hesitated until he could clear it with National Life. When there was no objection, he agreed to start performing for WDAD. In fact, for some months he continued to play on both stations, often appearing on WDAD early in the evening and then walking up the hill to WSM.

The sketchiness of radio logs during the first two months of operation by both WSM and WDAD makes it unclear how much Dr Bate was on the air. He first appears in the WSM schedule for October 18, 1925, when a "studio program featuring Dr Humphrey Bates /sic/ and his string quartet of old-time musicians, from Castallian /sic/ Springs" is announced for 10.00 to 11.00 pm. By January 3, 1926, a radio column in the Tennessean reports that Dr Bate and his band had been on WDAD over 20 times since the station began operating in September; that would mean that Dr Bate had played on the station almost every Saturday night. A similar record is probably true for WSM. On December 20, 1925, the Tennessean ran a photo of Bate's band with the caption "Players of old-time favorites for WSM"; it is the first photo of any Opry performer to appear in print.

On Thursday, November 5 - a week before George Hay arrived, and three weeks before the famous Uncle Jimmy Thompson broadcast - WSM got several of its radio artists together to broadcast from the Ryman auditorium for the policemen's benefit. Two old time groups were included, Dr Bate's, and Uncle Dave Macon and Sid Harkreader. The two groups vied with each other for the more applause; the Tennessean described the Bate band's role in the show:

> "Dr Bate directed his old-time orchestra, using himself the harmonica. His daughter, Miss Alcyone Bate, presided at the piano, Walter Ligget and Hugh Peay played the banjo, and O.R. Blanton and Burt Hutchinson played guitars. They rendered several numbers of old time and popular music, and the audience never got enough."

By this time Alcyone, now 13, was playing ukulele and piano with her father's band, and occasionally singing numbers like "Peggy O'Neal" and "Silver Threads Among the Gold". As the band continued to perform, it began to attract its share of the fan-mail. One letter, dated January 4, 1926, from Richmond, Ontario, read:

> "Dr Humphrey Bate's orchestra was so plain we had a pleasant quadrille to it. It was such a pleasant change from the jazz music and the announcer's words were so plain we enjoyed hearing the Southern drawl."

Though the mail was not as great as that received by Uncle Jimmy Thompson, it was impressive, and by March of that year WSM publicity was saying that "the doctor has one of the fastest barn dance teams on the air today".

Left, the earliest photograph of the Possum Hunters: (standing) Oscar Stone, Burt Hutcherson; (seated) Dr Bate, Alcyone Bate, Walter Ligget. The photograph was made in December 1925.

Right, a slightly different lineup: Bate, Stone, Ligget, Staley Walton, Paris Pond (an occasional substitute for Hutcherson), Oscar Albright.

Alcyone elsewhere in this book gives her memories of what broadcasting was like during the first few months. But as early as January 1926 Dr Bate was a regular on the barn dance program, usually opening the show with "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight".*

Though the personnel of Dr Bate's band varied slightly from month to month, seven members formed the core of the band. There was Dr Bate himself, who usually played harmonica; Alcyone, who usually played piano; and five excellent local musicians. The lead fiddler was Oscar Stone, a Nashville native who worked days as a hardwood floor layer for a leading Nashville department store. Oscar reportedly joined the Bate band on October 25, 1925, shortly after WSM started. Though a native of Obion County, Tennessee, he had moved to Sumner County as a boy, and there met Dr Bate. He was only six years younger than Dr Bate and acted as a sort of co-leader of the band; on occasion, when Dr Bate would lead a contingent of his band that he called his "Hawaiian orchestra", Stone would lead the old time section. When Dr Bate died in 1936, Oscar took over the Possum Hunters and kept them going until 1949, when he himself died. Stone is given credit for composing two wellknown songs associated with Bate. "Goin' Uptown", which Bate and Stone recorded in 1928, was published by Flick Music in Nashville in 1931; it is one of the few pieces of sheet-music published featuring an old time band from the '20s on the cover. Stone also wrote "Stone's Rag", which was featured but never recorded by Bate and Stone; however, another Nashville band, Paul Warmack's, recorded it on Victor (V-40009) in 1928, with Stone's friend Charlie Arrington doing the fiddling.

Walter Ligget was Bate's banjo-player for years. He was a native of Cottontown (a few miles west of Castalian Springs) and worked during the day as a truck farmer. He was the group's comedian, and would "crow like a rooster" whenever the band left the stage after performing. He liked to wear a thatched red wig, much like the "Toby" clowns used to wear in medicine shows of the day. Oscar Albright usually played the bass fiddle, or "doghouse bass" as it was called then. He was from Sideview, Tennessee, and was a farmer also. Judge Hay recalled proudly that Oscar's brother had been a US "minister" to Finland, but neglected to mention the more pertinent fact that Oscar was probably the first

* After Uncle Jimmy Thompson began to play less on the program, it was usually Dr Bate's band that opened the whole barn dance program at 8.00 pm, and "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" became the informal theme song for the early Opry itself.

"Goin' Up Town"

BARN DANCE

From the Grand Old Opry
W. S. M. Nashville, Tenn.

Introduced by Dr. Humphrey Bate and his Possum Hunters

By OSCAR R. STONE

Lively

mf

Salute your partners Balance all.

Hands up, hands around circle to the left,

singing of the early days. Yet Dr Bate took it all in good spirit, and his band continued to be the flagship band of the Opry. Alcyone, meanwhile, was developing a career of her own, and as early as 1930 had her own radio show over WSM. Later during the '30s she sang with Jack Shook and his band, Smilin' Jack and his Missouri Mountaineers, and put together a girls' vocal group, Betty and the Dixie Dawns. But early in 1936 Dr Bate began to experience heart trouble. He told George Hay, "It is my wish to die in harness." The trouble continued, and Dr Bate passed away the night before the Opry moved into its new quarters on Fatherland Street.

Today Alcyone Bate is the only surviving member of this splendid pioneering band. For years she and Staley Walton struggled to keep the Possum Hunters together, but they gave this up and in the mid-'60s joined with the Crook Brothers' band. When Staley died a few years ago Alcyone went into semi-retirement. After some 40-odd years of making some of the finest dance music in the nation, the Possum Hunters were no more.

We cannot leave the story of Dr Bate without examining why it was not he but Uncle Jimmy Thompson who caught the public's fancy and gained wide acceptance as the Opry's "founder". There was no overt plot against Dr Bate; Hay thought more of him, if anything, than he did of Uncle Jimmy. In fact, it was only after Dr Bate's death that Uncle Jimmy began to be widely described as the first musician on the Opry; his own 1931 obituary notices make no mention of his "founding" the Opry.

There are a number of very real reasons why Uncle Jimmy attracted more contemporary publicity than Dr Bate. One was Henry Ford. By early 1925 Ford, through his vast resources, had generated a widespread fad for old time fiddling; Uncle Jimmy arrived in the midst of this fad, and, being an excellent fiddler, took advantage of it. Uncle Jimmy also fitted the stereotype Ford was building of the old time fiddler; in fact, on the cover of Ford's widely circulated magazine The Dearborn Independent for January 16, 1926 (the week Ford staged regional fiddling contests across the country), appears an old, bad, white-bearded fiddler who in many ways resembles Uncle Jimmy. Dr Bate, by contrast, did not fit this stereotype. In fact, another related reason for the interest in Uncle Jimmy was the deliberate attempt to promote the barn dance music as rustic and primitive. We have seen how Hay rusticated the image of Dr Bate's band during the first few years of the Opry. With Uncle Jimmy, there was little need to rusticate. Whereas Dr Bate was a genial, sophisticated, well-educated physician, Uncle Jimmy was cantankerous, eccentric, and a genuine man of the hills. And finally there is the fact that Uncle Jimmy was Hay's own discovery, whereas Dr Bate had attained wide popularity over the station even before Hay arrived on the scene.

The mystery of how the Opry image developed is too involved to go into here, but a full investigation of it might reveal why Dr Bate's role has been generally overlooked. The fact that the legend persists today, even in spite of increasing recognition of Dr Bate, is also a story in itself.

A Tribute to Dr. Humphrey Bate

By GEORGE D. HAY, *"The Solemn Ol' Judge"*

The Possum Hunters—Dr. Bate in center, holding dog

WSM lost the dean of its Grand Ole Opry when Dr. Humphrey Bate, a kindly, intelligent, country physician, felt his own pulse at about nine o'clock last Friday night and told his son-in-law that he was leaving this world. His death occurred a moment later.

For nearly eleven years Dr. Bate and his 'Possum Hunters have opened the program which started out in a very small way in WSM's first studio, and is now housed in a tabernacle which seats four thousand people.

Dr. Bate was graduated from the Vanderbilt University Medical School just before the Spanish-American War, and served as an officer in the Medical Corps during and shortly after the war of 1898. His father before him, Dr. Humphrey Bate, Sr., practiced medicine for about forty years at Castalian Springs, eight miles beyond Gallatin. Dr. Bate turned down several offers as a young man to move to the city. He thought them over carefully, but decided that he could render more service in his own community, which needed him so badly. A man of simple tastes, he enjoyed nature to the utmost. The streams and woods found him during his off hours, and his one emotional outlet was playing the old-time tunes which he loved so dearly.

Several months ago Dr. Bate was stricken with heart trouble. He told the writer about it, and asked only one thing—that he be allowed to continue on the Grand Ole Opry until the end came. He was a physician, and knew the uncertainty of such a malady. He was told that his place would be here as long as he wanted it, but that he must take care of his health, whereupon he replied, "It is my wish to die in harness," which he did. It was almost prophetic in that the good Doctor passed away the night before the Grand Ole Opry moved into its new quarters on Fatherland Street, which seats several thousand people. He was among the very first on the program, which started in the fall of 1925. As a matter of fact, he played on the station before the barn dance started, along about the first of December, 1925.

His sterling character was appreciated by all who knew him, and especially the boys and girls who were associated with him on the program. He greeted everybody with a slap on the back, a smile, and some new story he had picked up around the country. He was beloved as a husband and father and a friend.

At his funeral services in the front yard outside his home at Castalian Springs hundreds of his neighbors gathered to pay tribute to the man who held service above self. To his widow, Mrs. Bate; his daughter, Mrs. Alcyon Bate Beasley; and his son, Buster, we extend our heartfelt sympathy. A fine man has passed beyond our ken, and with him goes our love and affection.

Radio Station P. T. A.

The Parent-Teacher Association of
Earlington will broadcast a

Special Musical Program

At the E. M. B. A. Hall

Friday Evening, Sept. 3

Beginning at 7:30 P. M.

PROF. A. P. PRATHER, Announcer

A number of Local Artists will appear on the program in Vocal Solos, Quartets, etc. Several Instrumental Numbers

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The Feature of the Evening

Dr. Humphrey Bate

and His Old-Timers

Also Dr. Bate and his Hawaiian Four from Stations WSM and WDAD, at Nashville, Tenn. These Radio Artists have delighted audiences from coast to coast with their French Harp, Steel Guitar, Ukulele, Guitar, Banjo and Piano Combinations. Don't miss it.

Admission - [illegible] 15c

Earlington [illegible] Co.

DR BATE'S REPERTOIRE

In the case of many of the early Opry performers, we have only hints of the kind of music they played: a song folio, a few records, some memories of favorite tunes. But with Dr Bate's band we are very fortunate to have uncovered a list, in the doctor's own hand, of his extensive repertoire. This document, one of the rare cases of a "golden age" stringband listing virtually all of its repertoire, is reproduced here.

The list was prepared by Dr Bate apparently for Vito Pellettieri, WSM music librarian before 1935 (when he attained his more famous position as stage manager). It is unclear whether the list was prepared before or after Pellettieri became stage manager, but it would seem more logical that Vito would have wanted the list rather in his capacity of librarian, in his attempt to build up the music library. There are some annotations on the list, possibly in Vito's hand, indicating that some of the songs - a very few - had been published and were in copyright. (As early as 1932, according to Alton Delmore, the Opry was becoming more conscious of song clearances.) It was Pellettieri who preserved the list and eventually gave it to Alcyone Bate, who allowed us to reproduce it here. Alcyone also has a second list which her father made as a sort of rough draft of the one presented here, but the songs are almost identical.

A very cursory survey of the list reveals some enlightening patterns in the makeup of Dr Bate's repertoire. 125 songs are listed, and of those 22 titles were not recognised by this writer. Of the 103 recognised tunes, one can categorise them into the following types:

- traditional fiddle tunes: 34
- popular songs, 1880-90 era: 20
- popular songs, 1920s: 12
- originals (?): 6
- other traditional tunes: 8
- marches: 2
- hornpipes: 5
- vaudeville, minstrel: 13
- ragtime: 3

To condense categories, one can summarise by saying that 47 of the 103 tunes were traditional fiddle tunes (including hornpipes), 13 were from minstrel tradition, and 37 were published pieces, including pop songs, marches and rags. These percentages suggest that the Bate repertoire was actually much more traditional than some have suspected. Though an artificial rustic image was imposed on the band, their music did in fact have genuine folk roots. Well over 50% of the songs listed here are traditional by any definition of the term, and some of the unknown titles might well prove to be traditional, boosting this percentage even higher. If the repertoires of the other early Opry bands were anything like this one, the show was in fact succeeding very well in its stated aim of preserving old mountaineer melodies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks go to Mrs Alcyone Bate Beasley of Nashville, who shared her memories as well as her scrapbook with us. Most of the documents illustrating this chapter come from her collection. Thanks also to Doug Green of the Country Music Foundation, Nashville.

'HELLO FOLKS! THIS IS OLD UNCLE JIMMY THOMPSON!'

THE OPRY'S FIRST LEGEND

TRADITIONALLY, HISTORY OF THE OPRY HAS ALWAYS STARTED with November 28, 1925, when George Hay unleashed upon America the fiddling and personality of 77-year-old Uncle Jimmy Thompson. As we have seen, Uncle Jimmy was really not the first old time musician to play over WSM, but he was the first one to evoke the nationwide excitement that convinced Hay and the WSM owners that barn dance music had a future in radio. He was one of the first traditional artists to experience the full impact of the new electronic mass medium of radio, and he experienced it with stunning swiftness. Within a month radio elevated him from a locally-known rural fiddler to a champion musician whose merits were debated as far away as Boston. And within a year it had elevated him into a legend of perplexing proportions.

Yet the picture we have of Uncle Jimmy is curiously one-dimensional. We see a white-bearded, stocky man dressed in a conservative black suit, seated before a large carbon microphone fiddling away with a sort of detached amusement. We see him playing for hours on end during the first few weeks of the Opry, but then dropping out of sight. It is almost as if he did not exist prior to November 1925, nor after March 1926. But he obviously did, and he obviously saw the Opry as only a part of a full and long life that ranged from the Civil War to the Texas frontier. There is a man behind the legend, and there are still people around who played with him, shared a jug with him, heard him tell jokes, and even sat on his lap. To them he is very much a real person: an independent, self-reliant, outspoken, hard-living, rough-talking 19th-century man of the land. In fact, the reality is more interesting than the legend.

But the legend is important. Why was it Uncle Jimmy who seized the fancy of the American public in 1925? Why yet today does he retain the status of a folk hero in his native Wilson County? Uncle Jimmy only made two records during his life, and they were not widely popular; he broadcast hardly at all after 1928. His music, it would seem, has long since died. Why then

does he live on in the popular imagination? Answers can be gained only when we know something of Uncle Jimmy's personality and philosophy, and such aspects have hitherto been obscured. The first step in understanding the Jimmy Thompson phenomenon - and, to an extent, the whole old time Opry phenomenon - is to try to reconstruct a life of the man.

Uncle Jimmy was born James Donald Thompson near Baxter, in Smith County, about halfway between Nashville and Knoxville, in northern Tennessee. He had at least two brothers, neither of whom distinguished himself musically. However, Lee, who eventually settled around Cookeville, Tennessee, was the father of Eva Thompson Jones, Uncle Jimmy's wellknown niece who played behind him on WSM. Little is known about the history of the Thompson family itself, though the line probably sprang from Scots origins.

When he was a boy, Uncle Jimmy's people moved to Texas, shortly before the Civil War. The family must have been fond of Texas, for both of Uncle Jimmy's brothers stayed there after the war, and Uncle Jimmy himself returned there several times. Jimmy was too young for the Civil War, but by the time he was 17, in 1860, had begun mastering fiddle tunes like "Flying Clouds", a tune that would remain one of his favorites. The young man continued to learn tunes, some from men who had fought in the Civil War, others from fiddlers whose repertoires might well have stretched back to Revolutionary America. Uncle Jimmy recalled later that on August 4, 1866, he learned a "fine quadrille", the old minstrel-show number "Lynchburg" (also known as "Lynchburg Town").

Though he primarily farmed for a living, the young Jimmy Thompson traveled widely in his youth and eventually returned to his native Smith County, Tennessee. There, in the 1880s, he married Mahalia Elizabeth Montgomery of Smith County. The union resulted in two sons and two daughters: Jess (born 1886), Willie Lee (born 1896), Sally (who eventually married and moved to Montana) and Fanny, who died in infancy. All the children are now deceased. About 1902 Uncle Jimmy took his family back to Texas, and settled around the Bonham area, northeast of Dallas and close to the Oklahoma line. He continued to farm, but was beginning to play more and more in public on his fiddle.

In 1907 Uncle Jimmy participated in the famous eight-day marathon contest he so vividly described to Judge Hay the night of his first broadcast. The contest was held in Dallas, and Uncle Jimmy won "the nation's championship in his class against nearly 100 contestants" (Tennessean, June 13, 1925; the actual figure given by Uncle Jimmy later was 86). Information is lacking about who was in this contest, but the fact that Jimmy won indicates that he had absorbed a good deal of the Texas "long bow" style during his various stays there. (His style, which has been described as "fancy", is in distinct contrast to the older, heavier styles of traditional Southeastern fiddlers, like Fiddlin' John Carson or Gid Tanner; it has much more in common with the Southwestern stylings of Eck Robertson.)

About 1912 Uncle Jimmy, now 64 and with most of his family grown, returned to Tennessee and bought a farm near Hendersonville in north central Tennessee. His wife was dying of cancer, and perhaps she wanted to be back in her native state before she died. Soon after they returned, she died and was buried in Smith County.

By this time Eva Thompson, Uncle Jimmy's niece, was starting to teach music in rural Tennessee schools. As a young girl, Eva was fond of classical and semi-classical music (and the turn-of-the-century parlor music that passed for such), and used to accompany her father into Nashville when he came to sell stock, just to watch the touring shows that played there. Later she was to study at Ward-Belmont college, then as now one of Nashville's more prestigious musical schools, and later recalled going by horse and buggy to give music lessons.* In 1915 Eva was teaching in Sumner County, and was indirectly responsible for introducing Uncle Jimmy to his future daughter-in-law, Katherine Womack.

Katherine, who is today Uncle Jimmy's closest living relative, recalls the night she met him:

> "It was at a school entertainment up here at Number One in Sumner County - that's the way I met my husband. Eva was teaching music there, and she knew I played a banjo, so they sent home and got my banjo, and he come down to play for us, Uncle Jimmy did, and I played with him. And he was just tickled to death to find a woman playing a banjo. So we really had a big time down there at the school. He went home and told his son about it and that's how I met my husband."

Katherine's husband was Willie Lee, Jimmy's youngest child, and after they were married both she and her husband played with Uncle Jimmy on an informal basis. Willie Lee played guitar, Katherine banjo; on one or two later occasions they joined their uncle on the radio. Uncle Jimmy was especially fond of Katherine, and liked to listen to her sing and play the banjo on some of his favorite numbers like "Red Wing", "The Preacher and the Bear" and "Rainbow".

About 1916, when he was 68 years old, Uncle Jimmy decided to remarry. He chose Ella Manners, from nearby Wilson County, Tennessee, an older woman who soon became known as Aunt Ella. It was after this that Uncle Jimmy moved down to Wilson County, near Laguardo, and bought a house formerly occupied by an old physician. Both he and Aunt Ella were to live at Laguardo for the rest of their lives.

From all accounts Aunt Ella was just as high-spirited as Uncle Jimmy. She loved to buck dance, and she loved her dram of white lightning as much as her husband. Neighbors in Laguardo recall often visiting the pair and watching Aunt Ella buck dance in a long white dress while Uncle Jimmy played the fiddle. Occasionally Ella and Jimmy would travel around the mid-Tennessee area playing for fairs and outings, pulling up in their truck, unrolling a special rug for Ella to dance on, and performing an impromptu show. They would then pass the hat and collect quarters and dollars from the audience. One neighbor recalls a fiddling session at Uncle Jimmy's house when both Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Ella had a little too much bootleg. "Aunt Ella finally fell flat on her face, and Uncle Jimmy, fiddling all the time, glanced down at her and remarked, 'Watch it now, Ella, you done gone and spoiled it thar.'" Another neighbor repeats stories about Uncle Jimmy and Aunt Ella

* Most of the biographical material on Eva Thompson Jones comes from Don Cummings' pamphlet The Birth of the Grand Ole Opry. Mrs Jones talked to Cummings before she died (in 1973), and her remarks are reflected in the book.

chasing each other around their old house, each with a loaded gun, firing playfully into the air.

It is not clear just now much "paraprofessional" entertaining Uncle Jimmy did before his fame on the radio, but it seems obvious that he enjoyed at least a regional reputation as a fiddler before his WSM days. Some friends have said that he travelled quite widely, both with Eva Thompson Jones and Aunt Ella, and staged shows across Tennessee in the days before World War I. Jim Thompson, a former neighbor of Uncle Jimmy's (but no relation), says that Uncle Jimmy began to do shows to make a living when he began to get too old to farm.

> "Before he played on the Opry, he was mainly a farmer, till his age got the best of him. And while he was a farmer he had fiddled, so he just quit trying to work on account of his age and went to playin' the fiddle. And he'd get right smart o' donations when he'd go around to these different places playing. That's how they lived. They'd put on these little shows."

Uncle Jimmy had a rather distinctive means of transportation for getting around to these shows. He had taken a little Ford sedan and had built a truck bed on to it in 1922, and then built a little house on the back. It was a rough prototype of the modern camper, but it caused quite a stir in the '20s. Katherine Thompson remembers:

> "He had furnished it, it was real amusin' to all of us. He had a floor covering on there of matting, and he had the inside all fixed up and had a cot in there. Had a water bucket, a dipper, washpan, towel, even a little wood stove, so he could spend the night travellin' if he wanted to."

Uncle Jimmy and occasionally Aunt Ella would travel in this camper and seldom be out any expenses on their trips. Uncle Jimmy was very proud of the little truck, and all of his friends have their favorite stories about the way he cared for it. Grandson Fred Thompson remembers that Uncle Jimmy always wiped the truck off with motor oil, and refused to let anybody touch the truck body. "He was afraid that the salt in your hand, the sweat, would rust it. 'Don't touch that, boy!' he'd say, and he made 'em back up, he had a big old walking cane." Family legend has it that the truck was given to Uncle Jimmy by Henry Ford in recognition of his fiddling. While this may have been the case, there is no record in any of Uncle Jimmy's contest documentation of his winning such a truck.

Some time in the fall of 1923 Uncle Jimmy, then 75, decided to drive his truck down to Texas. In those days the trip took from a month to five weeks, but this was no problem to Uncle Jimmy. As he himself said in a 1926 interview, "When I got tired, I'd jest drive it in the first open place I found by the road and ask if I could stay all night. 'Yep', they'd say, and I'd drive it in, fix my bed, and git out my fiddle" (Tennessean, January 3, 1926). His main purpose was to go to Dallas for another fiddlers' contest; there he won a gold watch that was engraved on the back. But the trip had a more significant effect: his success at Dallas made him enthusiastic to seek a wider audience for his music. "When he got back," says Katherine Thompson, "that contest was all he would talk about. He was keyed up to try to do something about his music. He felt like he had something and he wanted the world to know about it."

1923 saw the first Southern-made hillbilly records, by Fiddlin' John Carson, as well as the start of old time music on radio stations like Atlanta's WSB. By the next year, the boom in old time music was on in both

media, radio and records, and Uncle Jimmy watched it with increasing interest and anticipation.

"When the record market got so big and people got so interested in making records and radio and all, it really made him more anxious. He would just sit and daydream all the time after he had heard radio and records - why, he thought it would be wonderful to make records of his music, or to play it on the air. 'I want to throw my music out all over the American,' he used to say. (He wouldn't say 'America', but 'the American'.) He really wanted to record and to go on the air. He wanted to get his music 'caught', was the way he said it." (Katherine Thompson)

Recording fever finally got the best of Uncle Jimmy and in the summer or early fall of 1925 he decided to take matters into his own hands. He took Katherine along with him.

"The first time he made a record, I was never so tickled, but I was never so mortified, it embarrassed me so. He wanted me to go with him and make a record up in this building on Church Street in downtown Nashville. Somebody had a little recording outfit up there, and they were going to make him a little record for, I don't know, a dollar or so. He wanted to have some records made real bad. He was supposed to pay for these, and that's what embarrassed me so. We got in there and made this record - I think it was 'Flying Clouds' with me playin' the banjo back of him. And this man played it back to him and it made Uncle Jimmy mad. He said, 'Why, hell, thar, that don't sound like my fiddle. That don't sound a bit like me a-playin' my fiddle. There's just something wrong with your machine, or you don't understand catchin' it, one!' I felt like going through the floor, and that man, he didn't know what to say. He tried to be nice, said Uncle Jimmy could take the record for half price. But Uncle Jimmy said, 'Why, I ain't a-gonna give you no half-dollar, I ain't a-payin' you nothin' for that. You can just break that un right now!' Out he stormed; he put his fiddle in his case and wouldn't make no more records. And it was a little aluminum record, about the size of a saucer, and it didn't have much volume to it, and it did sound tinny. That started him, though; he was wantin' to get into the record or radio business after that, wantin' to get his music caught so it could be throwed out across the American. So it wasn't long after that that Eva took him up to the broadcasting station."

There are different versions of how Uncle Jimmy actually got to the WSM studios for the first time. According to relatives of Aunt Ella, a member of the Manners family first took Uncle Jimmy up to WSM so he could simply tour the station and see how it worked; while there he mentioned his fiddling and was asked to play a little. Unknown to Uncle Jimmy, the engineers turned on the transmitter and broadcast his fiddling. A similar version is given in the 1969 official Opry picture and history book, where it is alleged that Uncle Jimmy came up to tour the station on a Thursday night. His guide happened to be the Program Manager (George Hay) and when Uncle Jimmy mentioned his fiddling abilities, Hay asked him to return the next night (Friday) to broadcast.*

According to Eva Thompson Jones, however, the event occurred with less serendipity. Eva had been performing on WSM as a singer of light classical music and a pianist. She later told Don Cummings that Hay had not been satisfied with the direction of the station's shows, and asked her for suggestions. She suggested her uncle, and invited Hay to meet him for an informal audition at her home on Friday night, November 27. He did, was impressed, and invited Uncle Jimmy to appear the next night.** Katherine Thompson, for the record, agrees that it was Eva who really got Uncle Jimmy on to the show.

Whatever the case, he broadcast on Saturday, November 28. His first tune was supposedly "Tennessee Waggoner" and it was carried across the country by the 1000-watt transmitter. Hay recalled, in his history of the Opry, that "Uncle Jimmy told us he had a thousand tunes", and Hay then announced that he would answer requests. Telegrams poured into the station. After an hour, Hay asked Uncle Jimmy if he wasn't tired, and the old fiddler snorted, "Why, shucks, a man don't get warmed up in an hour. I won an eight-day fiddling contest down at Dallas and here's my blue ribbon to prove it." Eva recalled that then Percy Craig entered the studio with an armful of telegrams and announced that they had received a telegram from every state in the union.

Uncle Jimmy and Eva continued to play Saturdays throughout the month of December, and letters continued to come in praising his fiddling. One of the first was dated December 6 and came from listeners in the Missouri Ozarks, some 400 miles to the west. By the end of December WSM had instituted, somewhat reluctantly, a regular program of fiddling on Saturday nights. Their press release in the Tennessean of December 27 announced that Uncle Dave Macon and Uncle Jimmy Thompson would answer requests. (The column is reproduced here.) The story emphasises Thompson more than Macon, and provides several interesting new details about his life. It suggests that Uncle Jimmy's repertoire included "375 different numbers", certainly a more realistic figure than the "thousand" Hay claimed for him.

The local newspapers at once became fascinated with Uncle Jimmy and throughout January and February 1926 constantly published stories about him and pictures of him. But it was the speed with which radio made Uncle Jimmy famous that is so astounding; within a month of his first broadcast, he was known across the country. This became obvious when, during the first days of January, Uncle Jimmy received a challenge from fiddler Mellie Dunham of Maine.

Dunham had recently been crowned World's Champion Fiddler by Henry Ford and was attaining widespread popularity in the North, owing to Ford's promotion of old time fiddling. After he had played at Ford's house, Dunham had been deluged with theatrical offers from the stage and vaudeville circuits. On January 2, a Boston newspaper ran a story in which Dunham challenged Uncle Jimmy and Southern fiddling in general. Dunham, the story read, was "tiring of the challenges and criticism heaped upon him by other fiddlers throughout the country", and "is anxious to meet 'Uncle Jimmy' Thompson, recently nominated by unanimous vote as the greatest barn dance fiddler in the South, for a championship

* However, November 28, which Hay always gave as the date Uncle Jimmy first played, was a Saturday.

** Don Cummings, The Birth of the Grand Ole Opry.

WSM TO FEATURE OLD-TIME TUNES

"Uncles" Dave Macon and Jimmie Thompson Will Play.

Old tunes like old lovers are the best, at least judging from the applause which the new Saturday night feature at Station WSM receives from its listeners in all parts of the country. Jazz has not completely turned the tables on such tunes as "Pop Goes the Weasel" and "Turkey in the Straw."

America may not be swinging its partners at a neighbor's barn dance but it seems to have the habit of clamping on its ear phones and patting its feet as gaily as it ever did when old-time fiddlers got to going.

Because of this recent revival in the popularity of the old familiar tunes, WSM has arranged to have an hour or two of them every Saturday night, starting Saturday, December 26. "Uncle" Dave Macon, the oldest banjo picker in Dixie, and who comes from Readyville, Tenn., and "Uncle" Jimmie Thompson of Martha, Tenn., will answer any requests for old-time melodies.

Uncle Jimmy Thompson has been fiddlin' for more than 60 years, and the people of the South recently nominated him by almost a unanimous vote taken in Texas, as the greatest barn dance fiddler of his time. Uncle Jimmy is 82 years old, and he says by the time he is 90 he will be a young man. Not only does he play 375 different numbers, but he dances each one of 'em while he plays. He is one of the most attractive features on the program of WSM.

Uncle Jimmy made his first appearance a month ago and telegrams were received from all parts of the United States, encouraging him in his task of furnishing barn dance music for a million homes. He puts his heart and soul into his work and is one of the quaintest characters radio has yet discovered. There is a twinkle in his eye, which is, of course, not an unusual characteristic in view of the fact that there are a number of people in this world with twinkles in their eyes, but Uncle Jimmy's twinkles mean that he is happy and making everybody else happy. He is usually accompanied by his niece, whom he refers to constantly as "Sweetmeats."

Uncle Jimmy is old-fashioned and is proud of it. For that reason, when he had his picture taken with his niece, he insisted that she let her hair down. "I don't like these new-fangled styles women wear," says Uncle Jimmy. He has been a farmer for many years in Tennessee, his home being near Martha, in Wilson county. He was crowned America's champion barn dance fiddler in a contest which lasted eight days in Dallas, Tex., a few years ago. He had 86 opponents. Although Uncle Jimmy is a farmer with simple tastes, he has traveled all over the United States with his fiddle.

"Let Mellie Dunham Come Here," Says "Uncle Jimmy," Eager for Contest

Champion Fiddler Chats About Contest, Leatherpants Dances and How He Learned to Play.

"Uncle Jimmy" Thompson knows the difference between jig and leather-breeches dances; he knows enough old-time tunes to play all night without repeating a single selection; he recalls the eight days of playing in Dallas about 19 years ago when he won the nation's championship in his class against nearly 100 contestants.

And being champion, "Uncle Jimmy" knows that it is the challenger's place to let him say where he shall defend that title. That is why "Uncle Jimmy" will insist that Mellie Dunham of Maine, who challenged him Saturday night, must come to Nashville if he wants a chance at the Tennessee veteran fiddler's crown.

"Uncle Jimmy" came to Nashville Monday from his home in Martha, Tenn., to find out what all the fuss was about. He chatted enthusiastically about a fiddle he has had more than 30 years and refuses to sell; about the scores of quadrilles, schottisches, reels and waltzes he likes so well; and about his 73-year-old wife who "hits the floor" when he strikes a favorite tune.

Eager To Meet Mellie Here.

"If Mellie Dunham will come down here to this WSM station, I'll lay with him like a bulldog," the fiddler declared, emphasizing his statement with a sudden lifting of his chin that seemed to shake his thick, white beard. "Now, wouldn't that be finer I'll play him and let ev'ybody judge."

Through all of "Uncle Jimmy's" talk of old-time contests—and he has never lost one, he asserts—he frequently referred to numerous simple facts connected with his 82 years of home life, all but 10 of which have been spent in Tennessee. He lived in Texas that long.

In his humble home, in Smith county, "Uncle Jimmy" lives alone with his wife. His three children are "married and gone away"—Willie Lee Thompson, 31, but called the baby, in Nashville; Jesse Morgan Thompson in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, and Sallie King Callicut, his only daughter, near Seattle, Wash.

But his existence is not a lonely one. "Someone's always stoppin' in," the selfmade musician said, "and we have a big time."

Learns Music by Self.

Asked about how he learned to play, he chuckled: "Huh! never took a music lesson in my life. I'd jest as soon look a mule in the face as look at a sheet of music. I been playin' over 60 years and I learned it all myself."

He refused to name his "favorite piece."

After all, music is inly an avocation for "Uncle Jimmy," and he takes pride in many other achievements. "I run a naked truck from Nashville four years ago, made a bed for it myself and drove the thing to Texas two years ago. When I got tired, I'd jest drive it in the first open place I found by the road and ask if I could stay all night. 'Yet,' they'd say, and I'd drive it in, fix my bed and git out the fiddle."

With one eye failing him, however, and with his 82 years of cares beginning to tell, "Uncle Jimmy" says he would not want to attempt another drive to Texas. Nor does he want to go to Maine, much as he would like to play in a contest with Mellie Dunham.

"I'll lay with him like a bulldog," he repeated, "if Mellie'll come down here."

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contest." The article concludes:

"Considerable has been published about the 'WSM' star in this section and repeatedly Dunham has been called upon to comment. The Maine fiddler takes exception to the crowning of Thompson as America's champion barn dance fiddler following a contest which lasted eight days in Dallas.

'He may have defeated 86 opponents in the Dallas contest,' declared Dunham today, 'but they were all southerners and they don't know as much about barn dance fiddling in that section as they do "down in Maine." I'm ready to meet any and all of them but I'd rather like to meet Uncle Jimmy Thompson, who claims the title, first.'"

Accordingly Dunham sent a telegram to Thompson, care of WSM.

"Mellie Dunham held at Keith's for third week. Sends challenge to Jimmy Thompson of WSM fame. Eager to meet Southern rival."

Dunham's challenge raised a furor in Nashville, and a dispute quickly developed as to where the contest was to be held. George Hay volunteered to serve as a "medium" for the contest, and with Uncle Jimmy's blessing sent a telegram to Dunham accepting the challenge. Hay suggested Dunham and Thompson have the contest on WSM "any Saturday night in the near future that suits you". WSM would pay all expenses for the contest. "Let the radio public of America be judge. Our radio station reaches all points of the United States." What happened next is unclear. Hay recalls that Dunham's advisers, "realizing that he had nothing to win refused to allow him to accept. Whereupon Uncle Jimmy remarked, 'He's affeared of me.'" But about the same time, in Boston, Dunham's employers, a vaudeville circuit, denounced the telegram Dunham sent as "undoubtedly a fake". If the telegram was a publicity stunt, as now seems likely, Uncle Jimmy was certainly not involved in it. (The story apparently originated in Boston, though WSM was certainly exploiting it for as much publicity as they could get.) But Uncle Jimmy was not even in town at the time, and came in only the next week "to see what all the fuss was about"; one thing that came out of the whole affair was the delightful interview Uncle Jimmy gave a local reporter (reproduced here). The contest itself never came off.

Other contests did, though, and throughout 1926 Uncle Jimmy was busy participating in fiddling contests across the South. This year saw the peak of the old time fiddling craze that swept the nation, spurred on by the enthusiasm of Henry Ford. During the second week of January the Ford dealers in Tennessee, Kentucky and Indiana sponsored a series of local fiddling contests. The main purpose of these contests - in addition to fostering fiddling - seems to have been to draw people into the Ford showrooms to look at the new cars, and this was successful: several Tennessee contests averaged between 1000 and 2000 attendance - and in the dead of winter. The winners of these local contests did not get much cash, but they were allowed to go on to the regional contest. For Tennesseans, this contest was held in Nashville, and from there six winners would go on to compete in the "Champion of Dixie" contest in Louisville. Winners there would go to meet Mr Ford himself.

Uncle Jimmy won the local contest (held at nearby Lebanon) with ease, and participated in the regional contest at Nashville. Because of the Mellie Dunham incident, tempers were running high; "On to Detroit!" became the battle-cry of the contest. According to contemporary newspaper accounts, the 25 winners who played in Nashville on January 19-20, 1926, had collectively played to between 30000 and 35000 people in eliminations. All day, the day of the contest, according to the newspapers, "groups came from various sections of the whole hill country of Tennessee came to the city . . . to boost their respective contestants." "Coming from some localities in groups of 200 or more, the clans of the hills of Middle Tennessee swarmed into the city. . . ." "The overflow crowd /Ryman auditorium, where the contest was held, seated then about 3600/ bore earmarks of rurality. The presence of family groups, father and mother and children, was noticeable throughout the audience. Their approval was frank and hearty, if inclined to boisterousness, and they certainly did enjoy the fiddling." A Reverend Roberts, who opened the contest with a short talk, declared that "the real significance of the meeting lay in the fact that this section, by this contest, was paying tributes to the homes of the pioneers, where such music abounded long ago." Undoubtedly some of the news reporters and participating civic leaders like Rev. Roberts were caught up in Henry Ford's romanticised notion of what American fiddling meant; once the fiddling craze died down,

UNCLE JIMMY IS FIDDLERS' CHAMP

Contest at the Auditorium Draws Overflow Crowd Tuesday Night.

Fiddling staged a "come back" in popularity in Nashville last night, when a mammoth and enthusiastic crowd filled every available foot of space in the Ryman auditorium to hear the old-time fiddlers of Middle Tennessee compete in a regional con-

UNCLE JIMMY THOMPSON.

test, in which "Uncle Jimmy" Thompson, the venerable wizard fiddler, and his magic instrument, emerged winner.

"Leather Breeches," "Sleepy Lou" and "The Arkansas Traveler" never, in the heyday of fiddling when swinging partners were thralled by those joyous strains, received more clamorous acclaim than upon Tuesday evening's demonstration.

The crowd listened to the best Tennessee could offer, and they realized it. The hoary, 80-year-old champion, Uncle Jimmy, was probably favorite with the crowd, but the contest was hot and the competition close. The six that emerged from yesterday morning's selection were winners from all parts of the state, and had won their right to the place by surviving two contests. Demonstrative applause greeted each one.

The unique one-armed performer, Marshall Claiborne, champion from Hartsville, was given second award following boisterous applause and a silver shower that descended from all directions as he ripped off several of the familiar tunes with his bow between his knees, and his fiddle in his left arm, fretting and sliding the strings up and down the bow. So absorbed with and intent upon his performance was Claiborne that he fiddled right on through the four-minute bell and had to be cautioned three times. The crowd approved and applauded.

J. L. Stephens of Lynchburg received the third award in the close contest. The others who performed in the evening exhibition as winners from the group of twenty-five or more champions from local contests held all this week by Ford dealers in various towns of Middle Tennessee were: Bob King of Carthage, Fred Halslip of Fayetteville and Commodore Loveless of Columbia.

MEET OTHER STATES.

Winners of the first three places, chosen by the judges, who were Mayor Hilary E. Howse, Col. Bill Smith, Francis Craig, the Rev. Tom L. Roberts and Clem. Holderman, were the guests of the Ford Motor Company at the Andrew Jackson hotel, Tuesday night, leaving early Wednesday morning for Louisville, where they will compete with three winners from Kentucky, and two from Indiana at the Brown Theatre Wednesday night. The winner will be dubbed "champion of Dixie" and be furnished a trip to Detroit the last of the month.

The real significance of the meeting lay in the fact that this section, by this contest, was paying tribute to the homes of the pioneers, where such music abounded long ago, declared Rev. Roberts in his introductory comment at the opening of the evening performance.

The tribute was a final one and judging from the enthusiasm of the audience, the bond with their forefathers was still strong.

The overflowing crowd bore earmarks of rurality. The presence of family groups, father and mother and children, was noticeable throughout the audience. Their approval was frank and hearty, if inclined to boisterousness, and they certainly did enjoy the fiddling.

Groups from various sections of the whole hill country of Tennessee came to the city during the day Tuesday, to boost their respective contestants. And, that they were numerous, might be suggested from the fact their automobiles were parked about the auditorium from two to three blocks in all four directions.

The contest which was under the direction of C. R. Johnson of the Louisville Ford dealers, was put on in Nashville by the George Cole Motor Company, the Hippodrome Motor Company and the Dresslar-White Company.

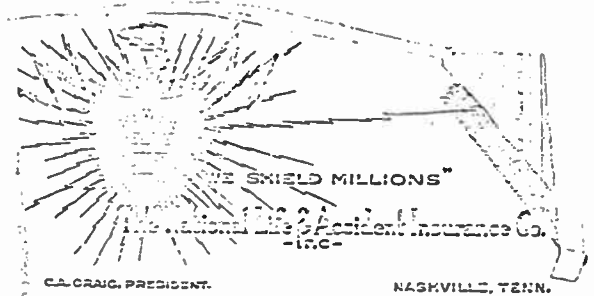
many Nashville citizens were quick enough to repudiate this precious heritage as it manifested itself on the barn dance. But there is no denying the enthusiasm of Southerners for Ford's contests, as the Nashville event demonstrates. Ford and the South were alike in their love for fiddling, though probably for different reasons. Ford saw fiddling as a dying tradition to be resurrected; most Southerners saw it as a vibrant and living tradition to be developed.

Uncle Jimmy's competition here was stiff by any standards. Among those he went up against were Uncle Bunt Stephens, the famous Lynchburg fiddler; Mazy Todd, lead fiddler with Uncle Dave Macon's Fruit Jar Drinkers; W.E. Poplin of Lewisburg, leader of the Poplin-Woods Tennessee String Band which later recorded for Victor and became an Opry fixture; and John McGee, from Franklin, the father of Opry pioneers Sam and Kirk McGee. Marshall Claiborne, a one-armed fiddler from Hartsville who held his fiddle between his knees and fiddled with his left hand, and was very popular in the middle Tennessee area, also played. The Nashville Tennessean referred to the fiddlers as "exponents of the art of Old Ned".

Uncle Jimmy won by playing "Fisher's Hornpipe" and "The Mocking Bird". Claiborne took second and Bunt Stephens third. All three journeyed the next weekend to Louisville for the tri-state championship. There their competition included "Blind Joe" Mangrum of Paducah, Kentucky, a fiddler who was later to play often on the Opry. But to the disappointment of Tennesseans the first place was won by an Indiana fiddler, W.H. Elmore; Bunt Stephens won second, and Marshall Claiborne third. To everyone's surprise Uncle Jimmy did not place. A Thompson family story, which family members are unsure about accepting, holds that certain parties knew about Uncle Jimmy's love of moonshine and plied him with drink just before the contest. Supposedly, when his time came to play, he was barely able to make it on to the stage. Uncle Jimmy some years later tried to visit Henry Ford in Detroit, but was unable to get an appointment with him; perhaps he was wanting somehow to redeem himself. Bunt Stephens' performance in the contest, incidentally, was the start of a long and interesting career for him (discussed in the following chapter).

Wins Fiddlers' Contest Here

"UNCLE JIMMY" THOMPSON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December 17, 1925.

Mrs. Eva Thompson Jones,
152 6th Ave. N.,
Nashville, Tenn.

Dear Mrs. Jones:

We have booked you to appear on a program of classical music on January 6th, Wednesday night at 8 o'clock, for one hour, as per our conversation with you recently in our studio.

Will you be kind enough to let us know who will appear with you on that hour's program and if possible let us have a detailed program so that we can get publicity? We would also like to have you send in publicity and picture of Uncle Jimmy Thompson. We would like two or three pictures if you can get them. I am sure I can put them in several radio publications.

Yours very truly,

George D. Hay,
Director.

GDH/J.

"NASHVILLE MAKES MORE MEN'S SHOES THAN ANY OTHER CITY IN THE SOUTH."

The Louisville debacle hardly slowed Uncle Jimmy's career though. He continued to headline the barn dance program throughout the first six months of 1926; he and Eva usually started the program at 8.00 pm for an hour, though on occasion he was scheduled for as much as two hours. In April he was selected by Tennessee Governor Austin Peay to represent Tennessee in a radio fiddling contest staged at station WOS, Jefferson City, Missouri, which had challenged fiddlers from all states bordering on Missouri. The governor also selected fiddler Fulton Mitchell of Nashville to represent Tennessee, and "urged all Tennesseans to back their representatives" at the contest. But since the contest was judged by the "amount of applause in messages" received at the station Missouri fiddlers obviously had the edge.

Uncle Jimmy temporarily left the barn dance in May 1926 when he broke his fiddling arm, but by July 3 he was back on the air, with a good deal of fanfare, and played throughout July. He played less regularly, but steadily, throughout the rest of the year. On November 1, 1926, he and Eva were in Atlanta, where they cut their first commercial records, for Columbia. Four sides were recorded: "Mississippi Sawyer", "High Born Lady", "Karo" and "Billy Wilson". Only the last two sides were issued, however: on Columbia 15118-D. Oddly, there was no mention on the label of Jimmy's WSM affiliation. Most of the tunes are traditional fiddle

Uncle Jimmy Thompson and Eva Thompson Jones.

standards; "High Born Lady" is probably an instrumental of "My Gal's a High Born Lady", a favorite of Uncle Dave Macon. "Karo" is Uncle Jimmy's version of "Flop Eared Mule". "Billy Wilson" - not the clog tune of this name still popular - is related to the Texas "Bull at the Wagon" (recorded by the Lewis brothers for Victor in 1929) and the West Virginia "Red Bird" of Clark Kessinger. Sales from the Columbia record seem to have been only average, and Uncle Jimmy received little royalty from them; like most old time musicians he probably recorded for a flat fee of $25 or $50 a side.

After 1926 Uncle Jimmy began appearing on the Opry less and less. His time slots were also becoming shorter; as early as the fall of 1926 he was playing for only a half-hour at a time, as opposed to the two-hour stints of barely a year before. During all of 1928 he appeared on the show only once. Since recordings he made in 1930 show him still to be an excellent fiddler, one might well question his departure from the Opry.

There seems to be a number of reasons. One might simply be his age: he was 77 when he first played on WSM, and shortly after that he had a stroke which left him blind in one eye. It certainly became more difficult for him to get around, and the 30-mile trip from Laguardo to Nashville was not an easy one in the '20s. Bu But a more basic problem was that the Opry was becoming much more formal and structured, and Uncle Jimmy was more attuned to the leisurely 19th-century style of performing than to the hectic clock-watching 20th-century mode. Laguardo resident Bert Norther recalls one significant night toward the end of Uncle Jimmy's broadcasting career:

> "I remember one night when Bill Bates, had the store here, we went down there one Saturday night to listen to Uncle Jimmy on his radio. Bill Bates called down there and told George Hay to get Jimmy to play 'When You and I Were Young, Maggie'. He cut loose on it and he never did quit. Finally they had to stop him, got him out of the way. He'd just had one drink too many."

The drinking was another problem. Uncle Jimmy associated drinking, dancing and having a good time. It was normal for him to take along a bottle when he played on the radio. Neighbor Sam Kirkpatrick recalls:

> "I'll never forget the last night Uncle Jimmy played. He kinda liked his bottle pretty well, he was playin', and before he finished his piece there was this stopping, and we didn't hear nothing for a minute, then George Hay come on and said Uncle Jimmy was sick tonight or something. Come to find out later he had just keeled over and passed out."

The drinking caused bad blood between Jimmy and WSM, and eventually led to a falling-out. Neighbor Jim Thompson says:

> "They would have to watch him - in fact, they told him they didn't want him to come down there drinking. His business down there just finally played out on that account."

It was a cruel irony: Uncle Jimmy in the end becoming a victim of the medium that had originally brought him to fame. It must have been bitter.

In the last few years he continued to tour a little, farm a little, and play for his friends. Touring was more lucrative than playing the Opry anyway; Katherine Thompson recalls that WSM originally paid Uncle Jimmy $5 a show for fiddling, and he could make four times that amount by passing the hat at local fairs. He was still able to do some farming; even in his 80s he was strong enough to carry a bushel (150 pounds) of corn on his back to a mill several miles away.

In April 1930 he went to Knoxville to record again, this time for Brunswick-Vocalion. He did "Lynchburg" and a medley of "Flying Clouds" and "Leather Britches", and recorded some charming dialogue with recording supervisor Bill Brown.

> Brown: How old are you, Uncle Jimmy?
>
> UJT: 82 - and I've got grown grandchildren, and great big great-grandchildren; runnin' cars and trucks yet, and a-playin' the fiddle yet. And I love to look at a pretty woman just as much as I ever did.

Brown: Say, Uncle Jimmy, were the girls as pretty back in 1866 as they are now?

UJT: They prettier - they healthier. Stout. Fat, and plump.

Brown: What kind of clothes did they wear?

UJT: They just wore nice, good clothes - plenty width in the skirts, and they was long enough to come down to the shoes.

("Lynchburg" /Vocalion 5456/)

Brown: That /"Flying Clouds"/ is as peppy as a drink of good whiskey, isn't it?

UJT: Yes, it's all right. All it lacks is a good set to dance after it.

Brown: Uncle Jimmy, did you use to get good whiskey when you were a young man?

UJT: Sure, get good whiskey, fine as could be. It was whiskey that jest made you love everybody. Make a fellow love his poor old grandmother.

Brown: What'd you have to pay for it?

UJT: Twenty-five cents a gallon. Right to the still and get it. Go to the stillhouse, didn't have very far to go. It made you love everybody instead of wanting to fight.

Brown: Say, I've got a fellow here that plays guitar. Want you to listen to him, see what you think of him.

/Guitar solo/

UJT: Well, a guitar's pretty, but they ain't near as pretty as a violin. They're the finest musical we've got in American. . . . I call fiddle, some call 'em violins, but fiddle just as good as violin, people know what they mean.

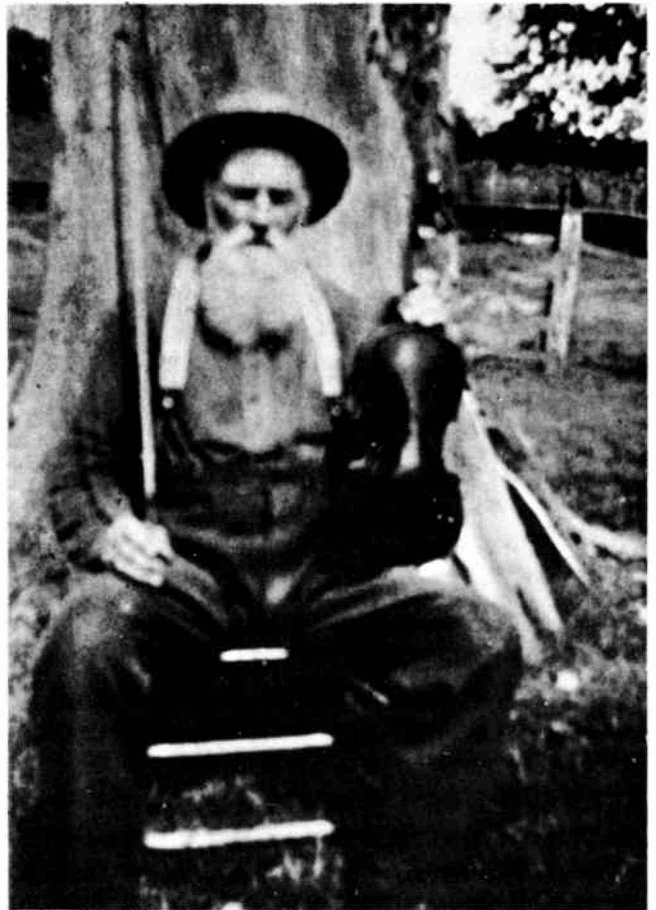
("Uncle Jimmy's Favorite Fiddle Pieces" /Vocalion 5456/)

Less than ten months after he spoke those words, Uncle Jimmy was dead. He passed away of pneumonia at his home in Laguardo, about 3.00 pm on Tuesday, February 17, 1931. Even his death is shrouded in legend; there are at least five different versions of how he died. Some stories hold that he passed out one night and froze to death; others say he caught pneumonia trying to repair his car in a snowstorm. The Thompson family says that he caught pneumonia one night when his house caught fire; dressed only in his long underwear, Uncle Jimmy managed to put out the fire by drawing buckets of water from his well, but while doing so soaked his long johns. The underwear froze on him and he fell ill the next day. The day of his funeral was cold and icy, and Eva Thompson Jones was the only member of the Opry cast to attend.

MEMORIES OF UNCLE JIMMY

The facts can reveal a picture of Uncle Jimmy's role in the history of country music, but what of Uncle Jimmy the man? Glimpses of his personality can be gained by talking with his old friends, neighbors and relatives. Here is a sampler of some of their favorite "Uncle Jimmy" stories.

"He wasn't a trick fiddler - he was serious about everything he played. He was always real entertaining, though; he'd always have some kind of little story to tell about something that was



interesting to him. He could tell you just where he learned each fiddle tune, tell you where he firs first heard it played and who played it. And he used to tell about when his daddy or his uncle had this distillery, and they had a big flock of geese. Them geese would get up there at the mill dam where they had the grist mill - they had their still above that. And this water would come through there, where they poured the whiskey mash. Well, the old geese would get drunk, and - it just tickled you to hear him tell about how crazy them geese flopped around."

(Katherine Thompson, daughter-in-law)

* * *

"We had a ferry down here at the river and he used to go to the other side of Gallatin to get his bootleg. There was a gate across the road . . . there was no fence laws at the time, and we had to keep fences to keep the people's cattle from comin' down here in the corn. One day my father and I went over there and fixed that gate up, next day or two Uncle Jimmy went over there at Gallatin, got him some whiskey, got drunk. Had one of those little Model T roadsters, and he hit that gate, and he tore that thing all into splinters. Didn't hurt the car much. Uncle Jimmy said, 'The damn car wouldn't open the gate.' Tore the gate all to pieces, we never did fix it up. That wound the gate up."

(Sam Kirkpatrick, Laguardo neighbor)

* * *

"He would get into a buckboard and drive the team at a fast run into town, and frighten anybody who was with him." (Eva Thompson Jones)

* * *

"He took exercise every morning; he never failed. Would get up and take calisthenics. One time, it was 1918, the year of the war, my husband and I lived in Gatlinburg and he came to spend the night with us. Uncle Jimmy shared the room with cousin Jack Womack, the man we were living with as boarders. Uncle Jimmy, he got up the next morning, it was gettin' up time, I hadn't called them for breakfast. He got up and was goin' through all of that exercising and kicking - he'd always kick his feet. So after he went home, cousin Jack was a terrible religious old man, he said to me one morning, he blared his eyes real big when he'd talk, he said to me: 'Let me tell you something. That poor old man is in bad shape. I seen him a-havin' the awfulest fight with the devil that you ever seen in your life. He was kickin' and a-snortin' and a-beatin' hisself in the breast - he was havin' the awfulest fight with the devil." (Katherine Thompson)

* * *

"He would chew a whole package of gum at a time, but he would then put it in a vaseline jar he kept in his vest pocket. Would carry it there. He said he'd biled that jar out, and would stick the gum in there when he finished chewing it. Always said, 'You can't wear that gum out' - so he could chew it over and over again as much as he wanted to." (Jim Thompson, Laguardo neighbor)

* * *

"The first time he got his engagement on the Opry, Eva made him have his pants pressed. So she took his pants and had them cleaned and pressed, and he came in there when he got ready to put them pants on, hollered in there and said, 'Hey, thar, who ironed them damned wrinkles in these britches? I like my britches smooth and round. Fit my kneecaps. Don't want no crease in 'em." (Bill Thompson, grandson)

* * *

"He was fond of Texas, always braggin' on Texas. Fellow that run the store down there, Mr Bill Bates, made up with this salesman one time to knock Texas. So Uncle Jimmy come in, and this salesman started talking about how he was in Texas one time and there was a fellow out there had a pair of oxen driving, and one of them froze to death, and he was gonna go out and skin him and before he got him skinned the other one died from overheat. And Uncle Jimmy, he jumped up and said, 'That's a damned lie!' And Uncle Jimmy got mad at Bill, and he'd walk right by his store a half-mile on up the road even if he wanted a nickel box of matches." (Sam Kirkpatrick)

* * *

"I once asked him how he liked to stay out at Eva's house when he came into town /Nashville/ and he said, 'I wouldn't have it, I wouldn't have it.' I says, 'Why?' And he says, 'Well, there ain't nowhere for to spit when I chew my tobacco.' I says, 'Couldn't you get you a little bucket of ashes?' 'Why,' he says, 'there ain't a damned ash thar.'" (Katherine Thompson)

* * *

"I remember we had a little colored community over here, not too far from his house, and he liked to go over there and play for them from time to time. And he'd get real hot if anyone said anything to him about it." (Jug Stewart, Laguardo neighbor)

* * *

"He knew all about the stars. He used to tell us about them, what their names were. He could tell where he was just by looking at the stars in the heavens. That's how he was able to never get lost when he was travelling around." (Mary Irwin, relative)

* * *

"He called his fiddle 'Old Betsy'. He told the history of it lots of times, but I don't remember it now. He kept rattlesnake rattles in it, and in his case a piece of red flannel. And he'd spread it over Old Betsy's breast every night, he'd 'put her to bed', he'd call it." (Katherine Thompson)

At the unveiling of Uncle Jimmy's marker, June 1975: Brother Oswald, Charlie Collins, Mrs Katherine Thompson, T.A. Hudson (TVOTFA President), Johnny Wright, Roy Acuff, the author, Mrs Tex Ritter, Jerry Strobel (Opry PR). At the back, Bill Harrison.

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Sally Goodwin
Moonlight & Roses
Yankee Doodle
Home Sweet Home
Turkey In The Straw
Skip To My Lou
Liza Jane
Moonlight & Roses
Red Wing
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Maudy Lee
Ida Sweet As Apple Cider
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Good bye My Darling Good bye
Camptown Races
B and Played On
Beautiful Blue Danube
Big Rock Candy Mountain
Hot Time In the Old Town Tonight
Merry Widow Waltz
When You And I Were Young Maggie
Put On Your Old Grey Bonnet
Jeannie With Her Light Brown Hair
Clog Dance
Birmingham Jail
Wagner

Pop Goes The Weasel
Sally In Our Alley
Arkansas Traveler
IrishWasherwoman
Paddy Wack
Irish Jig
Sailors Hornpipe
Old Zip Coon
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Fisher Horn Pipe
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Strauss Waltz
Dixie
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Maggie
Buffalo Gals
I Wish I Was Single Again
Annie Laurie
In The Shade Of an Old Apple Tree
Down By The River Side
My Gal Sal
Fascination
Bill Bailey
After The Ball
Little Brown Jug
Oh Dem Golden Slippers
Beautiful Dreamer
Beautiful Heaven
Home On The Range
Two Little Girls In Blue
Old Grey Mare
Silver Threads
After The Ball
Flying Clouds
The Girl I Left Behind
Old Dan Tucker
Over The Waves

UNCLE JIMMY'S REPERTOIRE

The list reproduced above was drawn up by Eva Thompson Jones and purports to list what are presumably the favorite "Old Fashion" tunes of her uncle. The date on the list is uncertain. A copy of it is on file in the CMF archives, Nashville. The list contains 76 songs, but one might question how accurately they reflect Uncle Jimmy's actual repertoire; most of them are popular songs from the 1890s commonly found in songbooks of that era. Missing are many of the fiddle breakdowns we know Uncle Jimmy loved to play; for instance, of his seven recorded tunes, only two, "Flying Clouds" and "Leather Britches", are listed. Also missing are tunes like "Nubbin Ridge" and "Old Hen Cackle", with which he won a 1926 Clarksville, Tennessee contest. So we must take this list with a large grain of salt. Eva once reportedly said that many of the old fiddle breakdowns sounded alike to her, and while Uncle Jimmy undoubtedly played these listed tunes, they were probably more Eva's favorites than his.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mrs Katherine Thompson, Greenbrier, Tennessee; Fred & William Thompson, Greenbrier; Dwight Manners, Boston; Mary Irwin, Nashville; Jug Stewart, Laguardo; Mr & Mrs Jim Thompson, Laguardo; Sam Kirkpatrick, Laguardo; Bert Norther, Laguardo; Virginia Braun, Lebanon; the Manners Family, Laguardo. Special thanks to Bill Harrison, Madison, Alabama, who led the drive to erect a marker for Uncle Jimmy's unmarked grave and did some of the initial research in piecing together the story of Uncle Jimmy Thompson.

THE GREAT OPRY UNCLE BUNT STEPHENS, BLIND JOE MANGRUM, HENRY BANDY & SID HARKREADER FIDDLERS

THE OPRY HAS ALWAYS ATTRACTED FINE FIDDLERS, FROM THE very first night Uncle Jimmy Thompson played. In later years the Opry was to be home for the men who were perhaps the two most influential fiddlers in the history of the music, Clayton McMichen and Arthur Smith. In more recent years artists like Curly Fox, Kenny Baker and Howdy Forrester have graced the Opry stage. Fine fiddling has always been a tradition at the Opry, even in the most commercial phases of the show.

The early years were no exception. Many of the best fiddlers led the various hoedown bands: Oscar Stone and Bill Barret with the Possum Hunters, George Wilkerson with the Fruit Jar Drinkers, Gale Binkley with the Binkley Brothers Clodhoppers, Theron Hale with his daughters, and Charlie Arrington with the Gully Jumpers. Mazy Todd, the fiddler who was the cornerstone for Uncle Dave Macon's recording band called the Fruit Jar Drinkers, often played with his own trio on the show. But in addition to the band fiddlers, there was a number of virtuoso fiddlers who specialised in fancy solo fiddling. They often played by themselves, or with one "second", and played in a style that called attention to itself; the style is similar to what today fiddlers call the "contest style", "Texas style" or "superstyle". It is a style not designed for dancing but for listening.

Uncle Jimmy, of course, was a fine exemplar of this style, if we can judge from records, and it is perhaps fitting that his picture grace the annual programs for the Grand Masters invitational fiddling contest held in Nashville. But there were numerous other early fiddlers who specialised in this style as well, and any one of them, in his prime, would do quite well in any contest today. Four of the best were Uncle Bunt Stephens, Blind Joe Mangrum, Henry Bandy and Sid Harkreader. Some brief notes on each follow.

HENRY BANDY

One of the first fiddlers to play regularly on the Opry after Uncle Jimmy was Henry Bandy, from Petroleum, Kentucky. (The Kentucky state line is only about 40 miles north of Nashville and in the early days a number of Kentuckians came down for occasional Opry appearances.) Little is known about Bandy except that he was a big man with a handlebar mustache, about 40 when he played in 1926. People recall that he played the fiddle in the old-fashioned way, holding it in the crook of his arm instead of under his chin. He was probably the only Opry fiddler to play this way, and it suggests an equally archaic repertoire. In July 1926 Bandy sent a challenge to Henry Ford offering to play against his "champion fiddler", with Ford alone acting as judge. We don't know whether the contest came off. That same month Hay, writing a press release for the Tennessean, described Bandy as "one of WSM's star fiddlers" and a recording artist. His recordings, however, have not been traced to date, and Bandy seems to have simply dropped off the Opry after a year or so.

UNCLE BUNT STEPHENS

The man Uncle Jimmy felt was his keenest rival in the area was a 5-foot, 120-pound farmer from Moore County, Tennessee, named John L. (Uncle Bunt) Stephens. It was Uncle Bunt who bested Uncle Jimmy in Henry Ford's Louisville contest in 1926, and went on to win first prize in Ford's national contest. Uncle Bunt had been fiddling for dances in the hills of middle Tennessee for some 30 years before he entered Ford's regional contest. He was a good deal younger than Uncle Jimmy, being only 47 when he began to play in contests. Like Uncle Jimmy,

Uncle Bunt had been married twice, and like Uncle Jimmy, he was a genuine rustic, and an eccentric and colorful character.

A visitor to Uncle Bunt's house in the '20s described it as a "shot-gun" house about a mile from Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. (A "shot-gun" house was a house whose rooms were constructed one behind the other, so that a shot fired in the front would go through all the rooms in the house.)

> "The front room, a bedroom with a crude fireplace, was on the ground level while the kitchen, directly behind it, was two steps lower. The front room was small; just enough room for the double bed, a wash stand, one rocking chair, one straight chair and a rather large country fireplace, through which the wind whistled on that winter day."

The walls were rather bare, except for two decorations: a double-barreled shotgun and Uncle Bunt's fiddle.

When Judge Hay asked Uncle Bunt to describe his trip to Detroit, the old fiddler said:

> "Mr Ford was very nice to me. He asked me where I wanted to stop an' I told him I didn't care much as long as it wasn't in the middle o' town, so he told a big colored fellow to take me out to the country club. . . . After I played about a week for him I told him I would have to go home 'cause Lizzie didn't have no groceries or cord wood in the house. Mr Ford told me to stay and he'd have his man in Lawrenceburg send her a whole wagonload. An' sure enough, he done it."

Uncle Bunt's wife made her weekly visit into Tullahoma during this time, and reported that Mr Ford had presented her husband with a new Lincoln car, $1000 in money, a broadcloth suit of clothes; paid for having his teeth repaired, and entertained him as a guest for a week. (Reported in the Banner, February 15, 1926.) Later Uncle Bunt talked Ford into giving him cash instead of the Lincoln, whereupon he purchased a Ford car and pocketed the difference. (How the old-timers loved their Ford cars!)

Uncle Bunt never played on the Opry regularly, but only for occasional guest slots. His first appearance was on February 28, 1926, only a week or so after he was crowned World Champion Fiddler by Henry Ford himself. WSM scheduled him for a special broadcast on Monday at 7.00 pm; "the radio public is cordially invited . . . to hear the world's greatest old-time fiddler," proclaimed the announcement in the Tennessean. Uncle Bunt played solo fiddle for a half-hour, and won the applause of everyone. Hay recalled that the staff went out of their way to make Uncle Bunt feel at home, but something occurred that they hadn't counted on: the professional jealousy of Uncle Jimmy Thompson. As Hay says,

> "In the meantime, Uncle Jimmy Thompson was burned to a crisp, as better men than he have been when a rival takes the edge away. But, he stuck to the ship and for many months we nursed two elderly male prima donnas who couldn't see each other for the dust in their eyes."

Winning Ford's contest complicated Uncle Bunt's life considerably. In addition to his WSM appearance, he made various trips to the East and broadcast from Chicago in March 1926. Aunt Lizzie developed a country clog dance using a lot of petticoats, and she and Uncle Bunt eventually went on the vaudeville circuit. They spent some time at this, but, Hay reports, "their new life did not make them happy". They soon retired back to their cottage in the woods.

* For details of Uncle Bunt's life and career, see Don Roberson, "Uncle Bunt Stephens: Champion Fiddler," The Devil's Box XII (May 25, 1970), reprinted in Old Time Music 5 (Summer 1972).

Uncle Bunt reportedly won Ford's contest by playing his version of "Old Hen Cackled" and "Sail Away Lady" and in March 1926 he was in New York to record these numbers and others for Columbia Records. He finally had four numbers released, all unaccompanied fiddle solos. Next to Texas fiddler Eck Robertson's classic solos of "Leather Breeches" and "Sallie Gooden", these are probably the finest examples of traditional American solo fiddling recorded. The four sides were "Candy Girl" and "Left in the Dark Blues" (Columbia 15085-D) and "Sail Away Lady" and "Louisburg Blues" (Columbia 15071-D). Scholars of fiddle music have described Uncle Bunt's version of "Sail Away Lady" as "probably similar to much American dance music in the period between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars", and an ethnomusicologist has spent over 20 pages analysing the musical patterns of the piece. Uncle Bunt, "that nice little feller that never amounted to much", would have been quietly amused.

BLIND JOE MANGRUM

Blind Joe Mangrum, or Uncle Joe Mangrum as he was also called, was a remarkable fiddler from Paducah, Kentucky. He and his companion Fred Shriver, who played piano and accordion, were regulars on the Opry until the mid-'30s.

Opposite, Uncle Bunt Stephens in 1951. Above, some of the competitors at the Louisville tri-state contest in 1926 (see p 60): top left, W.H. Elmore of Indiana; right, Uncle Jimmy Thompson; bottom left, Marshall Claiborne; right, Blind Joe Mangrum.

Too little is known about Uncle Joe, but he left behind some excellent recordings and some tantalising bits of biography.

He was born about 1853, and was blind for most of his life. He apparently was a Kentucky native, though his exact birthplace is uncertain. Uncle Joe claimed as personal friends Irvin S. Cobb, wellknown Kentucky humorist, and the famous fiddling governors of Tennessee Alf and Bob Taylor. The origins of Uncle Joe's fiddle style are unknown, but it sounds clearer and cleaner than that of almost any other Opry fiddler. In fact, Judge Hay reported that Uncle Joe's "heart would be almost broken each week because we would not permit him to play selections from the classics and light classics, which he did very well. . . ." Alcyone Bate recalled that Uncle Joe liked to play Italian waltzes with Shriver's accordion backing him up, and on more than one occasion composed beautiful waltzes.

Mangrum and Shriver made a single record for Victor in 1928, "Bill Cheatam" and "Bacon and Cabbage". Uncle Joe's pure, mellow sound and fine execution, coupled with Shriver's unusual accordion backup, make this one of the most distinctive old time records. Victor also recorded three of Uncle Joe's famous waltzes but saw fit not to release them; "Mammoth Cave Waltz", "The Rose Waltz" and "Cradle Song" may still survive in Victor's vaults and perhaps someday can be recovered.

SID HARKREADER

Fiddlin' Sid Harkreader is widely recognised as Uncle Dave Macon's first companion, but he actually made more of a mark on the early Opry as a performer in his own right, and a leader of his own band. Though not perhaps of the caliber of a Thompson, Mangrum or Bunt Stephens, Sid was, and continued to be, a fine fiddler, as well as a singer and guitarist.

Sid was born in Wilson County, Tennessee, near Nashville, in 1898.* His family was of German origin and originally spelled the name Harkrader. As a young man Sid learned a harmonica-ukulele device called a "Little Joe", then went on to banjo, guitar and fiddle. He got his first fiddle from Sears with $3.95 he had earned trapping hides. As a fiddler Sid began to play locally at square dances, and discovered that he could make as much as $10-20 for an evening - not bad for a night's work in the early '20s. He soon determined to become a professional musician.

In 1923 Sid teamed with Uncle Dave and began a round of touring and record-making that was to last for the next seven years. During this time Sid became one of the first fiddlers to play over WSM. Documentary evidence places him and Macon on the station as early as the first week in November 1925. Sid also says that he, like many other local musicians, appeared on WDAD before his WSM stint. He may not have been one of the very first fiddlers on the Opry as such (i.e. the regular Saturday-night barn dance program), but he was one of the first fiddlers on WSM radio.

Even as he played with Uncle Dave, Sid would play other engagements and head up his own band. One reason was that he wanted to make his living totally by his music, and he had to work steadily to make ends meet. He was getting no living wage from his radio appearances so he turned to vaudeville, where he and Macon had enjoyed great success. In 1926 he was asked by a Loew's Theater manager in Memphis to put together a touring group of Charleston dancers; Sid agreed, and the act toured Tennessee and Alabama for several months. The next year Sid teamed up with Nashville guitarist Grady Moore and began appearing on the Opry. Moore was a guitar maker and instructor, and had himself had a solo spot on WSM and WLAC, where he featured himself on Hawaiian guitar. Also in 1927 Sid was contacted by agents of Paramount Records and asked to come to Chicago to record. Sid agreed, and took Grady Moore along to help out. The company paid him $1000 plus expenses for 24 selections.

Sid was pleased with this arrangement until he discovered that Paramount was also releasing his sides on the more popular Broadway label under the false names of Harkins & Moran. Sid took the matter to a lawyer and won a settlement from Paramount, probably becoming the first old time musician to assert his rights in face of the high-handed recording practises of companies in the '20s. In spite of this, Paramount asked Sid to record again in 1928. (This also indicates how very popular those "bootlegged" Broadway sides were; the Harkins &

* For a full discussion of Sid's career apart from his Uncle Dave Macon years, see Norm Cohen, "Fiddling Sid Harkreader," JEMF Quarterly VIII:8, no. 28 (Winter 1972), 188-93. This article also contains a discography of Sid's Paramount recordings. For the Uncle Dave years see the following chapter.

Moran sides still show up today with much greater frequency than the original Paramounts.) The second time, Sid took with him Blythe Poteet, a cousin of Sam and Kirk McGee, and the duo recorded 12 numbers.

Many of the Harkreader-Moore sides were sentimental songs of the McFarland & Gardner variety, such as "The Gambler's Dying Words", "Little Rosewood Casket" and "Picture From Life's Other Side". Others were traditional hymns and gospel pieces like "The Old Rugged Cross" and "In the Sweet Bye and Bye". Others were traditional fiddle pieces. "Old Joe" was a version of Dr Humphrey Bate's song, while "Kitty Wells" was probably learned from Dad Pickard. Uncle Dave's influence can be found in the monologue "A Trip to Town", as well as "I Don't Reckon It'll Happen Again For Months and Months" and "Bully of the Town". Sid added a number of his own specialities to the session, including his "Mocking Bird Breakdown" (which he still plays as his big crowd-pleaser) and "Drink Her Down". One of the most beautiful numbers from the session, "I Love the Hills of Tennessee", was written by Grady Moore.

Sid continued to play with one partner on the Opry in the early '30s. After he played with Moore, he joined up with Jimmy Hart, former guitarist with Dr Bate. A 1931 description of the pair, probably penned by Judge Hay, describes their performing style:

> "Fiddlin Sid Harkreader and Jimmy Hart! There is a team for you. Sid is a long tall boy whose love for starched collars causes him never to be without one. And they are high ones too. Sid literally dances around the microphone when he comes to bat, but he knows how to play breakdowns. Jimmy Hart with his guitar has appeared with many of the old-time bands and makes an admirable partner for Sid Harkreader."

In a sense, Sid was probably the first fulltime musician on the Opry, but during the early years he actually earned more of his money touring than broadcasting. By the mid-'30s he was able to broadcast more regularly and formed several larger bands. One such group, which broadcast over WLAC in the mid-'30s, included Nonnie Presson and Bulow Smith, who had recorded themselves as the Perry County Music Makers. Nonnie played a rare instrument, a custom-built oversized zither, which Sid's former partner Grady Moore built for her.*

In later years Sid played with the Gully Jumpers band on the Opry, and made numerous guest appearances at fiddling contests. As recently as three years ago he was still impressing people at fiddling contests with his skill. Today he lives in Nashville, where he is working on his memoirs and still occasionally fiddling. His plight in history is ironic. His sense of professionalism - his determination to make a living with his music - forced him to turn down many early Opry shows for paying jobs. His failure to appear slavishly on the early Opry has tended to minimise his role as a pioneer. But a pioneer he was, and one too often neglected in official histories.

* For more about the Perry County Music Makers see the author's article "We Play to Suit Ourselves: the Perry County Music Makers," Old Time Music 14 (Autumn 1974) 11-5.

TAKE IT AWAY, UNCLE DAVE!

"I REMEMBER ONE SATURDAY NIGHT, IN 1926, WHEN UNCLE Dave made his debut on WSM. We had read about it in the paper, but we didn't mention is about Lascassas. We had one of the two radio sets in the community, and we were afraid that everybody in that end of the county would swarm into our house to hear Uncle Dave and trample us. Nevertheless the word got around and just about everybody did swarm unto our house, except for a few local sages who didn't believe in radio."

Thus did Tennessee journalist Rufus Jarman describe the local impact of the meeting of the two most potent Tennessee influences on old time music, Uncle Dave Macon and the Grand Ole Opry. Of all the members of the early Opry, Macon is certainly the most famous; he is the only one of the "original 25" to have been elected to the Hall of Fame, and he is the only old-timer most of the current generation of Oprygoers are familiar with. Around middle Tennessee, Uncle Dave has become a genuine folk hero, and the tales told about him number hundreds. He recorded far more than anyone else on the early Opry, and his recordings have remained in print longer than those of anyone else; as of October 1975 there are no less than seven LPs of his reissued material in print and selling well. Folklorists have said of Uncle Dave: "With the exception of the Carter Family, Uncle Dave preserved more valuable American folklore through his recordings than any other folk or country music performer." Country music historians have referred to him as "the first featured star of the Grand Ole Opry". The popular press referred to him as "the king of the hillbillies" or "the Dixie Dewdrop". Yet Uncle Dave himself described himself merely as "banjoist and songster, liking religion and meetings, farming and thanking God for all his bountiful gifts in this beautiful world he has bestowed upon us".

Yet if Uncle Dave has come to symbolise the spirit of the early Opry, he was in many ways quite different from the average early Opry performer. To begin with, he was perhaps the only member of the early Opry cast that didn't need the Opry as much as it needed him. He came to the Opry already established as a star in vaudeville and through phonograph records; he was by no means the only early performer who had had professional experience prior to playing on the Opry (as some commentators have suggested), but he was the only artist who enjoyed a national reputation. Second, Macon made little effort to adopt his older vaudeville style (born from years of doing live shows) to the new radio medium, as did most other singers; he never really learned to be comfortable around a microphone. As ~~Judg~~ Judge Hay recalled: "When Uncle Dave came on we moved him back so that he would have plenty of room to kick as he played. He has always been an actor who thought the microphone was just a nuisance."

And finally, Uncle Dave's rather intimidating zest for life allowed him to get away with a great deal more on the Opry shows than anyone else could. Uncle Dave's humor was unpredictable and at times a little rough; the National Life company was very mindful of the "family image" of the Opry, and always watchful for the suggestive or the implicit. Nights when Uncle Dave had been into "the grip" (his little black satchel wherein he carried his Jack Daniels Tennessee sippin' whiskey) gave the Opry managers no little concern. "There was

no telling what he might sing then," one of them confided. "Some nights he would do songs backstage that were funny as could be, but they never, never could go out on the air." Yet Uncle Dave could switch from the innuendo of "I'll Tickle Nancy" to the pieties of "Rock of Ages" in an instant, and with no sense of hypocrisy. He was a genuinely good man who genuinely loved life, and this obviously sincere zest for life endeared him to Judge Hay as well as to millions of fans. He and Judge Hay became the best of friends in later years. But some of his antics which might well have gotten a less artist - or a lesser man - kicked off the show were for Uncle Dave written off as mere eccentricities. Legends, after all, are not born of conformity.

The legends about Uncle Dave are delightful and certainly meaningful, but they are occasionally mistaken for history. This has been the case with his early relationship with the Opry. It has been widely assumed that Uncle Dave was regularly performing on the Opry in its very earliest days. It has been reported more than once that Uncle Dave was the Opry's first featured vocal star. Neither of these stories is completely accurate, but to understand why, we need to review Uncle Dave's early career.*

Uncle Dave was born David Harrison Macon, the son of a former Confederate Army officer, in 1870 near McMinnville, Tennessee, about 60 miles southeast of Nashville. As a teenager he lived in Nashville, where his father operated the old Broadway Hotel. This hotel catered to vaudeville and circus performers and by the time he was 15 Uncle Dave had grown to love music and the performing traditions of the 19th-century American stage. In 1885, when he was 15, he got his first banjo. In his own words, it was Joel Davidson, "a noted comedian and banjoist . . . that inspired Uncle Dave to make his wishes known to his dear aged mother and she gave him the money to purchase his first banjo." A photo made a year later shows the young Macon proudly holding this instrument.

But long before Macon had seen Joel Davidson in Sam McFlynn's circus, and had begun [illegible] g 19th-century vaudeville tradi[illegible] ed to another [illegible] ic. A 1926 [illegible] on a farm in [illegible] tunes of the [illegible] Uncle Dave [illegible] id not hesi- [illegible] unt of "Rock [illegible] ake the [illegible] granted. [illegible], particu- [illegible] very first [illegible] 14849, made [illegible] untry [illegible] n farming [illegible] see. He [illegible] d his [illegible] songs [illegible] he [illegible] ny, [illegible] y old- [illegible] ng as [illegible] he [illegible] nswick

329/.) In 1920 Uncle Dave became a victim of technological unemployment: a truck line started in competition with Macon Midway and Uncle Dave simply chose not to compete. At the age of 50, he began thinking of starting a new career in music.

In 1920 Uncle Dave visited relatives in Arkansas and was encouraged to begin making formal public appearances. The next year saw Uncle Dave's first performance in public: it was a charity event in Morrison, Tennessee. Macon recalled: "The Methodist church there needed a new door. I gave a show, then passed the hat and collected the money, $17." Two years later he turned professional; a talent scout for the Loew's vaudeville circuit heard him at a Shriners' benefit in Nashville and offered him "several hundred" dollars a week to do a stand in Birmingham. The engagement was successful, and soon Macon found himself booked in the Loew's theater chain around the country.

Uncle Dave enjoyed the touring (banjo-playing comedians were very popular in vaudeville then, and had been since the 1890s) but soon realised that he needed a backup man in his act. In 1923 he was playing informally in Charlie Melton's barbershop in Nashville** when the young Sid Harkreader happened to walk in with his fiddle under his arm. They began playing and Macon was impressed with Harkreader's ready wit, musicianship and versatility. (He could sing and second on guitar as well as play fiddle.) He engaged Sid for some bookings and soon the pair was touring the Loew's circuit in the South. They worked together throughout 1924 and by early 1925 Macon had added a third member to his team, a buck dancer named "Dancing Bob" Bradford.

Uncle Dave became incredibly popular in the mid-South area solely on the basis of his stage appearances. He was so popular that the regional distributor for Vocalion Records, the Sterchi Brothers furniture company, became convinced that he should make records. Thus in the summer of 1924, just a little over a year after Fiddlin' John Carson had made the first commercial record of old time music in the South, Uncle Dave and Sid Harkreader found themselves in New York to record. Uncle Dave's first released number was "Chewing Gum", and it was to remain one of his most popular standards. Another was "Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy", which was reportedly the first tune he played on the Opry. The records were successful, and they launched Macon on a recording career that was to encompass some 175-odd commercially released selections.*** By the time he

* Uncle Dave's career, of course, extended beyond the Opry in many respects, but this sketch will obviously concentrate on his Opry relationships. For a more comprehensive sketch of Uncle Dave's life see the author's essay on Uncle Dave in Malone & McCulloh /eds./, Stars of Country Music (Urbana IL, 1975).

** Melton was a very popular local old time musician who played the harmonica. In fact, known as "Charlie the French Harp King", he was one of the first musicians to appear both on WDAD and WSM. His barbershop was a gathering-place for old time musicians in Nashville.

*** The full history of these recordings has been documented in Uncle Dave Macon: a Bio-Discography (JEMF Special Series No. 3)(Los Angeles, 1970). Since the publication of this work, further Macon recordings have come to light, including some unissued tests, airchecks, Silvertone home discs, and some informally recorded tapes.

Uncle Dave Macon and Sam McGee.

LOOK WHO'S COMING

UNCLE DAVE MACON

AND

SAM McGEE

BOTH FROM ENNESSEE

VOCALION REC ARTISTS

You are getting yourself TOLD about somethin tertaining and Worth While by seeing them in person. THEY DO DOUBLES AND SI GLES WITH BANJO AND GUITAR. INSTRUMENTAL AND VOCAL.

Uncle Dave Macon is the only man in captivity who plays and sings on two banjos at the same time. TRICK BANJO PLAYING IS HIS SPECIALTY.

Funny, Clean Jokes and Lots of Fun

BRING THE WHOLE FAMILY

WILL APPEAR HERE

ADMISSION 15 & 25 ¢

first sat before the WSM microphones Uncle Dave had recorded over 30 songs and toured thousands of miles as a vaudeville headliner.

In the spring of 1925 Uncle Dave met another musician who was to become his travelling companion and pupil, Sam McGee. Macon first met Sam when he and Harkreader did a show near Sam's hometown of Franklin, Tennessee. Sam had been playing the guitar for some time, but was then working as a blacksmith in a rural village. He recalls:

> "I never will forget what they had on their instrument cases. Uncle Dave's, it read: 'Uncle Dave Macon, World's Greatest Banjo Player', and Sid had on his 'Sid Harkreader, World's Greatest Violinist'. And I was just a little old one-gallus country boy and that really impressed me. You know, a violinist, that was something."

After hearing Sam pick the then new piece "Missouri Waltz" on his little Martin, Uncle Dave said, "Would you like to come with me if I could book us a few dates?" Sam agreed, and soon he was Uncle Dave's regular companion, alternating with Harkreader.

They travelled in an old touring car with curtains for windows. Sam drove. One of Uncle Dave's eccentricities was to have Sam stop at each railroad crossing while the older man would laboriously climb out of the car, walk up to the tracks and peer carefully down each side to make sure the way was clear. Uncle Dave booked his own shows through a voluminous correspondence and believed the best form of advertising to be word of mouth. Sam recalls that they would go into a town, put on a "sample" show and let the grapevine do the rest. They arranged their schedules so they could farm on the side, and were always in for planting and harvesting. (Uncle Dave was always a good farmer throughout his long career and even after he had achieved worldwide fame. He plowed with a mule up until his death, and each year he butchered enough hogs to provide each of his children with two sides of pork, salted and cured.)

Sam and Harkreader were interesting contrasts as musical companions, and as individuals. Sid Harkreader was a thin, angular, almost ascetic-looking man, thoroughly professional and rather intense about his music. He was an interpreter rather than a creator, and as much at home with the fiddle as the guitar; he also fancied himself somewhat of a crooner. Sam, on the other hand, was lively and impetuous, always ready for a joke, and one of the most creative guitarists in country music history. At times Uncle Dave felt uneasy with both men; Sid was sometimes a little too serious for him, and Sam's guitar and banjo virtuosity threatened to overshadow Macon's own talents. (Uncle Dave never learned how to "change gears" on the banjo, and carried three instruments with him, each tuned to a different key.)

With Sam such a natural comedian, and Uncle Dave having 30 years experience with vaudeville and burlesque jokes, their in-person shows must have been something to behold. The fragments of the repartee that they preserved on occasional records show it bristling with classic one-liners and impertinent rejoinders.

> Macon: Well, Buddy, how you feel?
> McGee: Feeling right.
> Macon: Well, if you ain't right, get right, and let your conscience be your guide, because I'm gonna play with more heterogeneous constapolicy double flavor 'n' unknown quality than you do.
> McGee: Make it light on yourself.

("Comin' Round the Mountain" /Brunswick 263/)

6,000 APPLAUD POLICE BENEFIT

Many Others Unable to Crowd In; Every Act Voted "Best."

Six thousand people crowded the Ryman Auditorium last night, listened for three hours and cheered for encores as the annual program pronounced by critics as perhaps the best and most entertaining yet offered by the Nashville Policemen's Benefit Association was executed. By the time the 6,000 were hearing the first numbers perhaps a third of that number were on their way back home for lack of standing room.

It was a miscellaneous program of music, instrumental, song and comedy, presenting a range from the finest touches in the classic to the old-time "break-down," and most "scientific jazz." Not only did the audience of 6,000 hear the program of scarcely excelled local talent, but through the courtesy of Station WSM of the National Life & Accident Company, the program was broadcasted with the result that scores of telegrams from various parts of the United States, indicating the popularity of Nashville talent for entertainment, were received. Jack Keefe was the announcer.

Howse Makes Address.

Harry Lester was chairman of the commitee on arrangements, assisted by Enoch Shelton and Jack Dowd. At the outset, Mayor Howse delivered a brief address as to the purpose of the entertainment and the organization presenting it, and presented Johnnie Stiner with a badge for sale of the largest number of tickets.

The program opened with a soprano solo by Miss Nell Moran, with Jack Keefe as accompanist, after which the Beasley Smith's Andrew Jackson Hotel Orchestra was heard. "Indian Love Call," a number by Miss Moran, was particularly well received.

Then came a series of violin solos by C. Roland Flick, with Mrs Flick at the piano, which held the audience spellbound.

Joe Combs In Solos.

A turn to the less serious side of life came with the introduction of Joe Combs in two or three light, fantastic solos. In one he appeared as the Adam of Creation in the song "I Want My Rib." Eric Nissen presided at the piano in his "New Stuff" as offered by himself and Mr. Combs. They presented "Tea For Two," and "Save Your Sorrow for Tomorrow."

Thereafter, it was tit for tat and whichever was last was always best in bringing down the house, as Dr. Humphrey Bate and his Hawaiin orchestra of Castalian Springs vied with Sidney Harkreader, introduced as the "fiddling fiddler" of Mt. Juliet and with "Uncle Dave" Macon, of Readyville, introduced as the "struttingest strutter that ever strutted a strut," either with his banjo, guitar or laryngeal equipment.

Misses His Fireplace

"Uncle Dave" confessed to some embarrassment in being transplanted from a home far back in the country to the stage without a big wood fireplace in which to expectorate and throw things. Some of the numbers presented jointly by himself and Mr. Harkreader were: "Turkey In The Straw," "Sugar Walks down the Street," "Ain't Goin' to Rain No Mo'," "Don't Reckon T'will Happen Again," and "Go Way Mule." Both Harkreader and Uncle Dave kept the audience in an uproar.

Dr. Bate directed his old-time orchestra, using himself the harmonica. His daughter, Miss Alcyone Bate, presided at the piano. Walter Liggett and Hugh Peay played banjo and O. R. Blanton and Bert Hutchinson played guitars. They rendered several numbers of old time and popular music and the audience never got enough.

Interspersed with the earlier part of the progrfam were several numbers by John Dowd, soloist, and and the Knights of Columbus quartette, composed of Gene Cunningham, first tenor; John Dowd, second tenor; Pat Murphy, baritone; and Vernon Arrington, bass.

Bill Tyson's orchestra, with the performance on the stage of several fleet-footed negro dancers, made the last comedy offering; Willie Laner, Clarence Rhodes, LaFayette Eastman and Theodore Culham participating.

Following this performance, the audience stood and sang "America" as a fitting close for the program.

...ways gives relief. The second and third doses completely break up the cold. Pleasant and safe to take ... Millions use "Pape's Cold Compound." Price, thirty-five ... druggists guarantee it.

A MIRTHQUAKE WILL HIT NASHVILLE

MON., NOV. 9TH

What do you know about this fresh egg

A MIRTHQUAKE WILL HIT NASHVILLE

MON., NOV. 9TH

Thursday Night, Nov. 5th

THAT'S THE BIG NIGHT! DON'T OVERLOOK IT!

Bigger and Better Than Ever

Policemen's Benefit Entertainment

Once each year we present the most novel entertainment of the year. This year we offer for your aprpoval

AN EVENING WITH WSM

See these artists and musicians in person that you listen to over your Radio every evening. Hear Jack Keefe say his funny sayings.

A chance of a lifetime to see how they all look and act in a broadcasting studio.

The following artists will appear on the program:

Beasley Smith's Andrew Jackson Hotel Orchestra.

Violin solo.

Sauvenir De Haydn .... N. Leonard

C. Roland Flick—Mrs. Flick at the piano.

Joe Combs and Eric Nissen in "New Stuff."

Dr. Humphrey Bate and his Hawaiian Orchestra of Castalian Springs.

K. C. Quartet.

Uncle Dave Macon.

Sidney Harkreader.

Hear Uncle Dave and Sid oo the Banjo and Guitar. They sing some mean blues. New Jokes—Old Jokes New Songs—Old Songs.

ALSO A BIG SURPRISE ACT

PROGRAM STARTS PROMPTLY AT 8 P. M.

RYMAN AUDITORIUM

Don't Forget We Are Looking For You

STARTS TODAY AT THE

BELMONT

1701 21st Ave. So.

SECRETS OF THE NIGHT

with

A Cordial Invitation to Visit

ELECTRIC COOKING SCHOOL

IN ELECTRIC HALL

It was with such experience that Macon, in the fall of 1925, settled in for the winter and began to spend some time in Nashville. The old time fiddling craze was sweeping the nation, two new radio stations were starting, and Uncle Dave was the right man in the right place at the right time. His relationship with WSM in the station's earliest days has hitherto never been clearly defined, and because of its importance it is perhaps appropriate to examine it at length.

Historians have generally accepted a chronology running thus: on November 6, 1925 Uncle Dave and Sid Harkreader perform in a special live show at the Ryman auditorium and "set hundreds to stomping their feet." On November 28, George Hay lets Uncle Jimmy Thompson play and thus starts the Opry. On December 26, Macon joins Uncle Jimmy for "an hour or two" of "old familiar tunes". The common story holds, then, that Uncle Dave appeared on WSM's barn dance program shortly after Thompson's debut. Hay himself has written that Uncle Dave was one of those who formally joined the barn dance roster "during the first two or three months of the year 1926." But a close scrutiny of newspaper files for those months reveals a vastly different story.

In the first place, the famous Macon-Harkreader concert of November 6 was not merely a concert: it was also a WSM broadcast. The occasion was the annual Policemen's Benefit show and included other acts than Macon and Harkreader. And researchers have overlooked the vital fact that the show was advertised as "An Evening with WSM" (see illustration on facing page). The audience was urged to see "these artists and musicians in person that you listen to over your radio every evening." (Emphasis mine.) It is this latter phrase that is so important, for the list includes Uncle Dave and Sid, as well as Dr Bate's band. Though it has been widely reported that Bate was playing on Nashville radio prior to the November 28 broadcast, this is the first evidence that Macon and/or Harkreader had also done so. Furthermore, it was announced only during that same week of the November 6 concert that George Hay had been employed by the station - and he was not to assume his duties until November 9. Thus Uncle Dave Macon, as well as Dr Bate and Sid Harkreader, had appeared on WSM at least three weeks before Uncle Jimmy made his famous broadcast - and the week before Hay arrived on the scene. To be sure, there was probably no organised barn dance so early, but, as we have seen, there was little organised programming at all during the first month of WSM.

The Ryman broadcast was historic in another sense: it was the first country music broadcast out of the building that was later to become the shrine of the Grand Ole Opry. (For another interesting Macon-Ryman connected, see the note alongside.) The newspaper account (reproduced on facing page) was very sympathetic to old time music on the show and gave a detailed account of Uncle Dave's performance. Curiously, it also referred to his playing guitar as well as banjo. Sam McGee has said that Uncle Dave could "second only a little" on guitar, and Sid Harkreader points out that Uncle Dave played guitar behind his fiddling on their Vocalion record of "The Girl I Left Behind Me". (Uncle Dave could also play the piano, specialising in a number called "Eli Green's Cakewalk".)

By December Uncle Dave seems to have been appearing regularly on WSM; his next documented appearance is December 19. On that night he played on the station for a while and then, accompanied by station announcer Jack

Note

In a further instance of historical irony, Uncle Dave liked to sing a song about the builder of the Ryman Auditorium, riverboatman Tom Ryman. The song, entitled "Cap'n Tom Ryman", was collected from Macon by folklorist George Boswell in 1950; Boswell transcribed both words and music for his unpublished collection of Tennessee folk song. Uncle Dave never commercially recorded the song, though he did record a related version of the widely known "Rock About My Saro Jane". Boswell's text reads as follows:

"Cap'n Tom Ryman was a steamboat man,
But Sam Jones sent him to the heavenly land,
Oh, sail away.
Oh, there's nothing to do but to sit down and sing,
Oh rockabout my Saro Jane, oh rockabout my Saro /Jane,
Oh rockabout my Saro Jane.

Oh rockabout my Saro Jane,
Oh rockabout my Saro Jane,
Oh there's nothing to do but to sit down and /sing,
Oh rockabout my Saro Jane.

Engine give a scratch and the whistle gave a squall
The engineer going to a hole in the wall -
Oh Saro Jane.
There's nothing to do but to sit down and sing,
Oh rockabout my Saro Jane."

Uncle Dave, when asked about the song, gave this history to Boswell:

"Now that tabernacle what was built down there where we play, Rev'rend Sam Jones converted Cap'n Tom Ryman. He had six steamboats on the Cumberland River and you ought to have seen that wharf just lined with horses and mules and wagons hauling freight to those boats and bringing it back. And Sam Jones preached the low country to him so straight he took them niggers all down there Monday morning and bought all that whiskey and poured it in the river. Took them card tables and built a bonfire and burned 'em up. Clean up. Niggers started this song."

The song would make an interesting case study in Uncle Dave's use of traditional material in his music. As with many of his pieces, the "core" of the song seems borrowed from black tradition, as he always acknowledged. The chorus of "Saro Jane" might well have referred to a steamboat originally, and the piece could have been a form of work song. Yet the couplet at the beginning of each stanza seems to have been interchangeable, like a blues stanza. On Macon's 1927 recording of "Rock About My Saro Jane" (Vocalion 5152) he sings words identical to those above except that he does not include the "Cap'n Tom Ryman" stanza and does include several other stanzas that seem to have little in common with one another. While Uncle Dave probably did sing the "Tom Ryman" couplet earlier than 1950, when Boswell collected it, he probably used it simply as a random stanza in "Rock About My Saro Jane". But after he saw the Ryman Auditorium become the home of the Opry, he might well have shifted the emphasis of the song to the more topical focus of Tom Ryman. Macon was notorious for mixing parts of different songs and "recomposing" them to suit himself, and some day some poor folklorist is going to ruin his liver trying to track all of them down.

Banjo Picker Enlivens Travelers In 15th Annual Banquet at C. of C.

Joel Fort, Sr., Stirs Applause With Wit and Sarcasm; Mayor of Cookeville Attends.

"It ain't what you got, it's what you put out; and boys, I can deliver," said Dave Macon at the fifteenth annual All-Traveler's banquet at the Chamber of Commerce last night.

Dave Macon is the best banjo picker in the South, according to M. F. Herrin, the oldest travelling man at the meeting, who has seen them all. Now, Mr. Macon may not be the best in the South, but to use his own vernacular he is "a stomp down good un." Mr. Macon is from Readerville, Tenn., and his songs and original verses were the outstanding feature of the evening's entertainment. The unanimous decision of the meeting was that his boast was not an idle one. He can deliver

E. C. Faircloth, toastmaster, lived up to his reputation as story-teller.

As the first number on the program Jack Keefe made the personal acquaintance of many whom he had entertained over WSM. His original songs and piano selections were just as popular when delivered in person as when over the radio, and judging by the applause received, that is considerable popularity.

The most enthusiastically received speech on the program was made by Joel Fort, Sr. His wit and scarcasm was effectively turned upon every well known traveling man present and his observations as to their various qualities were gretted with roars of approval.

Three minute speeches were made by various traveling men. Some were traveling men actually, others were traveling men in the literal interpretation of the term. Col. William A. Hensley, mayor of Cookeville, and member of the governor's staff, drove 116 miles after 4 o'clock in order to attend the banquet, and his reception should have paid him for the trip, for the ovation following his introduction was one of the greatest of the evening.

Among other short speeches were those made hy A .E. Rainey, president of the Tennessee Traveling Men's Association; Olney Davies, State T. P. A. secretary; M. F. Herrin, the oldest traveling man at the meeting.

Sam Bjoton was general chairman of the arrangements committee, and was assisted by R. J. Cowan, founder of the banquet 17 years ago.

Two boys at play recently discovered a prehistoric apartment house in New Mexico.

Keefe, attended a local Chamber of Commerce banquet where he performed again. (See illustration.) Uncle Dave, like Uncle Jimmy, attracted a good deal of mail, and the next week WSM announced that "because of the recent revival in the popularity of old familiar tunes, WSM has arranged to have an hour or two every Saturday night, starting Saturday, December 26." Both Macon and Uncle Jimmy would answer requests. An old-timer who recalled this show told me: "Uncle Jimmy and Dave Macon would do a show together, but they wouldn't actually be playing together at the same time. Uncle Dave, he'd play for a while, and then Uncle Jimmy'd take it for a while." Thus it is quite likely that Uncle Dave had more to do with the establishing of the barn dance than he is generally given credit for.

After the December 26 show, however, he did not appear on the program for a time. In fact, during the "first two or three months of 1926" that Hay talks of, when Macon, supposedly, formally joined the barn dance cast, he made not a single appearance that can be documented. He seems to have formally "joined" on April 17, 1926; newspaper accounts of that week play up Uncle Dave and report that since he has been such a hit "this past winter" on the station, he will now appear twice per barn dance show, "early and late". For the next four months, from April through July, Uncle Dave is one of the three mainstays of the program, along with Dr Bate and Uncle Jimmy Thompson. He began to appear less frequently as late summer turned into fall; on one night he was scheduled to go on at 11.45, which suggests he might have been dropping by the station after a concert or live show. All told in 1926 he appeared on 15-20 of the barn dance shows - less than either Bate or Thompson, but enough to maintain a high profile with the audience.

But if Uncle Dave was in on the barn dance during its first months, he was hardly a sterling regular for

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Prescott, Ore., December 19, 1925.
Radio Station WSM,
Nashville, Tenn.

I am just writing you a line to tell you how much we have enjoyed your radio program tonight. I live [illegible] miles west of Portland, Ore., on the Columbia river. I tuned in your station tonight at 7:15 p. m., Pacific time. The first selection was by Uncle Dave Macon, and believe me it is the first time I have been homesick in four years. I was born and grew up in Clay county, North Carolina, so you see why I got homesick when the strains of Uncle Dave's banjo eased off on "Old Dan Tucker," "Old Gray Mule," and several other familiar Southern airs. Charlie is no amateur on the harmonica; his selections were very good. We also enjoyed the American Legion program very much.

Give my best regards to the artists that performed over WSM Saturday eve, December 19, 1925, and give us a barn dance program every Saturday night. I have some friends that don't believe I ever hear a station in old Tennessee. If it is not asking too much of you, I would like to hear from you to show them you were in Oregon and I was in Tennessee, see.

MR. AND MRS. GARNETT L. SMITH, Prescott, Ore.

Physician Excels as Musician for Radio

Music and medicine may not be ordinarily called a good mixture but in the career of Dr. Humphrey Bate of Castalian Springs, Tenn., whose orchestra of barn dance musicians appears each Saturday night on the program of Station WDAD, they have both been important and not conflicting.

Dr. Bate, who was graduated many years ago from the Nashville Medical College, served as a physician in the Spanish-American War when he was a lieutenant in the United States Medical Corps. Since that time he has been engaged in his profession at Castalian Springs. His group of string instrument musicians which consists of his daughter, Miss Alycyone Bates, Burt Hutchins, Oscar Stone, O. R. Blanton and Walter Liggett, has appeared on the local station's programs twenty times since it began broadcasting.

the next three or four years. He continued to prefer "personals" - in-person concert tours - and recording to radio performances. One obvious reason was money: WSM wasn't paying at all at first, and even when pay began Uncle Dave could spend his time much more profitably in other media. (He was accustomed to adequate recompense for his services. One of his favorite stunts was to pass the hat after a concert, and ceremoniously examine the offering. If it was not enough, he would frown and start a heart-rending spiel that began, "Folks, I've got seven little children that are home and barefoot. . . ." The hat was passed again, and people dug a little deeper. Uncle Dave collected the money, thanked the folks, and then explained. "And my children thank you too. And lest you misunderstand, they are at home and barefoot because they are in bed and asleep.") So Macon would spend much of summer and spring touring, and appear on the radio mostly in the winter months when roads were bad. In 1928, for example, he appeared only four times in the year.

Most of Uncle Dave's early Opry shows were done alone, with Sam McGee, or with Sid Harkreader. But in 1927 he for some reason decided to form a larger stringband. He got Sam's younger brother Kirk, who played mandolin and fiddle, and a superb local fiddler named Mazy Todd. Todd was from middle Tennessee and came from a family of fine musicians and folk artists; when he wasn't playing with Uncle Dave he often appeared with his own "string trio" on the barn dance. The main lineup was: Macon, banjo and cheerleader, Sam on guitar and usually Kirk and Mazy on fiddles. It seems to have been a band organised primarily for recordings (the twin fiddle lead suggests that the Brunswick-Vocalion company for whom they recorded might have been looking for competition for Columbia's very popular Skillet-Lickers, which also used a two-, or three-, fiddle lead). Also, Macon dubbed the group the Fruit Jar Drinkers, regardless of the fact that there was an entirely different band on the Opry at that time with the same name, headed by George Wilkerson. This fact in itself suggests that Macon did not plan to use the group locally very much, and they made relatively few appearances on the barn dance as such. However, Uncle Dave would use Mazy on his personal appearances, now alternating him with Kirk McGee, Sam and Sid.

No matter why he organised the band, Macon created in it one of the most exciting of Tennessee stringbands. Propelled by his driving banjo, the band steamed through classic numbers like "Bake That Chicken Pie", "Tom and Jerry", "Hop Light Ladies" and "Rock About My Saro Jane". Macon's years of experience in playing for and calling square dances - one of his overlooked talents - is reflected in his calls on the records. "Backs to the wall and bottom shoe all," he bellows. "Shout if yo' happy." It was an inspired band, and one the Skillet-Lickers themselves would have had trouble taking.

The Depression continued to deepen in the early '30s, and Uncle Dave pontificated on the state of things by arguing that music and morals go together and the hard times were caused by the fact that both music and morals were in decline. He told a reporter:

> "A man who can't enjoy music has no heart and very little soul. People today are drifting away from the old tunes, the real music, and at the same time they are drifting away from morals - one is the cause of the other."

Jasper Aaron "Mazy" Todd (1882-1935), who played fiddle on Uncle Dave Macon's Fruit Jar Drinkers' recordings, with unknown guitarist.

Whatever the case, the Depression hit Uncle Dave's musical profession hard; he found both touring and recording becoming less lucrative. The record companies were recording little and releasing even less. Uncle Dave did his last Brunswick session in Knoxville in March 1930; it was a special occasion for him, for it marked the recording debut of his son Dorris. He was therefore considerably angered when Brunswick failed to release a single one of the sides. Sid Harkreader has recalled that he thought there was some sort of technical flaw in the records, but Uncle Dave would not hear of this and severed his long recording relationship with Brunswick. (He had recorded exclusively for them and their sister company Vocalion since his recording debut in 1924.) Thus he set up a session with the rival company Okeh, and with Sam McGee did a memorable session for them in December 1930. This date, in Jackson, Mississippi, produced at least two masterpieces, "Tennessee Red Fox Chase" and the topical "Wreck of the Tennessee Gravy Train". But most of this session, like the last Brunswick one, was not issued. Recovered test-pressings from the Okeh date show that the music was fine, as usual; the failure of Okeh to issue the sides was mainly due to no one's buying records. Uncle Dave was not to record for another 3½ years, and the 1934 date, for Gennett, was to come about because Kirk McGee initiated it. Altogether in 1930 Macon recorded some 18 sides and saw only six released.

It is thus in 1930, when other media began to fail him, that Uncle Dave first begins to appear regularly on the Opry. He appears in the radio logs with regular

Above, Uncle Dave cutting up on stage at the Opry, with his son Dorris accompanying.

slots on almost every Saturday program, usually appearing only with his son Dorris. (His old pardners the McGee brothers had teamed up with Arthur Smith to form the Dixieliners, and Sid Harkreader had a band of his own.) His audience was waiting for him when he took his place among the WSM regulars and he quickly became the most popular attraction on the show. Popularity in those days, before the WSM Artists Bureau had mastered the art of setting up successful tours, was measured by the amount of fan-mail a performer received, and Uncle Dave customarily received more mail than anyone else, with the occasional exception of the Delmore Brothers.

It was in fact this last fact that led Uncle Dave to approach the Delmores and suggest that they team up on tours and "personals". The Delmores had joined the Opry in 1933, and their close-harmony singing and amiability appealed very much to Uncle Dave. The Delmores were also able to keep time with him, a rather difficult feat since Macon, used to playing alone for many years, tended to vary his tempo as a song progressed. As with his other younger pardners, Uncle Dave became a sort of father-figure to the Delmores, sharing his considerable show-business experience with them and helping them negotiate the increasingly complex world of contracts and bookings. The Delmores, like the McGees, helped with the driving and chores attendant on touring. Alton Delmore recalled that Uncle Dave was a scrupulous bookkeeper:

> "He didn't want a penny that wasn't his, and he didn't want you to have a penny that belonged to him. For instance, when we checked up, that is counted the money, sometimes there would be an odd penny. We split three ways and of course you can't divide a penny into three parts. But Uncle Dave would put it down in his little book and remember every time who the odd penny belonged to."

Uncle Dave became close friends with the Delmores and by the mid-'30s was often staying with them at their house in Nashville.

It was also with the Delmores that Uncle Dave resumed his recording career. By 1935 the Depression was easing somewhat, and Victor Records had two years before initiated their Bluebird label, designed to be sold for about half the usual record price; it was an attempt to accomodate the record market to the hard times, and to facilitate this many of the early Bluebird releases were reissues from older series. But in 1934 the Victor executives embarked on a determined drive to corner the old time music market, and began recording many of the best-selling groups of the '20s, like the

Skillet-Lickers, the Jenkins Family and Fiddlin' John Carson. They were therefore very much interested in picking up Uncle Dave, and in 1935 he began a series of records for Bluebird.

Uncle Dave's first session for Bluebird was in New Orleans in 1935, and an incident there is representative of his attitude toward record-making and his music-making in general. Waiting to record after Arthur Smith, Uncle Dave was entertaining a black gospel quartet with jokes. The foursome - the Southern University Quartet - was waiting to record after Uncle Dave. The humor had gotten to the point where the black group would crack up merely if Uncle Dave looked at them. Then it came time for Uncle Dave to record. With the Delmores backing him, he launched into "Over the Mountain". Alton Delmore recalls what happened next:

> "Uncle Dave had been looking back at the Negro quartet when he was playing and that didn't hurt anything, but when he was singing he never looked back at them till we got about halfway through. Then, right in the middle of a verse, he turned round and looked at them and the buzzer sounded. We couldn't see the technicians and Mr Oberstein because there was a wall between us, and they were in another room. /Eli Oberstein had replaced Ralph Peer as Victor's main field-recording supervisor and talent scout for old time and blues music./ But if something went wrong, they would buzz us and the record was no good. When the buzzer sounded we all quit playing, and in a moment Mr Oberstein came walking in real slow like. He was not looking at anybody, but I could tell he was not pleased. He had seen Uncle Dave having fun with the quartet and he knew exactly what had happened.
>
> 'Now, Uncle Dave, you are not here to sing for those boys back there, so come on now and let's get something going.' He was right, but he didn't know Uncle Dave. The record would have been just as good if he had kept on the mike. That's the way he had always made records, from the beginning. 'Now Cap,' Uncle Dave said, 'I can sing anyway I want to and still be heard. I've got a lot of git up and go.' (He meant volume.) 'And I've got a smokehouse full of country hams and all kinds of meat to eat up there in Readyville. I've got plenty of wood hauled up, and I don't have to be bossed around by some New York sharpshooter just to make a few records 'cause I've done my part on the record making anyway.'"*

Uncle Dave continued to tour with Opry groups, and to build up his audience. Thus in 1939, when Hollywood decided to make a film about the Opry, Uncle Dave was a

* Quoted from Alton Delmore's autobiography Truth Is Stranger Than Publicity, edited by Charles Wolfe and published by the Country Music Foundation Press (Nashville, 1975).

natural choice to appear in a major role. Even then he was unimpressed with film, as he had been with records. When first notified of the film opportunity, his immediate reaction was to ask "How much money up front?" George Hay recalls bringing the Hollywood "advance man" to Uncle Dave's house prior to the filming.

> "Uncle Dave was delighted. He asked the cook to prepare a real, sho' 'nuf Tennessee dinner with all of the trimmings and we drove down from Nashville on a beautiful day. . . . Uncle Dave asked the blessing and we were served a dinner which is not on sale anywhere in these United States, more is the pity. We were forced to be satisfied with rich country ham, fried chicken, six or seven vegetables done to a Tennessee turn, jelly preserves, pickles, hot corn bread and white bread. Then came the cake. . . . After dinner Uncle Dave invited us to be seated under a large tree in his front yard, where we discussed the possibility of a Grand Ole Opry picture. As the producer and your reporter drove back to Nashville, that experienced executive said, 'I have never met a more natural man in my life. He prays at the right time and he cusses at the right time and his jokes are as cute as the dickens.'"*

Uncle Dave appeared in the picture not only as a musician but also as an actor. He played the constable of a small rural town, and had ample opportunity to demonstrate his classic vaudeville humor. In one scene he is umpiring a baseball game in which an Opry group plays a girls' softball team. As an Opry member tries to bat against a leggy red-haired pitcher, Uncle Dave cracks, "You're looking at the wrong curves, boy." In another scene he forces a reluctant prisoner into his cell by firing a shotgun into the floor inches from his feet. As a musician he appears in a stringband led by Roy Acuff where he calls a square-dance set and plays a driving banjo in a lengthy version of "Soldier's Joy". He also plays with Acuff's group in a spirited version of "Down in Union County" (the film's theme song), rendered while bouncing down a hill in an old open touring car. Finally he and Dorris do a version of "Take Me Back to My Old Carolina Home", in which Uncle Dave sings, picks, mugs, fires his banjo like a gun, fans it, twirls it, passes it between his legs and dances with it. It is his only film appearance, and it makes one realise just how much of his art was not captured by phonograph records.

Uncle Dave's career on the Opry extended far beyond the period covered in this study, but that is another story for another time. He was the mainstay of the Opry during the '30s, and one of the few old-timers that the average fan knows anything about. While his music was vibrant and important and deserving of complete study in and by itself, it is his personality that impressed people so much. Kirk McGee, who is perhaps today's best raconteur about the early Opry, recently talked about Uncle Dave, and a selection from his stories makes a fitting conclusion to a profile of "The Dixie Dewdrop".

* George Hay, A Story of the Grand Ole Opry, 13-4.

"I loved travelling with Uncle Dave. He was good to get along with, you know. He was always peaceful. And he was a showman - he sold what he had. Most of his songs were just three-chord numbers, mostly in A and G, and keys didn't matter too much to him, but he was a showman. You knew you were going to have a crowd with Uncle Dave. Cause he'd been in the business so long. His dress - and everything - was just different from everything else.

He meant for us to be just like it should be, strictly business with him in the music. But he was a show, all day, every way. He was always ready to go; he wasn't finicky about his food, where he'd stay. He just wanted to rest, and when that time of the day come, why, he was going to bed somewhere. I remember once we were at a little place called Ollewah, outside Chattanooga, there was a school and a hosiery mill there. He went to his cousin that lived there, a first cousin, and was going to spend the night there. Of course, they wanted to talk, they hadn't seen him in a long time, and they asked him all about the family and all. So when this lady went in the other room, he said, 'Now if she don't fix me a bed, I'm going to leave here.' He didn't want to talk to her, he wanted that nap.

And then there was that trip to New York in 1927 /to record the famous Fruit Jar Drinkers records/. Well, it was the greatest thing that ever had happened to me at the time to get to go up there. Of course, Uncle Dave didn't want to get out and see anything. All he wanted to do was stay in the hotel. He was afraid something would happen and we wouldn't get back and be able to do the session. That was the main thing. And he said, 'Now, boys, there are all kinds of people in New York, they'll knock your head off.' I wanted to see the town. But he didn't want us to get away from him. The battle fleet was in the harbor down there, all those ships, and I wanted to go down and see that, and he said, 'Oh, it's nothing but a bunch of old boats, wouldn't be nothing to it.' He wouldn't go anyplace but the recording studio.

And the people doing the recording, they had a time handling Uncle Dave, because he wouldn't stay put. He kept getting closer and closer to the mike. He was an old stage man, you know, a vaudeville man, and he wanted to do it just like he was doing for an audience. And the recording man said, 'Uncle Dave, you're not before an audience now. We're putting this on the wax.' And they had a lot of trouble with Uncle Dave stomping his foot; they finally had to get him a pillow to put his foot on. It was a wood floor, and he'd get to reeling and rocking and stomping and he'd shake the floor and vibrate that stylus and we couldn't record. So they went and got this pillow to put his foot on. Well, he didn't like that. He said, 'I don't like that, 'cause I can't hear my foot; that'll ruin my rhythm.'

There was once a family that had had their boy killed on a cycle of some sort. That family had never laughed until one night when Uncle Dave spent the night with them. They told me later, 'It done us more good than anything that could ever happen to us.' Uncle Dave, he was a man for every occasion, I don't care what it was. He could make a nice talk in a church; he was well educated. He could just hold an audience in his hand anyplace he was.

I still think about him. There's hardly a day pass that I don't think about something he told me. Even if I go up around Woodbury I remember things Uncle Dave told me about the people there. He was a great man, but the people didn't know it at the time; around Woodbury, he was just an old banjo player. I did realise it myself as I travelled with him; I thought he was the greatest, and still do. It was a pity a man like him had to die, for he was so much pleasure to everybody."

Uncle Dave Macon Dies At Rutherford Hospital

Murfreesboro, Tenn., March 22—(Special) — Uncle Dave Macon, known to millions of radio listeners as the "Dixie Dewdrop" of WSM's Grand Ole Opry, died at Rutherford Hospital here this morning at 6:25 o'clock after an illness of several weeks.

He was 81 years old last Oct. 7.

Funeral services will be held Sunday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock at the First Methodist Church here conducted by Charlie Taylor, minister of the North Maple Street Church of Christ, and the Rev. Vernon Bradley. Burial will be in Coleman Cemetery on Woodbury Road with Moore Funeral Home in charge.

Uncle Dave, whose home was on a farm at nearby Kittrell, had been called "king of hillbillies." He was one of the small group of entertainers who a quarter of a century ago joined George Hay in the Grand Ole Opry, creating a new interest in folk and hillbilly music which today had grown nationwide making Nashville known as the folk music capital of the country.

His last appearance on the Grand Ole Opry was Saturday March 1. He became sick the next day and was operated on in the hospital here several days later.

He traveled with the Grand Ole Opry's road troupes until 1950.

He had made many phonograph

(Continued on Page 2, Column 3)

UNCLE DAVE MACON

(Continued From Page One)

records. In 1940 he went to Hollywood and played in a movie based on the Grand Ole Opry. He was the author of numerous songs, among the best known being "Never Make Love No More," "Give Me Back My Five Dollars," "You Can't Do Wrong and Get By," "She Was Alway Chewing Gum," "All I've Got Is Gone," "The Nashville Gal," "Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy All The Time," and "Country Ham and Red Gravy."

Son of Captain John Macon and Martha Macon, he was born at Viola and lived there until he was 20 when the family moved to Nashville, where his father operated the Broadway Hotel.

In 1898 he moved to Readyville and a year later married Miss Mary Richardson. He moved to Kittrell where he had resided since. His wife died in 1939.

From 1901 to 1920 he operated a freight wagon line between Woodbury and Murfreesboro.

Surviving are seven sons, Archie and John of Murfreesboro, Harry of Nashville, Glenn of Kittrell, Dorris of Woodbury, Esten of Chattanooga, and Paul, now in the Army.

The two weeks that he has been in the hospital here cards from well-wishers over the country arrived at the rate of around 200 a day.

The cheerful songs of tree frogs are heard most often during damp weather and before a storm.

DEFORD BAILEY

THE FOLK ROOTS OF THE MUSIC OF THE EARLY OPRY ARE nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the career of Deford Bailey. Bailey was one of the single most popular performers on the pre-1930 Opry; in 1928, for instance, he made twice as many appearances (49 times in 52 weeks) as any other Opry regular. It wasn't at all uncommon for Deford to appear for two or even three sets in a single Saturday-night show. And he did this by himself, usually playing harmonica solo, without any band backing him up. He did this in spite of the fact that he had had a crippling illness, and was young and inexperienced. And he did all this in spite of the fact that he was black.

Students of country music history have struggled for years to assess just what Deford's presence on the early Opry meant in terms of the interrelationship of black and white folk music traditions. Deford's emergence as a star on the Opry preceded Charley Pride's by some 40 years; yet how viable was Deford's role on the Opry? Was his presence there an instance of tokenism? Paternalism? Authentic musical biraciality? The full story would be a complex study in itself, and cannot be developed here. But the whole problem is complicated by the fact that details of Deford's life have heretofore been vague and sketchy and often drawn from secondhand sources. It has been only in the last two years that Deford, who lives still in Nashville at 74 years of age, has begun to emerge from his voluntary self-exile and to talk to fans and admirers. It is only recently, therefore, that we have been able to get some reliable opinions and information from him. This information sheds a great deal of light on his unusual role in early Opry history.

Deford was born in 1899 at Carthage, in Smith County, Tennessee, but some of his family originally came from New York. As a youth he moved nearer Nashville, and spent several years as a child around a couple of hamlets called Newsom's Station and Thompson's Station. As their names imply, both communities were oriented toward the railroad, and this had an immense effect on the young Deford. He had to pass under a trestle on his way to school, and he recalls that often he would deliberately wait until the train went over it. "I would get up under it, put my hands over my eyes, listen to the sound, and then play that sound /on his harp/ all the way to school." This sound, of course, later became the strains around which Deford built one of his most famous harmonica solos, "Pan American Blues".

When he was three, Deford contracted infantile paralysis and his doctors did not expect him to live. He credits his religious faith with getting him through this crisis; Deford is today, and has always been, a strongly religious and temperate man. But the illness forced him to remain flat on his back in bed for a year, moving only his head and hands. During this time somebody gave him a harmonica to amuse himself with, and he quickly became skilled on the instrument. Though he survived the illness - a rare thing in rural turn-of-the-century Tennessee - it stunted his growth and left him with a slightly deformed back. Even today Deford stands only 4'10". This handicap helped to force him even more into a musical career, much as blindness forced many other old time musicians into music.

Curiously, much of the music Deford was exposed to during his formative years was not blues as such but, to use his own phrase, "black hillbilly music". Deford is quick to acknowledge that in his youth he knew many blacks playing forms of old time music; his father played "black hillbilly music" on the fiddle, and his uncle was the best black banjo-player he ever knew. Deford himself also became quite proficient on the guitar and banjo, as well as the harmonica; he plays the fiddle a little, mostly hoedowns, but it is by no means his favorite instrument; "I just fool around a little with it." As a child, he and his cousins often played on homemade instruments; he recalls making fiddles out of corn stalks and using a "washtub" bass. Occasionally they would get simple pots and pans from his aunt's kitchen; "You know, skillets and frying pans make good music too."

World War I found Deford working for a white merchant at Thompson's Station, a man named Gus Watson. Watson liked Deford's harmonica music and paid him to work in his store and around his house. Deford's music in the store attracted a good many extra customers, and Watson in turn gave Deford a place to live. He also kept him supplied with Hohner Marine Band harmonicas. Deford uses this type of harp even today, and swears by them. He reported to his friend David Morton, "I've had

all kinds of harps. I've had them roller harps and all, but ain't nothing beat this harp."

When Watson moved into Nashville in the early '20s, Deford joined him, and worked at various odd jobs around Nashville. He continued to play his harmonica, occasionally while he was working as an elevator operator. Several passengers told him he should go on the radio when WDAD started in Nashville in September 1925. Like many other early Opry performers, Deford recalls playing on WDAD first. Perhaps his earliest documented radio performance was one on the night of December 6, 1925, when he appeared on a radio French harp contest broadcast by WDAD. The Tennessean of that day reported that "the first prize in the French Harp contest staged recently was won by J.T. Bland, who played 'Lost John'. The second prize was won by Deford Bailey, a negro boy, who played 'It Ain't Gònna Rain No Mo'."

It was Dr Humphrey Bate who was responsible for introducing Deford to Judge Hay and WSM. Bate, as we have seen, for a time played on both WDAD and WSM, and one night he and his daughter Alcyone met Deford as they left WDAD to walk up to WSM to perform. Dr Bate persuaded Deford to go with them. Deford was hesitant.

> "I was ashamed with my little cheap harp and them with all those fine, expensive guitars, fiddles and banjos up there, but I went anyway."

When they arrived, Dr Bate persuaded Hay to let Deford perform on the air without an audition, and reportedly said, "Judge, I will stake my reputation on the ability of this boy." (Dr Bate, remember, was no mean harmonica player himself, and was uniquely qualified to judge Deford's talen..) Deford played several numbers, and Hay was so surprised - and delighted - that he threw his steamboat whistle in the air. He immediately asked Deford to return, and soon thereafter labelled him "the Harmonica Wizard". From then on, Deford's name seldom appeared without this tag. Apparently nobody at the time thought anything of Deford's color, though publicity a few years later was to start labelling him the Opry's "mascot" - a term usually reserved for pets.*

Deford quickly became one of the most popular performers on the Opry. His harmonica solo style was uniquely suited to the new electronic medium of radio, and Deford soon learned how to use the microphone for best effect. He found he could do things with his harp that he would have trouble doing when performing in person. In the early days he used an oldfashioned Rudy

Vallee-styled megaphone to amplify his harp, and he had to stand on a Coca-Cola crate to reach the WSM microphone. His "Pan American Blues", with its train effects, became so popular that once an engineer from a regular train that often passed through Nashville came up to the WSM studios to correct Deford on the exact whistle pattern for crossings; Deford listened and incorporated the correct pattern into his tune. He recalls receiving a lot of fan-mail, but when asked whether he appealed more to the black or the white community, he just smiled and said, "I couldn't tell whether the writers were black or white."

In April 1927 Deford journeyed with another WSM group, the Golden Echo Quartet (also black) to Atlanta to make his first records. He did his "Pan American Blues" (under the title "Pan American Express") and "Hesitation Mama" for Columbia; either they were defective takes (which is what Deford recalls) or they were not released because Columbia found out that Deford was planning soon to record for their arch-rival Brunswick. Regardless, these first two sides remain unissued even today. But two weeks later, on April 15, 1927, Deford had a more successful session in New York for Brunswick. On that day and the 19th he recorded eight titles, including his famous "Pan American Blues", "Fox Chase", "Old Hen Cackle" and "Up Country Blues". Each of these records sold well enough to justify their reissue by Brunswick, and, significantly, all issues were in the old time series, not the blues series. Brunswick, apparently, felt that Deford's largest appeal would be to a white audience, and never released any of his records in their "race" series.

Over a year later, on October 2, 1928, Deford was to record for the last time - at least, his last time to date. This was the famous Victor Nashville session described in a later chapter.** Deford recorded eight

* In fact the early Opry had a healthy tradition of blackface comedy during the height of Deford's popularity. By 1929 Judge Hay himself was participating in a very popular series of skits with Ed McConnell that were scheduled immediately prior to the Opry on Saturday nights. These skits had McConnell dramatising the "trials and tribulations of Uncle Wash" while Hay played himself, the "solemn old judge". Some of the skits were undoubtedly based on the newspaper columns Hay had written while a reporter in Memphis (see the first chapter). Later, by the mid-'30s, duos like Lasses & Honey (Lasses White and Honey Wilds) came to the Opry after many years' experience as blackfaced comedians in vaudeville. It may seem curious that a radio audience which did not recognise Deford's blackness would be expected to recognise the stereotypes of blackface comedy, but Deford seldom spoke on the air and confined his act pretty much to playing music. Whether Hay attempted consciously to conceal Deford's race from his Southern audience is not at all clear.

** It has been reported by Paul Hemphill that Deford made the first records cut in Nashville, but Victor files show that, while he was on the first session, he was not the first to record.

sides here too, duplicating none of the Brunswick titles. Victor released only three of these, but one coupling, "Ice Water Blues"/"Davidson County Blues", was so popular that it was reissued at least three times. Ironically, Victor's sides were issued in their blues/jazz series aimed at black markets. (It has been generally assumed that all Deford's unissued sides were harp solos, but one of the Victor numbers, "Kansas City Blues", has been known for years as one of his best vocal/guitar numbers. For more about this title, see below.)

These 11 sides constitute Deford's complete discography to date: an astounding and shameful fact for an artist of his popularity. Numerous informal recordings have been made of Deford's playing in the last 10 years, but repeated rumors of an authorised studio album have not been borne out.

However, it was probably Deford's radio popularity that sold the records, and not vice versa. Through the late '20s his popularity continued to rise, and it was his train imitations that inspired Hay, as we have seen, to rename the barn dance the Grand Ole Opry. When Opry groups began touring in the early '30s, Deford was a popular addition to any show going out. In fact, Hay insisted that any time Deford made an appearance, he got $5 flat fee, regardless of whether that particular show made any money. Most of the other Opry acts got a percentage of the gate on these shows; if the show didn't attract enough audience, there was no pay. But Deford's pay was constant, regardless; Judge Hay saw to that. This arrangement gave Deford a sense of security, to be sure, but it also caused him to lose out on some lucrative gate receipts when the shows did well.

Deford toured with most of the early Opry greats: Dr Bate, Uncle Dave Macon, and later Roy Acuff (starting in 1938) and Bill Monroe (starting in 1939). Many members of the audience on these tours had never seen Deford and had never realised he was black, but he never met with any hostility. Touring in the South in the '30s was difficult, however. Deford encountered the same kind of problems that so many jazz artists met while touring in those days: he was never allowed to eat in restaurants (except sometimes in the kitchen) and many hotels refused to admit him. In case of the latter difficulty, Deford would try to find lodging with a local black family, but even here he had trouble: his size made him an easy target for criminals. Mindful of Deford's difficulties, several Opry performers who toured with him went out of their way to help him. For instance, Deford remembers with fondness Uncle Dave Macon, who would get him into his hotel room by insisting that he was his valet, and would refuse to stay in a hotel that would not let him take Deford into his room with him. Deford also respected Macon's music; "he was the best white banjo player I ever heard."

But as the Opry grew, Deford's time-slots became smaller and smaller. From slots of 20-25 minutes in the late '20s his allotted airtime shrank to 10-minute slots in 1934, and to 5-minute slots in 1935. And the number of slots per program shrank from three to two to one. By the late '30s, Deford recalls, he was going down to the station, hanging around for three to four hours, and playing one number if time permitted. By 1941 he was off the Opry completely, and operated a shoe-shine business in Nashville. He played only infrequently, for an occasional customer or friend.

Everybody familiar with the situation has a different reason why Deford left the Opry. The traditional, "official" Opry explanation, which is parrotted by most of the Opry members today, is the explanation Judge Hay wrote in his book in 1945.

> "Like some members of his race and other races, DeFord /sic/ was lazy. He knew about a dozen numbers, which he put on the air and recorded for a major company, but he refused to learn more, even though his reward was great. He was our mascot and is still loved by the entire company. We gave him a whole year's notice to learn some more tunes, but he would not. When we were forced to give him his final notice, DeFord said, without malice: 'I knowed it wuz comin', Judge, I knowed it was comin'.'"

This isn't quite the way Deford himself remembers it, though he isn't really bitter at Hay; he felt Hay himself had had pressure put on him. Regarding his repertoire, Deford recalls the situation was just the opposite: that he wanted to play new tunes, different tunes, but that Hay and the audience insisted he perform the same tunes, such as "Fox Chase" and "Pan American Blues", over and over. (This statement has been borne out by recent events: in the last three years, Deford has made special guest appearances on the Opry three times, and has been asked to play these two tunes on every occasion. In spite of this, he has managed to slip in an incredible one-minute rendition of "Casey Jones" on one show, and a nice "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More" on another.)

There's certainly no reason for Deford ending his career in 1941. Changing tastes probably contributed; the harmonica solo was a popular mode of old time music and blues in the '20s, but the '40s demanded a more elaborate music. David Morton, close friend of Deford, thinks he was the victim of the complex ASCAP-BMI music-publishing battle in the early '40s, and suggests that Deford's notion of music - which derived from oral tradition rather than written or published sources - was at odds with the increasing Tin Pan Alley influence in Nashville and on the Opry.

Whatever the case, Deford has remained in voluntary musical exile for almost 35 years now. In the '60s he made a memorable appearance on Nashville's famous syndicated blues TV show "Night Train" - one of the few times that the local black community has recognised his art. But he refused offers to cut an album with Pete Seeger, to be a guest at the Newport Folk Festival, and to record solo albums. Most recently he refused a handsome offer to appear in a Hollywood film being shot in Nashville. (The part later went to Memphis bluesman Furry Lewis.) His reason: fear of being further

exploited by a white establishment he feels has already abused him. However, Deford has recently been appearing on the Opry and meeting occasionally with writers and fans.

Though many think of him only in terms of the harp, Deford also frequently performs vocals accompanying himself on banjo or guitar. He plays both instruments lefthanded and therefore "upside down"; his banjo style is totally unique, with a strong ragtime overtone. He uses no picks, but allows his fingernails to grow long and form natural picks. One of his favorite banjo-vocal numbers is "Lost John", in the old hillbilly version as opposed to the Handy composition. His guitar specialty is "Kansas City Blues", a variant that bears little relationship to either the Delmores' song of the same name, Furry Lewis's version, or the rock song of the '50s.

"Well, I got me a bulldog, two grey hounds,
One high yaller, one black and brown,
Gonna move to Kansas City (move to Kansas City),
Move to Kansas City (move to Kansas City),
Gonna move to Kansas City,
Honey where they don't let you.

Well, I got me a wife and a bulldog too,
My wife don't love me but my bulldog do,
Gonna move to Kansas City. . . ."

Deford says that he played and sang occasionally on the air as well as on concert tours. Sadly, this facet of his talent may never be well documented on recordings, since all of his early issued records were harp solos.

A full analysis of Deford's music would be a lengthy and complex undertaking, since he seems to represent a tradition - black hillbilly music - that is all but extinct. His solos of the '20s seem to have drawn on old time rather than blues sources. His famous "Fox Chase" had been recorded by white hillbilly artist Henry Whitter as early as 1923, and it became a staple for all harp players. "Old Hen Cackle" seems derived from the wellknown fiddle piece, and "Lost John" was also recorded by white artists before Deford's recording. (It may well be, however, that this latter piece was originally a black item that entered white tradition in the early 20th century, and Deford might well have learned it from either source.) A similar statement could be made for his other two railroad pieces, "Casey Jones" and "John Henry". Yet Deford also borrowed from a rather distinct blues-jazz tradition in some numbers. A case in point is his famous Victor recording of "Davidson County Blues". (Nashville is in Davidson County, Tennessee.) As Tony Russell has noted, this tune is basically the same as blues pianist Cow Cow Davenport's "Cow Cow Blues" (originally recorded in January 1927), the Mississippi Sheiks' "Jackson Stomp" and bluesman Charlie McCoy's "That Lonesome Train Took My Baby Away". Deford thus seems to be borrowing from both white and black traditions, though it is noteworthy that both McCoy and the Sheiks were noted for their hillbilly overtones.*

Given the immense number of people that have heard Deford or know of him, it is odd that his influence has not been more apparent. Sonny Terry, perhaps the leading country blues harp-player today, remembers seeing Deford in North Carolina years ago and picked up his version of "Alcoholic Blues". Several black musicians in the Johnson City area recall being very much impressed with Deford's visits there in the '30s. And Deford's recent comeback has sparked a couple of contemporary Nashville records which echo his style. But at times one gets the feeling that Deford's music has existed in a vacuum; perhaps this can be attributed to his lack of recording, or perhaps it can be written off to the fact that his music represented a synthesis of two distinct musical forms, hillbilly and blues, and that as these two forms became increasingly segregated in the '30s and '40s, he could not find a real home in either.

But in spite of these hard times, and in spite of the fact that Deford today is not in the best of health, his spirit is unbroken. Last year he said, "I don't get tired playing. I make them songs go as I breathe. It's just like a fish in water, and water runs through its gills." Throughout his career Deford has been a "pro" in the best sense of the word, and he is not bragging when he looks back over it and says simply, " I was a humdinger".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks in preparing this section to David Morton, whose article on Deford, "Every Day's Been Sunday" (Nashville! magazine /March 1974/, 50-5) is the best informal portrait of Deford in print. Other reading: a chapter on Deford in Paul Hemphill's The Nashville Sound (New York, 1970) and a note by Frye Gaillard, "An Opry Star Shines On" (Country Music /March 1975/). Special thanks also to Dick Hulan.

* Tony Russell, Blacks, Whites and Blues (New York, 1970), 54-8.

ALCYONE BATE BEASLEY'S MEMORIES OF THE EARLY OPRY

THE HISTORICAL FACTS CAN GIVE US A GREAT INSIGHT INTO what the early Opry was like, and what the men and women who made it were like. But history gives us only one dimension of the Opry; there is another, the personal side, the view of the Opry not so much as a vague musical force but as men and women doing a job. This side of the music is all too often missing in the traditional historical approach, or the folkloristic study of music-performer interaction.

In order to balance somewhat this rather factual account of the early Opry, we are devoting this chapter to the informal reminiscences of one of the most perceptive eyewitnesses of those historic early days at WSM. She is the daughter of Dr Humphrey Bate, the "dean of the Opry", Alcyone Bate Beasley. Alcyone began playing on the show in 1925, when she was only 13; one of her fondest memories is being escorted to the "hospital room" at the old WSM studios so she could take a nap before her father's band went on. She is one of the few survivors of that golden age, and loves to talk about the early days. The following quotations are transcribed from Alcyone's conversations with the author.

> "For Opry performances, daddy always wore a suit. I can't remember him ever wearing a costume. In fact, back then everybody wore a suit. They didn't come in a costume or overalls. And if you'll notice now, the old-timers still dress in suits: the Crook Brothers, Sam and Kirk McGee."

* * *

HENRY BANDY

> "He was one of the most colorful men I've ever seen on the Opry. Of course, he was on there before it was named Opry. He was from Petroleum, Kentucky, I suppose a farmer, and he always came down immaculately dressed. Usually a dark suit, and white shirt with a high stiff collar, I think the collar was separate from the shirt, a celluloid collar. And a tie. Always a tie. He was a brunette also, black hair and a big huge black handlebar mustache. When he started playing, he was maybe 40. He played solo fiddle but I do remember some guitarist who was there do a second for him. And he held the fiddle down in the crook of his arm, not up under the chin like modern fiddlers. And he used a bow not filled with horsehair, like any other bow I had ever seen, but it was filled with a number 60 thread. I remember my father asked him about it. I don't know why he used it; you could hardly tell the difference in the sound. I've never seen him in a picture; he stopped playing there, but why I don't know."

MRS CLINE

"I remember just exactly what she looked like. She was a tall, slim brunette, straight hair, dark eyes, dark hair. And she could play that instrument so well. She used little hammers on the strings, I don't recall her ever plucking it with her fingers. As far as I remember, she played it alone. I never heard her sing; she played old tunes, familiar tunes. But she played pretty fast breakdowns. She was from Westmoreland, Tennessee. She didn't stay on the Opry too long."

DAD PICKARD

" . . . was - I hardly know the word to describe Dad Pickard, but he was great, his whole family, Mr and Mrs Pickard both were the epitome of genteel country people. . . . Mrs Pickard was from Ashland City somewhere. They were nice people. At first it was just Mr and Mrs Pickard singing, not the whole family. She played piano for him. She could read music well, I know. He was very, <u>very</u> popular."

UNCLE DAVE MACON

"My dad and him got along very well, just fine. My father liked to tell jokes, like Uncle Dave. Maybe daddy didn't go into the jokes of the Uncle Dave type. I remember whenever Uncle Dave would come on, even later on, I'd always say, 'How are you tonight, Uncle Dave?' and he would always say, 'Fine, and how's the little thing tonight?' That's what he always called me, 'the little thing'.

* * *

"The way I remember a typical show back in those days - of course I was just a little girl - I would always go in the studio and just sit there the whole time and just listen and watch everybody as they came in. I don't know where they rehearsed, or if they did rehearse in the early days; if they did, they must have went around to the restroom or something to tune up at least.

Everybody loved everybody else there then. I remember there were no commercial spots in the beginning. . . . I don't remember it going commercial for a while, anyway. There was never any announcement on the air that anyone had made any records, or when the records came out.

Even though daddy and his band would do calls with their numbers, they didn't have any dancers on the early Opry."

* * *

UNCLE JOE MANGRUM

"Uncle Joe was one of the dearest people I've ever known in my life. He was blind, and he had a sweet wife who came with him every Saturday night, Aunt Mary. Used to bring him up there and stay right with him. He was just a gentleman. He called me 'Miss Altheon', and one time came up and he said, 'Miss Altheon, I want to play something for you.' And so he played this pretty thing for me, and I said, 'Oh, that's so pretty, what's the name of that?' and he said he had named it after me. I thought that was the cutest thing. Fred Shriver played accordion and piano with him. Uncle Joe was a talented man. I'll tell you what he played - he played so beautifully - he played Italian things, some of those things, you can almost see gondolas. He played a lot that did not really fit in with the Opry, but it was so fine. . . ."

THE BINKLEY BROTHERS

"Amos and Gale. Mr Gale was a watch repairer, had a little place on Dedrick Street; I'm not sure whether Mr Amos, he worked in there with him. Mr Gale played a different style fiddle from most of the Opry people; he played a clear, true - and all of his breakdowns he played a little slower than the rest would play them. Anytime you could hear Mr Gale playing, you would know it was Mr Gale, no matter what the tune. And he had the first left-handed guitarist, Tom Andrews, I ever saw."

* * *

"The numbers on the show were all announced, but I cannot ever remember any of the performers talking, in the early days. Now Dad Pickard was one of the first ones, in his later time there, after he had come back in 1931 or so, but now he was good at it. And although my daddy was very gifted and could have talked, but he wouldn't have done it at all. He felt there were others who could do it better."

* * *

Dr. Humphrey Bate

AND HIS

Possum Hunters

WITH

ALCYONE BATE

(*Blues Artist*)

★ WSM Radio Artists

★ Brunswick Recording Artists

★ R-K-O Vaudeville Artists

Will Appear at

____

____

*Admission*__________

One of the most distinctive of early Opry performers was Mrs G.R. Cline from Westmoreland, Tennessee. She started playing on the air in 1928, having come to Nashville after hearing of "auditions" to be held. She played hammered dulcimer, and for the first four or five times on the air was accompanied by Edgar Cline, a relative, on the fiddle. Hay asked the fiddle player to drop out, though he continued to drive Mrs Cline to Nashville. Mrs Cline was paid "$1.00 a minute of air time" for her work, and she usually gave this to her driver for gasoline. She stopped playing on the air after witnessing a bloody automobile accident on the way to Nashville one evening; in fact, she stopped travelling on the highways at all after that and retired to raise a family. Her first tune she was "approved" to play on the air was "Chippie Get Your Hair Cut", though she also played numbers like "Airplane Ride" and "Lexington". The hammered dulcimer was rather common in middle Tennessee rural stringbands; a pre-1900 photo discovered from Robertson County, near where Mrs Cline was from, shows a hammered dulcimer in a fiddle band: two people play on it, one for the bass strings, one for the high strings.

The above photograph shows Mrs Cline playing on the same dulcimer she used on the Opry. It was taken by folklorist Dick Hulan, who discovered Mrs Cline in the late '60s. She was approaching 90 years of age, and died soon after. Note that she is using pencils, having lost her original felt-tipped hammers.

Inglewood Grocery Company

3601 GALLATIN ROAD

Phones 3,4443 and 3-4444

Item	Price
24 pounds Tip Top Flour	69c
10 pounds Sugar	49c
Fancy Sliced Bacon	15c
Country Sausage	15c
No. 2 can Green Beans, 3 for	25c
No. 2 can Tiny Peas, 2 for	35c
Fancy Corn, 3 for	23c
Fresh Country Eggs, 2 doz.	25c
No. 2½ can Fancy Hominy, 3 for	25c
Octagon Soap, large bar	5c
No. 2½ can Fancy Peaches	19c
Pure Lard, 3 lbs.	23c

DIO STATION

650 KILOCYCLES NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE THE TALLEST RADIO TOWER IN AMERIC

CLEARED CHANNEL

OPENING CURT	1 min	
P. HUNTERS	10 "	
DEFORD BAILEY	5 "	Pan Amer — Ain't gonna Rain
CURT	5 "	
DOC BATES & STALEY Walton	5 "	
ALCEYON	5 "	
P. HUNTERS	10 "	
DEFORD BAILEY	5 "	
CURT	5 "	
STONE & LIGGET	5 "	— Dusty
P. HUNTERS	10 "	

ENTIRE GROUP CLOSE WITH "COMIN' ROUND THE MOUNTAIN.

"From the very beginning, before we did our set, daddy would write down the numbers we would do. I remember that the very first time we ever went down there daddy carried his little program made out . . . and we would go right through the program, no interruption, only an announcement of the next song."

ASHER SIZEMORE & LITTLE JIMMY

"I remember when they came in. Jimmy was really little then, and they stayed around. Little Bud then came on with them too, and in fact the little girl - I don't think she ever worked with them. It used to just tickle me to death when Asher would make his introduction, he'd say, 'And now, ladies and gentlemen, here's Jim.' And little Jim would come on: 'Hello, 'body, hope everybody's feelin' FINE.'"

* * *

"The very first studio, before Studio C, called Studio B, that's where they had the big glass fronts, where the crowd used to sit right outside and look in through the windows. We moved from there out to the Hillsboro Theater in the early '30s."

Above, tour program of c. 1930, made out by Curt Poulton of the Vagabonds. Note Alcyone's blues specialties. Below, backstage at the Opry on Deford Bailey's 75th birthday: Roy Acuff, Deford, Alcyone, Herman Crook, Sam McGee.

THE HOEDOWN BANDS

ONE OF THE CONTINUING TRADITIONS ON THE OPRY HAS BEEN the traditional stringband - what Judge Hay called the "hoedown band". Today these bands only play for square dancers on the Opry stage, but this is a comparatively recent development. In the early days, the bands usually held forth on their own, playing, for 15 or 20 minutes, traditional Southern breakdowns with only an occasional vocal thrown in. Judge Hay himself admitted that the hoedown bands "form the backbone and lend a rural flavor to the entire Grand Ole Opry." He was always careful to space the bands at regular intervals throughout the show, just in case some of the other acts got a little too "modern". The breakdowns the band played were, in Hay's words, "definite punctuation marks in our program which get us back down to earth the minute they plunk the first note."

Hay himself singled out four of the basic hoedown bands: the Possum Hunters, the Gully Jumpers, the Fruit Jar Drinkers and the Crook Brothers. These are the four bands that survived into the '60s, one generally playing on each hour of the standard four-hour Opry show.* But there were four other bands which would have to be included in this category: the Binkley Brothers' Clodhoppers, Ed Poplin's band, Theron Hale and his Daughters, and, perhaps the most famous of all the bands, the Dixieliners. (The Possum Hunters have already been discussed; the Dixieliners will be treated in a later chapter.)

As we have already noted, most of the colorful names for the bands came from Hay. Sid Harkreader recalls that Hay had a list of outlandish names he had made up, and that when a good band showed up at the station, he would simply pick a name for them from the list. This practise began only in 1927; during 1926 many of the bands had rather undistinguished names like Smith County Trio, or The Carthage Fiddlers. Since many of the bands sounded rather alike, and since each played a similar repertoire of traditional fiddle breakdowns, 19th-century sentimental pieces and waltzes, it was probably an acute move on Hay's part to give the bands distinct identities. The only major band that escaped having its name changed was the Crook Brothers, and that was probably because they had already established a following under their own name by the time Hay became so image-conscious. Also, Hay may have thought that the name Crook Brothers was rustic-sounding enough as it was.

Like the old traditional New Orleans jazz bands, the hoedown bands stressed a collective sound; few of them had any "star" instrumentalists whom they featured on a regular basis. Guitarist Burt Hutcherson was occasionally featured with different groups because he was able to develop a popular flat-top lead style. But generally the fiddler was the keystone of the group, mainly because his was the lead instrument in most of the breakdowns. By the overall standards of old time music, none of the stringbands was remarkably innovative or outstanding; few of them approached the excitement of the Skillet-Lickers, the popularity of the Hill Billies or the creative dexterity of the Red Fox Chasers. Not until the advent of the Dixieliners in the early '30s did the hoedown bands produce any outstanding individual stars (as the Dixieliners had in Sam McGee and Arthur Smith), or any truly remarkable band. Yet the hoedown bands were extremely competent and probably accurate reflections of traditional Tennessee stringband styles; nearly all of the musicians were natives of the area, and nearly all were into music on only a part-time basis. Not enough is really known yet about these bands, since many of their members have died. Moreover, tha bands made only a handful of records in their prime (and some, like the Fruit Jar Drinkers, apparently never recorded). Also they occasionally switched personnels and exchanged members on a very casual basis, and at times it becomes hard to determine distinctive characteristics for the bands. But below are brief discussions of most of the groups, with more extensive analyses of the two most remarkable, the Crook Brothers and Theron Hale's band.

THE GULLY JUMPERS

The basic personnel in the '20s for the Gully Jumpers was Paul Warmack, mandolin and guitar; Charles Arrington, fiddle; Roy Hardison, banjo; and Burt Hutcherson, guitar. In fact this personnel was to remain intact for over 20 years, though Hardison played occasionally with other bands. The group's leader was Warmack, an automobile mechanic who worked for years in his own shop in Nashville and later for the state of Tennessee. His banjo player, Hardison, was also a mechanic and garage foreman. Arrington, whom Hay described as "an Irishman with quick wit", had a farm about 20 miles from Nashville in the Joelton community. Burt Hutcherson, a woodworker by trade who was later employed by National Life, started out with Dr Bate's Possum Hunters and then joined Warmack in 1928.

Warmack's band was a workhorse of the early Opry and apparently appeared as much as or more than any other

* In the '60s the four old bands were condensed into two; the Possum Hunters and the Gully Jumpers were in effect disbanded and their members assigned to the Fruit Jar Drinkers and the Crook Brothers band. This was done by Opry management over the strenuous objections of the leaders of the bands.

Above, the Gully Jumpers, c. 1930: Burt Hutcherson, Roy Hardison, Charlie Arrington and Paul Warmack. Below, Hutcherson and Warmack, "the Early Birds".

band. In 1928 the Vanderbilt Opry log shows that the Gully Jumpers appeared on 28 out of 52 shows, more than any other stringband. In addition to their regular Saturday-night shows, Warmack and Hutcherson had an early-morning show on WSM; they would sing duets and Burt would play some of his famous guitar solos like "Dew Drop Waltz". The duo was known locally as The Early Birds, since they came on at times as early as 6.00 am. (Burt continued to be a fine solo guitar player, and for many years gave guitar lessons in Nashville.)

The Gully Jumpers were one of the first bands to record in Nashville in October 1928, when they cut eight sides for Victor. The selections were "Tennessee Waltz" (an old waltz, not the Pee Wee King song), "Put My Little Shoes Away", "I'm a Little Dutchman" and "The Little Red Caboose Behind the Train". Paul apparently sang on some of these; his lilting, Dalhart-like tenor is heard on "The Little Red Caboose" in a rather unusual and appealing style. Two of the sides, "Caboose" and "Tennessee Waltz", were released, but apparently Victor wanted something gamier. Two days later they had the band back in the studio playing some breakdowns: "Robertson County", "Stone Rag", "Hell Broke Loose in Georgia" and "Five Cents". The first two were released; "Stone Rag" was the composition by Oscar Stone of the Possum Hunters, already referred to (and bears some structural resemblance to Theron Hale's "Hale's Rag"). "Robertson County" does not seem to have been the tune recorded by other bands as "Robinson County", and may be a local composition, since Robertson County is only a few miles north of Nashville. One interesting historical footnote: the Gully Jumpers' "Tennessee Waltz" and "Little Red Caboose" were the first record made in Nashville to be commercially released, Victor V-40067.

The only member of the Gully Jumpers' original band still alive today is Burt Hutcherson, who still plays with the Crook Brothers.

BINKLEY BROTHERS' CLODHOPPERS

Watch repairmen by trade, Amos and Gale Binkley began playing on the Opry about a year after it started, and

continued to be fixtures on both WSM and WLAC for some years. Gale played fiddle, Amos banjo, and their band was completed by the lefthanded guitar player Tom Andrews. Gale was a careful and deliberate fiddler, and had a reputation for being meticulous in his noting and technique. About 1929 or 1930 the Clodhoppers particip-

Binkley Brothers' Clodhoppers, c. 1928: Tom Andrews, Gale Binkley, Jack Jackson and Amos Binkley.

ated in a marathon three-day fiddlers' contest in Chattanooga and walked away with second place. The band flourished on Nashville radio well into the '30s.

The Binkleys used as their vocalist a Lebanon, Tennessee, native named Jack Jackson. Jackson had been doing spots on both WLAC and WSM as "the strolling yodeller" and had attracted a large regional following; a newspaper of the time referred to him as "perhaps the most popular radio entertainer in the South". Jackson was, as his sobriquet implied, a specialist in yodelling, having learned it not from Jimmie Rodgers but rather a Murfreesboro, Tennessee native who had picked it up in World War I in Switzerland. Jackson usually did solo work, and sold little songbooks by mail to supplement his income. He left Nashville in the late '20s to work in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, and returned to WSM briefly in 1933-4 to head a cowboy group called Jack Jackson and his Bronco Busters. When he retired from the music business in 1934, the group was taken over by Zeke Clements.*

The Binkleys and Jackson joined forces in 1928 for a series of Victor recordings and stage appearances. They recorded eight sides, six of which were released; all of them featured Jackson's clear, well-trained voice. "Give Me Back My Fifteen Cents", "Hungry Hash House", "When I Had But Fifty Cents" and "It'll Never Happen Again" were all widely known songs in the area, often done by other Opry performers. Jackson's version of "I'll Rise When the Rooster Crows", which he may have learned from Uncle Dave Macon (who recorded it two years earlier), is the group's masterpiece. Both Jackson and Gale Binkley were superb technicians and they complemented each other beautifully on records.

ED POPLIN & HIS BAND

This band became a popular fixture on the Opry in the early '30s and was led by a rural mail-carrier from Lewisburg, Tennessee, Ed Poplin. (Lewisburg is about 95 miles from Nashville.) Poplin was a competent old time fiddler who liked to adapt popular tunes of the day to the old time style. Hay recalled that the band played well, "specializing in folk music, although once in a while, before we could or did stop it, Uncle Ed would slip in an old popular song, such as 'When You Wore a Tulip and I Wore a Red, Red Rose'." Uncle Ed, however, was a genial, fun-loving man who didn't worry too much about such distinctions.

Other members of the Poplin band originally included the Woods family, Jack (mandolin), Francis (guitar) and Louise (piano), as well as Ed Poplin Jr. The fiddle lead dominated most of their songs. By 1931 the band included the Batt brothers and guitarist Jimmy Hart. A newspaper account of 1931 described the Poplin band in these terms:

> "There is one number in particular that Ed Poplin loves to play, and that is 'Pray For the Lights to Go Out'. Where he dug up this concoction, nobody seems to know at this writing. Ed draws upon the numbers which were in the popular category twenty or twenty-five years ago and usually winds up with 'Are You From Dixie?'"

The Poplin "favorite", "Pray For the Lights to Go Out", later to be popularised further by Bob Wills, was one of eight numbers the Poplin band recorded for Victor in 1928. Only two, unfortunately, were released: "Dreamy Autumn Waltz" and "Are You From Dixie?" The others included "Flop-Eared Mule", "Sally, Let Me Chew Your Rosin Some" (vocal by Ed Poplin Jr), "Robert E. Lee", "Honey, Honey, Honey" and "Lovers' Call Waltz". Coming from a genuine rural Southern background, Poplin is a

UNCLE ED POPLIN and his Home Folks Band. Uncle [illegible] at Lewisburg, Tenn. Right purty gals you got there, Uncle Ed.

good example of how traditional musicians had no hesitation about integrating older Tin Pan Alley songs into their repertoires. Also, like many other early stringbands, the Poplin group was based on family ties. In short, it was a rather typical Opry band, making a modest but significant contribution to the program.

THE FRUIT JAR DRINKERS

The leader of the Fruit Jar Drinkers was George Wilkerson, a Nashville mechanic who specialised in "red hot fiddling". Other members of the band, which remained basically intact for over 20 years, were Claude Lampley, guitar; Tommy Leffew, mandolin; and H.J. Ragsdale, bass fiddle and guitar. The Fruit Jar Drinkers normally did not use a banjo, featuring instead the mandolin of Leffew and the fiddle of leader Wilkerson. Lampley and Ragsdale were mechanics in town, and Leffew was a barber.

George Wilkerson began playing on WSM in January 1927; at first he featured only his fiddle backed by guitarist Jack Sadler. In a couple of months he met Tommy Leffew, an excellent musician who had in fact held down his own solo spot on the station from time to time. By March 1927 Wilkerson had teamed with Leffew and guitarist Howard Farmer to form a string trio, still unnamed. Soon Ragsdale replaced Farmer and the basic Fruit Jar Drinkers lineup was established. Occasionally in the early days banjoist Tom Givans, who later played with the Crook Brothers, joined with them.

In May 1927 Uncle Dave Macon took Mazy Todd and the McGee brothers to New York to record his first full stringband sides; he chose to call this band the Fruit Jar Drinkers, though he never used the name in personal appearances. This has led to endless confusion between Macon's and Wilkerson's Fruit Jar Drinkers, and has prompted much speculation about why Uncle Dave deliberately used the name of a current Opry band for his own records. However, it is not at all clear who copied whom. No reference to Wilkerson's band being called the

* For the full story of Jack Jackson, which touches more on WLAC and Hopkinsville than the Opry proper, see Charles Wolfe, "Jack Jackson: Portrait of an Early Country Singer," JEMF Quarterly IX:4, no. 32 (Winter 1973).

Fruit Jar Drinkers prior to May 1927 has been discovered; radio logs listed only the personnel of the band. It may well be that Macon loaned the name to the group. On June 4, 1927, just after Macon had returned from his recording session, he and the McGees with Todd appeared on the Opry; just before them appeared the Wilkerson band. Neither group was described as the Fruit Jar Drinkers. The question probably isn't worth pursuing at length, for the band name, regardless of who first used it, probably came from the solemn old judge's little list.*

The Fruit Jar Drinkers were one of the two bands to survive to the Opry stage today, where, often assisted by Sam and Kirk McGee, they usually play for the square dancers, propelled along by an obnoxious snare drum.

THERON HALE & HIS DAUGHTERS

The Theron Hale band was a little different from the average Opry hoedown band; it had a lighter, more delicate sound, and contained more than a touch of 19th-century parlor music. It was a smaller-than-average unit, also, being composed of fiddler Theron Hale and his two daughters Mamie Ruth, who played mandolin and fiddle, and Elizabeth, who played piano. Its appealing and sophisticated sound anticipated the mixture of popular and traditional styles that was to emerge in the '30s.

Theron Hale was born about 1883 in Pikeville, Tennessee, about 100 miles southeast of Nashville in the rugged Sequatchie Valley. He came from a musical family: his father and uncle were both church leaders who taught shapenote singing schools in the county. His nephew was Homer Davenport, a superb old time banjo player from the Chattanooga area who recorded with the Young Brothers in the '20s. At this time Homer was playing a three-finger banjo style that anticipated the Scruggs style of the '40s. Most of this banjo style Homer reportedly learned from Theron Hale. However, Hale seldom played banjo on the air, preferring the fiddle. His daughter Elizabeth recalls of her father's banjo playing, "He played in that old style, without picks, and I think taught Homer the same way." Theron was playing as a young man but then, as later, considered his music only a hobby.

Theron had married Laura Vaughn of Pikeville and about 1912 moved his family to Altoona, Iowa, where he farmed for three or four years. He returned to the Nashville area during World War I, where he bought a dairy farm. But Elizabeth recalls that her father's main occupation was that of a salesman, and during his Opry years he sold sewing machines for a living. In later life he had a used piano business in Nashville.

As his two daughters grew, Theron would play informally with them around the house. He himself played by ear, but Mamie Ruth became well trained in music and in later years taught violin at Vanderbilt University. In October 1926, shortly after the first anniversary of WSM, according to Elizabeth, "someone told the Solemn Old Judge about us, he was wanting to find old fashioned music at the time, and he asked us to come up and have an interview with him." On October 30 the Hales began to play regularly on the Opry, and continued to do so into the early '30s.

Elizabeth Hale recalls that the band's repertoire was dominated by Theron's "Listen to the Mocking Bird".

> "That was our main number. Some give us credit for launching the song in the popular sense. No one else played it like we did. On the chorus my father would whistle on the violin with his finger."

"Mocking Bird" was and is a popular trick-fiddling tune, but the Hales gave their version a distinctive sound by using twin fiddles on it. Mamie Ruth would, in fact, often play an alto second to her father's lead. This gave the band an unusual twin fiddle sound, resembling nothing on the early Opry. The band was also distinctive in that instead of a guitar or banjo rhythm it featured Elizabeth's piano. (But the piano has had a much greater role in old time music than has been generally thought; even Al Hopkins' original Hill Billies featured one. Dr Bate's Possum Hunters used a piano, Ed Poplin used a piano, and several Arkansas bands of the '20s regularly used a piano.)

In addition to "Mocking Bird" Elizabeth recalls that favorites included "Red Wing" and "Over the Waves". In fact, much of the Hale music was characterised by slow, two-part waltzes utilising the double fiddle harmonies. Theron occasionally played faster numbers, usually by himself, but Elizabeth says "he could never attain to the really fast, smooth playing." There was no one major influence on Theron's formative years as a fiddler, though later he openly admired the techniques of fellow Opry fiddlers Arthur Smith and Sid Harkreader. But the fiddler Theron Hale called "the best ever" was Roy Acuff's fiddler, Howdy Forrester; Theron lived to see Howdy's rise to prominence on the show, and never ceased to marvel at his bow technique.

In 1928 the Hales participated in the first recording session held in Nashville. As Elizabeth recalls,

> "This Victor company had gotten into contact with Mr Hay and asked for suggestions; we were one of the groups he recommended. We recorded in the WSM studios, and I think he /Theron/ may have gotten payment at that time. I know we didn't push the records, and I don't remember any royalties. None of us were too happy with the records. We always felt that because they had put the piano so far away from the microphone, that it lagged behind in the music. It was out of phase, a little behind, with the rest of the music."

* The name was apparently popular, though; another group, calling themselves the Fruit Jar Guzzlers, recorded for Paramount about the same time.

The band recorded a couple of waltzes, two novelty fiddle numbers - "Mocking Bird" and "Turkey Gobbler" - a version of "Flop Eared Mule" that Theron knew under the title "The Jolly Blacksmith", and an interesting original called "Hale's Rag". All but the last title were twin fiddle numbers.

The Hale band did not play at all publicly except for their WSM shows; they did not tour or do personals. The band began to break up when Mamie Ruth married and moved away from Nashville. Theron and Elizabeth continued to play into the early '30s trying to replace Mamie with other musicians, but the arrangement wasn't too successful. Shortly thereafter Theron quit playing for WSM, and continued to play informally around Nashville. Later in his life he played a lot with Sam McGee (who still has Theron's banjo), and with a banjo player named Fred Colby. In fact, Theron and Colby made quite a few semi-professional engagements for social gatherings at places like Vanderbilt and the local YWCA - "places where they still wanted the old type music". Theron passed away in 1954, and today the only surviving member of the band is Elizabeth, who lives in Nashville a few doors away from Alcyone Bate.

THE CROOK BROTHERS

One of the most distinctive of the hoedown bands, and one of the first to join the barn dance after Dr Bate's band, was that of Matthew and Herman Crook. Unlike the other bands, which featured a fiddle as lead instrument, the Crooks featured the harmonica as a lead. Even Dr Bate, himself a harmonica player from whom the Crooks learned much, only alternated the harmonica lead with the fiddle; whereas for the first six years of their bands, the Crooks had no fiddle at all, but often even used a twin harmonica lead. Their band was a natural culmination of the very strong old time harmonica tradition in middle Tennessee and on the Opry itself. The Crooks are also special in that they are, in a sense, the only one of the original hoedown bands to have survived to the present-day Opry in a semblance of its original form.

The name "Crook Brothers" on the band is actually a misnomer. Herman Crook is now the leader of the band, and has been for some 44 years of its existence. Originally Herman led the band with his older brother Matthew, but when Matthew quit music about 1930 Herman took complete charge. About the same time the band added Lewis Crook, a banjo player, who was by an incredible coincidence no relation to Herman at all. Lewis and Herman are the only members of the original band still playing today, and people normally assume they are brothers. Herman, mindful of the importance of the family image in early country music, let the name stand.

Both Herman and Matthew were born in Davidson County, Tennessee, about 15 miles from Nashville in a community called Scottsboro. Matthew was born in 1896, Herman in 1898. There were six children in the family, several of whom made music. Herman's father died when he was three, and his mother finally moved the family to Nashville, where she died some eight years later. Herman was raised by older brothers and sisters.

Herman and Matthew began playing the harp as boys, watching and learning from an older brother. They also had an uncle in DeKalb County, of whom Herman says:

> "He was one of the best buck and wing dancers you ever saw, and he could sing - man, he had a voice. It could sound so lonesome, kind of a mournful sound. He sang all those old songs, some would go back a hundred years. One was that 'Put My Little Shoes Away'. He also had an old cylinder player, with the big horn, and we listened to the records and learned some off of them. But a lot of those old numbers I had heard as far back as I could remember."

As a young man Herman began working at a variety of jobs in Nashville, and soon married. His wife played guitar and piano and they began playing informally at neighbors' houses and then at union halls and for occasional dances. Like most other Nashville-area musicians they were drawn to WDAD when that station started, and played there before WSM opened. Soon Matthew joined Herman and organised a regular band that included two guitars, a banjo and the twin harmonicas. This band was brought to the attention of George Hay and by mid-1926 was playing regularly on the barn dance. The first documented performance date of the Crook Brothers band is July 24, 1926, making it the first of the post-Bate

Two formations of the Crook Brothers' Band: opposite, in the '30s, Lewis Crook, Floyd Ethredge, Herman Crook, unknown guitarist; above, a '50s lineup, with Sam McGee.

stringbands to join the Opry. The Clodhoppers, the Gully Jumpers, the Fruit Jar Drinkers - all these classic bands came after the Crooks.

Though both brothers continued to hold down regular jobs in Nashville, the band appeared frequently on WSM, as well as on some of the rival stations. Herman recalls playing for a time on WBAW ("Harry Stone was the announcer there then, and we were located over the O.K. Houck Piano Store.") and on WLAC ("We helped put on an hour program there."). The Crooks managed in 1928 to appear on the Opry 22 weeks, about as frequently as any other group, and still to play regularly on WLAC's competing barn dance. One reason for this, according to Herman, is that when WSM began paying its artists in 1928, they had so many musicians wanting to play that the station had to devise a platoon system, with most bands playing only every other week. On alternate weeks, therefore, Herman, as well as Paul Warmack, Theron Hale and others, had no hesitation about appearing on WLAC.

In October 1928 the Crooks participated in the Victor session and cut four sides - their only recorded statements until the '60s.* The recording band was composed of Matthew and Herman, harmonicas; Tom J. Givans, banjo; George Miles, guitar and calls; and Hick Burnett, guitar. Their four numbers were "My Wife Died on Friday Night" and "Jobbin /sic/ Gettin' There" (V-40020) and "Going Across the Sea" and "Love Somebody" (V-40099). "My Wife Died on Friday Night" was learned from Dr Bate (though on the latter's recording his wife died Saturday night**). "Job" (with a long O as in the biblical character) was an old tune Herman had known for years. "Going Across the Sea" had been widely circulated as a banjo-vocal specialty (Uncle Dave had recorded it in 1924) but the Crooks' version is stylistically miles away from anything else that has ever been done to this tune. "Love Somebody" was a common middle-Tennessee name for "Lexington", a tune that might be a cousin to "Soldier's Joy". The records were popular enough to be later rereleased on the Montgomery Ward label.

Not represented by the recording session was a whole section of the Crooks' repertoire that centred on slower numbers. Herman says:

> "We mixed our programme up then; a lot of times me and my brother would play just a harmonica duet, just the two of us. We used to play 'Sweet Bunch of Daisies' and he'd take the lead on it and I'd play alto."

* Some airchecks from the '40s have recently surfaced giving some indication of how the Crooks sounded during this 30-year silence.

** A psychohistorian could have a little fun with this discrepancy in titles. WLAC, on which the Crooks were playing regularly at the time of the recordings, had its barn dance show on Friday nights. WSM, on which Dr Bate was a regular, had its show on Saturday nights. Was someone being messaged?

The Opry cast, c. 1933. Back row: Blythe Poteet, Alton Delmore, Rabon Delmore, Lewis Crook, Dee Simmons, Nap Bastian, Deford Bailey. Second row: David Stone, Herman Crook, Kirk McGee, Arthur Smith, Sam McGee, Robert Lunn, Bill Etter, Staley Walton, Judge Hay. Third row (seated): Oscar Stone, Oscar Albright, Dr Humphrey Bate, Walter Ligget, Dorris Macon, Uncle Dave Macon, Paul Warmack, Roy Hardison, Burt Hutcherson. Front row: Buster Bate, Claude Lampley, Howard Ragsdale, Tommy Lefew, George Wilkerson, Charlie Arrington, Tom Andrews, Gale Binkley, Amos Binkley. The background is probably Studio C of the WSM building.

Ironically, even today on the Opry the Crook band is confined to square-dance playing and few listeners are aware of the variety of their repertoire; few, for instance, have heard the singing of Lewis Crook.

In 1930 the Crook band underwent a facelift when Matthew quit playing and joined the Nashville police force. Herman carried on, using Lewis Crook, whom he had just met at a fiddlers' contest at Walter Hill, Tennessee, on banjo. By 1931 Bill Etter had been added on piano and Clarence Minton was playing with the band. But within two years Kirk McGee was often playing fiddle with them, and Herman was developing the harp-fiddle unison lead he uses today. Kirk's cousin Blythe Poteet had also joined the band by this time, and Kirk and Blythe did much of the singing.

Like most of the other bands that survived into the modern age, the Crook band continued to undergo personnel changes. Only Herman and Lewis (and to a lesser extent Poteet) remained constant members. By 1940 Floyd Ethredge was playing fiddle and Avery Cantrell was on guitar; by 1946 the band included Basil Gentry, Neil Matthews Sr and Neil Matthews Jr. Herman, perhaps the most outspoken and assertive of the old-timers on the Opry, resisted various pressures starting in the early '50s to modify or condense the older bands. Finally, in the early '60s, Herman's band was combined with the remaining members of Dr Bate's old group, the Possum Hunters. This gave a lineup of Herman, Lewis, Burt Hutcherson (transferred from the now disbanded Gully Jumpers), Staley Walton and Alcyone Bate from the Possum Hunters, and fiddler Ed Hyde. Since that time Hyde and Walton have passed away and the Opry is reluctant to let Herman replace them.

In spite of these changes, the Crooks have preserved over the years a distinctive and authentic sound. Most of this is due to the creativity and leadership of Herman Crook, who is very much aware that he is one of the last vestiges of the type of music that Judge Hay once called the cornerstone of the Opry. It is a proud heritage, and the Crook Brothers' band, waging battles the earlier bands could not even have conceived of, are still doing it justice.

THE PICKARD FAMILY

IN ONE SENSE, UNCLE DAVE MACON WAS PROBABLY THE FIRST "vocal" star of the Opry, since he appeared on the very first scheduled program. But Uncle Dave's singing was inextricably bound up with his banjo playing, and people were hardly aware of him as a singer *per se*; on some early shows he was even billed as "banjoist and character singer". The first artists to become a vocal star in the modern sense of the term was an Ashland City, Tennessee native named Obed ("Dad") Pickard. He first played on the Opry in May 1926, and within a few years had become nationally known as the leader of the singing Pickard Family. The Pickards were the first group to use their Opry appearances as a springboard for a wider national career, and in doing so set the pace for many Opry performers of later years. Though they were on the Opry for a relatively short time, their widespread popularity caused them to influence the whole tenor and direction of the show.

Obed Pickard was born July 22, 1874, and spent his youth learning to play a variety of instruments; his hometown had a brass band and it was said Obed could double for any instrument in the band except clarinet. He was also adept with the more traditional folk instruments, including fiddle, guitar, jew's harp, mandolin and banjo. As a young man he served in the Spanish-American War and had the privilege of entertaining Admiral Dewey himself on the flagship "Manilla" after the war was over. Returning to Tennessee, he married an Ashland City girl, Leila May, whom he fondly called "little Mother". The couple had four children, Ruth, Bubb, Charlie and Ann. From about 1900 to 1925 Obed worked as a commercial traveller, at times running a sort of collection agency.

In 1926 he met Judge Hay and became a regular on the Opry, but there are two different stories about how his career got started. The traditional version of his coming to the Opry seems to stem from an article about him in the October 28, 1928 *Tennessean*:

> "Through a tragedy which occurred in his family, the result of which was the accidental death of one of his daughters, indirectly bro ght Mr Pickard to the studios of WSM /sic/. He came first to express his appreciation of a message which reached him while he was travelling in Virginia, notifying him of the terrible accident."

WSM had apparently broadcast an appeal for Pickard to call home, and he later stopped in to thank the station manager for helping. While he was there he sat through part of the Opry, and a few weeks later returned with his instruments willing to play.

A different story is told by Pickard's sons Charlie and Bubb, who assert that their father was first asked to play on the Opry when Hay happened to walk into their uncle's bank in Nashville. Hay told this uncle that he was going to start something like the National Barn Dance in Chicago; Obed happened to walk in about that time, and his brother recommended Hay to audition him. Obed mentioned that he had played for Admiral Dewey; Hay was impressed, and soon asked him to play regularly on the show.

Both stories probably have some truth in them, but it is interesting how Hay consciously tried to build up the first story; he repeats it in his book and no doubt fostered it during Pickard's tenure on the show. Hay seemed to sense that such little bits about his performers helped audience identification with them, and succeeded in generating an entire folklore about early Opry stars.

Whatever the case, Hay quickly dubbed Obed "the one-man orchestra" (though he was almost from the first accompanied by his wife on piano) and the earliest announcements of his shows seem to stress his comedy as much as his music. At first Dad Pickard seems to have been considered somewhat of a novelty act. Gradually as the Pickard children reached age, they were added to the act: Ruthie on the accordion, Bubb the guitar, and then Charlie with the guitar. (The first song Charlie sang on the Opry was "Uncle Josh".) It was an old American vaudeville custom to use kids in

the act, and the Pickards simply transferred this to radio; it was an instant success, and within a couple of years the act was voted one of the most popular on the Opry. And it was the first all-vocal act.

About 1928, when Bubb was about 20, he got restless and went to work in the Detroit factories. In June of that year the family decided to take a vacation and visit him; they took along letters of introduction from Hay to the managers of stations WJR in Detroit and WGAR in Buffalo. The family did some broadcasts in Detroit and earned the first money they ever made in radio, $25 for two numbers. (Dad had continued to work as a traveller while broadcasting on WSM.) Their music attracted the attention of Henry Ford, who asked them to come out and sing a few numbers for them. Obed - probably helped out by an overzealous journalist - described the scene in a 1930 issue of Radio Digest.

> While we were playing away there for a number of the employes, a slender quiet man slipped into the room. I noticed my wife, who was playing the piano, began to get a little nervous and then I glanced up. It was old Henry Ford himself! and he was listening with a smile on his face as wide as Lake Michigan, and (you know he's crazy about those early American songs!) his foot was tapping out the time on the floor and his head was swinging to the time of the music! Yes, sir!
>
> "I MIGHT have been scared under other conditions—playing before the richest man in America right there in his own domain. But do you know I wasn't scared a bit; it seemed the most natural thing in the world! He got so interested I thought he was going to dance, but he didn't! He just stood there, as interested a listener as the Pickards ever had. And then just as we were playing that famous old reel-tune Sourwood Mountain . . . You know how it goes—
>
> *"I got a gal on Sourwood Mountain*
> *Dum diddle di do, diddle diddle dee!"*
>
> blamed if he didn't jerk a little jews-harp out of his pocket and play with us! And he could play, too! Just as natural as could be! It's a fact, or I hope I may never!
>
> "It was worth the trip out there to Detroit just to see Henry Ford standing there in his office playing that jews-harp and keeping time to Sourwood Mountain. He came over and talked to us afterwards and said some mighty nice things about what we played.
>
> "Did we like him? Yes sir, he's simply fine—the pleasantest spoken, most modest man you'd find in ten states! I swear he reminded me of the old-time southern gentleman that I used to know down in Tennessee . . .

Partly as a result of this exposure, the Pickards auditioned for NBC in Buffalo. Dad's comedy songs impressed the NBC scout, and they soon signed a 40-week contract to appear in a sort of minstrel show NBC was doing, "The Cabin Door". The newspapers in Nashville wrote long, glowing accounts of their triumph, and Hay seemed especially happy at their success. The act next worked for the Interwoven Stocking Company and were called the Interwoven Entertainers. The next year found them in Chicago doing the Farm and Home Hour for NBC, and Obed played a dramatic role in a play about a miner and his family. But in 1931 Mrs Pickard became ill, and the group returned to Tennessee.

They thus began a second stint on the Opry, from 1931 to 1933. With their wide experience, they were the stars of the show, and now that all the family was playing, their appeal was even broader. (Bubb, however, was not playing with them; he was continuing to work on WJJD, then in Aurora, Illinois, and trying to develop a market for hillbilly music.) In 1933 Mrs Pickard was better and Bubb had lined up new jobs for the family in Chicago, so they left again to go North. The next few years saw them broadcasting on stations in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York and New Orleans. They built up an immense following, solely on the basis of radio; at one point in New Orleans their mail was peaking at 7200 pieces a day. They later moved their base of operations to San Antonio, where they worked with the famous border station XERA, and then eventually to California. There in 1949 Dad Pickard became the star of one of the first TV series shows. He died five years later, though his family continued to record and perform.

Any study of the Pickard repertoire would be a vast and complex task. Though their commercial records are rather few, the songs they performed on radio transcriptions number into the thousands and have not even been catalogued. Yet their notion of traditional music seems to have been pretty formalistic. Hay recalled,

> "Mrs Pickard and Ruth were accomplished musicians, who had studied the art for many years. They did not care much for the homespun tunes in those early days, but it was not long before they put their hearts into the act. . . ."

Obed himself made his first big hit with a cover version of the then-popular 19th-century lament "Kitty Wells". (In fact, most Opry veterans still refer to the song as Dad Pickard's.) The first group of songs recorded by the family (in December 1928, after they had left WSM for the first time) included "popular" folk songs like "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain", "Down in Arkansas" and "Get Away From That Window". A later session yielded 19th-century standards like "Buffalo Gals",

Opposite, Dad Pickard's own account of his career, written for their 1934 song folio. Note the absence of any mention of WSM and the early Opry.

FROM "THE HILLS OF TENNESSEE" TO THE STUDIOS OF N. B. C.

I AM here relating the first real story of "my little family" in the hope that it may reach the hearts of some doubting Thomas's, for I firmly believe with all of my heart if you leave your life and everything you do in HIS hands, HE will take care of you.

Our home town is Ashland, Tennessee, and perhaps if it weren't for radio we would never have been heard outside the confines of this little country town in the Tennessee Hills. We had a little collection business and were getting along pretty good and making some money. We worked hard, though, but I guess we were one of the few who ever made any money in it, and what money I made was spent with "the little family" so we all had a lot of fun.

Apparently we were getting along "great" so when Leila May suggested that we give up this collection business and try the radio, I thought she was insane and she carries to this day a mental picture of the expression I had on my face and the pity I had for her for making such a suggestion. I tried my best to impress upon her that our old mountain, home spun airs wouldn't be of interest to radio listeners but she insisted that God gave us all some little talent and we ought to give it to the world. Finally "the little Mother" said, "Dad, let's have a little vacation." So, we jumped in the car, drove to Louisville (my, what a town), then to Detroit, then to Buffalo and then to New York. And, Oh Boy! What a town. Our opportunity came. After a hurried audition, we were given a spot and we clicked on "The Old Cabin Door" program right off the reel and well, we got cheated out of the balance of our vacation and we haven't had it yet. The "Little Mother" is responsible for our rise (or fall) to radio fame for I was never sold on it until we got our "black and white" from the N. B. C. I was only going on that glorious childlike faith that somehow He'd see us through.

You know my gang's a great gang. There's Obed, Junior, better known on the N. B. C. chain as Bubb; and Ruth Phaney, who is the "school boy" with the changing voice; and Ann, who is only four and a half years old and the only child employed regularly by the N. B. C. The truth of how folks just naturally absorb these old time Hick and Hoe down Hill Billy Songs is evidenced by what little Ann does; she can hum and sing the melody and keep the rhythm of every tune or song that we sing. And now we are beginning 1934 with Chuck, another member of our family. Chuck sings and picks the old banjo.

Since our first "Old Cabin Door" program, we have appeared in many different programs; such as on Lucky Strike Hour, in Socony Land Sketches, as Jolly Bill and Jane, as Gold Spot Pals, etc. We are now on the National Farm and Home Hour from N. B. C. Chicago Studios every day at noon to 12:45 P. M., except Sunday.

We are grateful to our "Great Silent Audience" for any degree of success that we may have achieved. One of our little darlings, our oldest daughter Leila, is safe on the other side and May and I really believe that our greatest inspiration comes from her to carry on, never falter, never fail. and some time we shall all be together again singing and playing the old mountain tunes on that happy golden shore with the angels to die no more.

To all of our friends everywhere, this little book is dedicated and now GRANDMOTHER, wind up the clock and POLLY you put the kettle on, and we will say "GOODNIGHT EVERY-BODY."

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Dad Pickard

"The Little Red Caboose Behind the Train" and "In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree". Two sides showing Obed's solo virtuosity are "Sally Goodin'", which reveals his dexterity on the jew's harp, and "My Old Boarding House", a hilarious version of the Uncle Dave Macon-Charlie Poole favorite, "Hungry Hash House". These records, made for the Plaza Company, were extremely popular and some of them were released on as many as 11 different labels. Dad Pickard himself told the Radio Digest reporter:

> "I am mighty glad of the opportunity to play and sing these old ballads and folksongs. I feel that we are doing something worthwhile, for we are helping to preserve something very sweet and fine which otherwise would be lost."

This sort of self-consciousness about material reminds one of Judge Hay's own romantic notion of Southern folk music, but is even more a probable reflection of Henry Ford's sentiments. The Pickards seemed to realise that they were functioning as popularisers of traditional material, though, and were content with the role. And their role pointed the way for many Opry vocal groups of the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The best source of information on the Pickards' career is Ed Kahn, "Tapescript: Interview with Charlie, Bubb and Lucille Pickard," JEMF Newsletter IV:4, no. 12 (December 1968), 134-41. Also included in this issue is a reprint of the Radio Digest article "The Pickards" by G.L. Eskew, and a complete Pickard Family discography. Judge Hay also discusses them in his book A Story of the Grand Ole Opry.

WHEN THE SKILLET-LICKERS CAME TO NASHVILLE...

THE GREAT 1927 FIDDLERS' CONVENTION

ONE OF THE CURIOUS THINGS ABOUT THE PRE-1930 OPRY WAS the fact that many of the most popular acts in old time music never appeared on it at all, even as guest artists. Jimmie Rodgers, as far as can be determined, never played the Opry, and the Carter Family appeared there only once. Uncle Dave Macon, of course, appeared more regularly since he was from the region. But the fourth great act of old time music, the Skillet-Lickers, did appear in Nashville on at least one occasion, and though they did not actually appear on the radio, they shared the stage with many of the great early Opry bands. In 1927, at the height of the Skillet-Lickers' popularity, they toured Nashville and helped set up the 1927 All Southern Old Fiddlers' Convention.

The contest was not really one in the strict sense of the word. In the late '20s the moving force behind the Skillet-Lickers, fiddler Clayton McMichen, would send out "road groups" of various members from the Atlanta-based Skillet-Lickers aggregation. These groups would move into a town, hire a hall and announce a contest. Local fiddlers were invited to try their luck against established artists like McMichen, Bert Layne and Lowe Stokes. They seldom won, of course, but the net effect was a pleasant combination of contest and concert. Columbia Records apparently helped sponsor these tours, and the newspaper write-ups are always careful to mention the latest records from the group.

The road band that came to Nashville was not exactly the band that made so many of the Skillet-Lickers' Columbia recordings. McMichen, Fate Norris, Layne and Riley Puckett made up the core of the band; Lowe Stokes and Gid Tanner, two other regular members, were missing for one reason or another. "Bob Nichols", McMichen's recording alias, was also there. It is also interesting to note that Bill Chitwood and Bud Landress performed on the show; possibly they came up with the rest of the Skillet-Lickers group from Atlanta, since they performed with Fate Norris.

Probably because the McMichen show was skilled in generating free publicity, the contest was well covered by the contemporary newspapers. Though the written accounts are full of spelling errors and phonetic misreadings, they provide a fascinating glimpse of the details of the contest.

The first notice of the event appeared in the Tennessean of May 7, 1927:

> FIDDLERS TO HOLD CONVENTION MAY 13
> Championship of South on Program
>
> Arrangements have been completed for the "All Southern Old Fiddlers' Convention," to be held here in the Ryman Auditorium next Friday and Saturday evenings. The contests are open to any fiddler, banjo and guitar picker and string bands. Mr Charles Loch of Columbus Ga. will reach Nashville sometime today, and will then begin to register entries. Fiddling championships from all over the South are expected to attend, and invitations have been sent to "Fiddlin' John Carson," Riley Puckett and Bud Stephens to be present. A big time is anticipated, and no doubt this convention will bring not only many famous old-time musicians to Nashville, but will attract the general public as well. Those wishing to enter the contest should write to Charles Loch, secretary, care Ryman Auditorium, for blanks.

The convention will be held two days only, Friday and Saturday, May 13 and 14.

One might assume that Bud Stephens is in fact the famous Uncle Bunt Stephens. As far as can be determined, however, neither he nor Fiddlin' John Carson accepted the challenges. Riley Puckett did show up.

Charles Loch, himself a trick fiddler, arrived on time and registration began. However, a problem with the date of the contest soon developed. On Thursday night, May 12, the night before the contest was to begin, the students of Ward-Belmont College in Nashville presented the opera "Cavalleria Rusticana" at the Ryman. Proper Nashville society during the '20s was very proud of its musical taste and its symphony, and turned out in force for the opera. In fact, papers said that 5000 people were turned away for lack of seats. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the fiddlers' contest was scheduled to begin Friday night, and many of the contestants had come from out of town, the opera producers simply pre-empted Ryman for a second performance of the opera on Friday night. This made the fiddling contest start on Saturday night, and, since Sunday night was reserved for preaching in Ryman, finish on Monday night. This awkward splitting of the two contest nights must have adversely affected attendance. It also shows how Nashville in the '20s was more interested in grand opera than in old time music.

Among the numerous contestants who had arrived from out of town were the Skillet-Lickers. On Friday, May 13, the Banner carried a story about the change in schedule:

SOUTHERN FIDDLERS WILL HOLD CONTEST

The all Southern fiddlers' convention for the championship of Dixie has moved the dates of its appearance at the Ryman auditorium from today and Saturday night to Saturday night and Monday night at 8 o'clock. The change in schedule was made to permit the local grand opera to be given at the auditorium for a second time tonight. There is no other change in the schedule. The convention is an annual affair and has been held in many Southern cities for twenty years.

Already forty entrants from seven Southern states have declared their intention of competing for the handsome cash prizes offered and for the honor of first place. An elaborate program has been arranged in addition to the fiddling contest itself. There will be singing and dancing and numbers on the guitar, banjo and string band.

Gid Tanner's famous string band, the Skillet Lickers, which is the composer of the song, "My Carolina Home," along with many other Columbia records, will be present. Fate Norris of Dalton, Ga., the one-man wonder, who plays six musical instruments in an individual band, will also furnish entertainment. Mr. Norris has in his band two guitars, bells, bass fiddle, fiddle and mouth harp. He devoted seventeen years to mastery of his art.

Judges will be chosen from the audience, and Charles Loch, secretary of the convention, will preside.

Competitors at the state contest in Nashville in January 1926, lined up on the steps of the Ryman Auditorium. Front row, W.E. Poplin, Lewisburg; J.W. Bridges, Cumberland Furnace; W.E. Working, Nashville; G.G. Mason, Springfield; J.L. (Uncle Bunt) Stephens, Lynchburg; W.A. White, Sylvin; Cancel King, Red Boiling Springs; Levi Dunn, Putnam County; Uncle Jimmy Thompson, Martha; R.M. Hodges, Cumberland Furnace; G.W. Finger, McMinnville. Second row: W.M. Baker, Nashville; D.W. Thompson, Nashville; Mack Horton, Nashville; Jake Jones, Gallatin; W.H. Duke, Nashville; Albert Draughon, Nashville. Back row: Bob King, Chestnut Mound; John F. McGee, Franklin; William Clyburn, Macon County; Mazy Todd, Murfreesboro; T.E. Scales, Nashville; S.J. Etheridge, McEwen; J.B. Blankenship, Pulaski; William Hill, DeKalb County. This photograph was first published in the Nashville Banner, January 19, 1926.

SIX NASHVILLE BANNER, NASHVILLE, TENN.

OLD-TIME FIDDLERS ENGAGE IN ALL-DAY CONTEST HERE

In an earlier version of the story, the Banner had stated that the contest was being delayed "in order to allow some of the participants from distant points ample time to enter", but the real reason was probably the Ward-Belmont opera.

A list of the people who entered the contest was printed in the Banner of May 12. After stating the dates of the contest, the article goes on to say:

> In addition to the prizes which will be given for proficiency in fiddling, there will be an award given each night for the best looking girl in attendance. The winner of this prize will be chosen from the audience by the group of performers.
>
> Among the well-known entertainers who will appear in the program are Riley Puckett of Griffin, Ga., who, despite his blindness, is expert in playing the guitar and in yodeling, and who is known popularly as a radio entertainer and a phonograph record artist. Others who will appear are Bob Nichols of Atlanta, author of "Carolina Home"; Clayton McMichen of Atlanta, former Southern champion; Fate Norris of Dalton, Ga., who is the operator of a one-man orchestra composed of two guitars, a fiddle, a bass fiddle, bells and a mouth harp. It required fifteen years, Mr. Norris says, for him to perfect his performance. Bert Lane of Bisbee, Ariz., champion of the Southwest, and S.G. Lynch, a champion fiddler of the radio, will also take part.
>
> The following Kentucky and Tennessee players have signed up to participate in the program: Dave K. Bradley, G.W. Wilkerson and the Wilson serenaders, all of Nashville; J.H. Robinson of Gladeville, Tenn.; Andrew Brady of Adairville, Ky.; Binkley Brothers' string-band of Nashville, consisting of Galey Binkley, fiddler, Amos Binkley, banjoist, and Tom Andrews, guitar; Henry L. Bandy, record artist and radio entertainer, of Petroleum, Ky.; W. Henry Quillen of St. Joseph, Tenn.; J.B. Carver of Hermitage, Tenn.; W.M. Rucker of Lebanon, champion of Wilson county; A.J. Williams and U.B. Williams of Joelton, Hugh Johnson of Reagan, Tenn., and Chester Rogers of Chattanooga.
>
> Charles Lock of the Old-Time Fiddlers' Association will also appear. Mr. Lock is skilled in forty-seven different ways of trick fiddling. All of these he carries on without a break in the time and without missing a note. He comes from Columbus, Ga., and was recently adjudged champion of Georgia.

The list reveals a number of interesting names and some curious omissions. Gid Tanner is not mentioned, either here or in later stories, though the Skillet-Lickers are present. Apparently the band made this contest without Tanner; whether such a practise was common, or whether Tanner was simply indisposed at the time, is not clear. The G.W. Wilkerson mentioned is doubtless George Wilkerson, leader of the Fruit Jar Drinkers.

On Saturday, the contest began, with an attendance of only about 500 people. (The opera, remember, had filled Ryman for two nights, and the next night, Sunday, a famous preacher, George W. Truett, was to draw 5000 people.) This may reflect again the fact that Nashville did not care all that much for old time music. Also noteworthy is that the fiddling contest was held the same night as the WSM barn dance. Oddly enough, none of the greats playing in the contest appeared on WSM that night; the schedule of that date reads as normal.

The Tennessean of Sunday, May 15, carried a story about the first of the contests:

Fiddlers Scrape Bows in First of Champ Contests

"Maybe "I Bet My Money on a Bob-Tailed Nag." and similar tunes would not have been very pleasant in the ears of some folks Saturday night after the Derby had been run up Louisville way.

But to about 500 fiddle-loving folks at the Ryman auditorium, that tune "Pop Goes the Weasel." "Turkey in the Straw," and all the others that sound so well when the res'n is right and the bow gets to scrapping. furnished enough tune to have pleasant dreams for a month or two. The occasion was the first night of the all-Southern old fiddlers' championship contest in which about 50 fiddlers are competing. Monday night winners will be picked.

Charles Loch, secretary of the Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers association, who is conducting the contest here gave an exhibition of wrestling with a fiddle. He played "Pop Goes the Weasel" with the fiddle and bow in 47 different positions.

Among those who gave a preliminary showing of the fiddling prowess Saturday night and who will meet in dead-locked finals Monday night were: Riley Puckett, Fate Norris, Clayton McMichen and Bert Lane of the Skilled-Licker band of Atlanta; Marshall Calyborn, one-armed fiddler and Raymond Harper of Westmoreland, Tenn.; Bill Chitwood and Bud Landers of Calhoun, Ga.; Ben F. Guy and Clarence Minton of Nashville; Charles McBride of Nashville: Tom Lefen and Wilkes Ragsdale of Nashville, the Binkley Brothers and Tom Andrews of Nashville and Mac Harton of Nashville.

The Banner of the same date was more detailed in its account of the contest:

> FIDDLERS PICK BEST-LOOKING GIRL
>
> Forty-Eight Musicians Play Old Favorites in Contest at Auditorium
>
> It took a Nashville girl, Miss Bobbie Martin, of 1913 Broadway, to catch the eye of old fiddlers performing in the all-Southern Old Fiddlers' contest at Ryman auditorium last night, despite the fact that a majority of the performers, being Georgians, are accustomed to Georgia peaches. The fiddlers came down from the stage, paraded around through the audience, and selected Miss Martin as the best-looking girl present. She was presented with a new hat.
>
> Forty-eight fiddlers opened with "The Alabama Gal" and "Turkey in the Straw". Riley Puckett, of Griffin, Ga., Fate Norris of Dalton, Ga., Clayton

McMichen, of Atlanta, Ga., and Byrd Lane, of Amarillo, Texas, known as the "Skillet Lickers" and phonograph artists, played "Bully of the Town" and "I Don't Love Nobody", which pleased the large audience.

Marshall Clayburn, one-arm fiddler, who plays holding the fiddle between his legs, played "Sleepy Joe". Billy Chitwood, of Calhoun, Ga., Fate Norris and Byrd Landers played and sang "Flat-Footed Nigger" and "Watermelon Hanging on the Vine".

Riley Puckett, the blind fiddler and singer, played "Drifting Back to Dreamland", and "How Do You Do?" Ben F. Guy and Clarence Minton of Nashville played "Dope Field Blues" and "Were You Ever Lonesome?" and Wilson Serenaders Five-Piece Band of Nashville played "New River Train" and "Turkey in the Straw".

Charles McBride of Nashville with his string band played "Arkansas Traveller" and "The Downfall of Paris"; Mack Horton, Nashville, "Nubbin Ridge" and "Sail Away, Lady"; Tom Lefen and Wilkes Ragsdale of Nashville, "Hop Light, Ladies" and "Soldier's Joy"; Charles Lock of Columbus, Ga., trick fiddler, played "Turkey in the Straw", "Liberty", and "Pop Goes the Weasel" in forty-seven different positions.

McMichen's Melody Men played "My Carolina Home", a composition of their own which they have recorded, and "Hand Me Down My Walking Cane". The following also participated: Binkley Brothers, Charles Harrington, Robert King-Ernest Green, Smith brothers and Will Taddle, all of Nashville; McKey brothers of Franklin, Tennessee, and Fate Norris, with his one-arm six piece band, played "Little Log Cabin" and "When You and I were Young, Maggie".

There will be a continuation of the convention Monday night at the Ryman auditorium, when a prize will again be awarded to the best-looking girl in attendance, in the opinion of the old fiddlers, and the all-Southern championship will be decided. There will be a complete change of program for Monday night.

Of course there are obvious mistakes here. Riley Puckett was not known as a fiddler, and Charles Harrington is probably Charles Arrington of the Gully Jumpers. The McKey brothers are most certainly the McGee brothers, Sam and Kirk.

The Tennessean on Monday morning, May 16, announced the second round of the contest:

FIDDLERS OF SOUTH TO CONTEST TONIGHT

Second Session to be Held at Ryman

"On with the dance."

Unless you are dumb then your feet just won't be still at the Southern Fiddlers' convention's finals at the Ryman auditorium tonight.

Here from seven states the champion fiddlers will settle tonight for one year at least, the question of who shall hold the title for the land of Dixie, "The fiddlingest place on earth."

A good crowd attended the preliminaries Saturday night, but the real show is set for tonight and Ryman auditorium is expected to be packed with lovers old-fashioned music.

The finals were described the next morning, May 17, by the same paper:

FIDDLERS FIDDLE; ATLANTAN WINNER

"Bully of the Town" Is the Tune Clayton McMichen Plays.

Clayton McMicken of Atlanta probed again last night that a champion once dethorned can come back when to the tune of "Bully of the Town" he fiddled himself back into the championship of Dixie wrestled from him in his home town by A. A. Gray a few months ago.

The champion did not attend the Southern Fiddlers convention here to defend his title despite the offer of the management to pay his expenses and thus loses his claim.

Gale Binkley of Nashville, with "Forked Deer" as his selection landed in second place while Bert Layne of Brisbee, Arizona, was awarded third place on "Jeff Davis."

A wide variety of selections were made by the 38 entrants in the finals last night. "Red Rooster," "Turkey In the Straw," "Stoney Point," "Green Back Dollar," "Tennessee Wagon," "Gently," and "Alabama Jubilee" were only a few of the many which drew applause time and again holding the foot patting crowd at the Ryman auditorium until almost midnight when the winners were announced.

Big fiddles, little fiddles, blind fiddlers, one armed fiddlers, but all with the spirit of the occasion joined in the applause of their successful opponents when the contest finally came to an end.

One interesting note here: though it is no surprise that Clayton McMichen won the contest - a pattern he was to follow for the next 30 years across the country - it is interesting to note that he had been defeated by A.A. Gray for the championship of Dixie. Gray is known to record-collectors for a fine series of Vocalions he recorded with "Seven Foot Dilly" (John Dilleshaw).

It would have been wonderful if someone could have caught this action with a cassette recorder so we could compare the fiddling of 48 years ago with, say, the Grand Masters contest now held annually in Nashville. Many arguments about the relative quality of fiddling would have been settled. The best we can do is listen to old phonograph records and wonder how closely they capture the excitement and inspiration of the original contest.

THE ORIGINAL NASHVILLE SOUND

NASHVILLE'S FIRST RECORDINGS

THE GRAND OLE OPRY OF TODAY IS RATHER CLOSELY RELATED TO the Nashville recording industry; many of the key executives in the current country recording industry are graduates, in one way or another, of the Opry. But it would be wrong to assume that there has always been an active relationship between the Opry and phonograph records. As we have seen, the pre-1930 Opry members recorded a good deal less than did other major old time artists of the '20s. Even through the '30s, as the Opry began to gain an even wider national acceptance, the regulars on the show recorded far fewer sides than their counterparts on WLS's National Barn Dance. Yet the Opry succeeded in spite of recordings, and the early history of the show suggests that a history of country music based solely on recordings could be severely distorted.

However, since Nashville has acquired the reputation of being the world's center for country recordings, there is a certain historical significance in tracing just where and when Nashville's first recordings were made. Most people know that the modern industry dates from the mid-'40s, when Decca became the first major company to record country music regularly in Nashville. About the same time, Bullet Records became one of the first Nashville-based companies to feature country music and Western Swing. The real impact of Nashville-based recording on country music as a whole dates from that time. However, there were earlier, rather abortive, attempts to record in Nashville, and their story sheds some interesting light on the history of the early Opry.

From a technical point of view, the first recordings actually made in Nashville were probably a series of 7-inch aluminum discs made as a customer service by a Nashville music store. Numerous old-timers recall going up to a music studio on Church Street, in downtown Nashville, and, for a fee, cutting a two-minute home recording. The operator of the makeshift studio usually charged only a dollar or so for a custom record, and of course each disc was a unique copy. Research suggests that this studio was operated as a service of the O.K. Houck Piano Company, which occupied the second floor of the old Vendome Building on Church Street; they were a well established Nashville music house and had been active since the 1880s. In the middle to late '20s this was the largest music store in Nashville. Apparently the recording service was operational as early as 1925, to judge from Katherine Thompson's account of making a record there with Uncle Jimmy Thompson before he had ever appeared on radio. It was probably from this studio too that the Perry County Music Makers (the Tennessee stringband with the zither lead) obtained the demo recording that they sent to Brunswick in 1929, winning a recording session the following year.

The Church Street records were about the size of the Silvertone home discs marketed by Sears in the '30s, and contemporary accounts suggest that their sound was shrill, tinny and unreliable. Nonetheless, they seem to have functioned well enough as audition records, and were probably often used as such. None of the records has so far been recovered from the Nashville area, and it is possible that they wore out quickly. Though it is uncertain exactly who recorded on them, it is quite possible that many early old time performers from the Opry and the other early Nashville radio shows made their way to the second-floor studios. And the anonymous engineer who oversaw them must have the distinction of being Nashville's first recording engineer. The service definitely existed from 1925 to 1930, and might well have continued into the '30s. Most of the records obviously had little influence beyond the immediate community, since they were never mass-produced.

Another early Nashville recording session was done by a Library of Congress team in 1942. This team, led by famous folklorist Alan Lomax, set up sessions at the home of John Work in Nashville and recorded some fascinating blues and washboard band sides. (One of the most interesting bands recorded was the Nashville Washboard Band, led by mandolin-player James Kelley; though the group was black, it included some interesting old time tunes in its repertoire, including "Old Joe", the tune popularised by Dr Humphrey Bate and the Possum Hunters.) However, there seems to have been little old time music recorded in this session and it certainly had little effect of any kind on the development of the Opry.

Thus the honor of making the first commercial recordings in Nashville must go to Victor, whose field unit made a single visit to the city in 1928. In that year the Victor Talking Machine Company (as RCA-Victor was then known) brought their portable recording unit to the city and, using the then new electric "Orthophonic" process, recorded some 69 sides by local country and gospel artists. These sides - or those of them that were released - represent an interesting chapter in Nashville

music history: the first, and in the end unsuccessful, attempt to use the Opry music as a base for a local ongoing recording program.

During the late '20s Nashville was becoming known across the country as the home of the Opry, but it was by no means the major recording center for country music; that honor went to Atlanta. As the record industry began to recognise the market for old time music in the '20s, it discovered quickly that the best way to find genuine country talent was to record "on location". The development of electrical recording techniques in the mid-'20s made it possible to pack all of the equipment needed to record into a touring car; thus mobile recording crews, usually consisting of a "producer" and two engineers, took to the field throughout the South in the late '20s in search of new, authentic, "downhome" talent. Atlanta quickly emerged as a fertile source for such talent, and Columbia and Okeh centered their field operations there, usually visiting in the spring and fall of each year. Many talent hunts were made into Tennessee, however: Victor recorded at Bristol and discovered the first country music superstars, Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family; Columbia recorded at Johnson City; Brunswick did sessions in Knoxville. By late 1927, though, Memphis had emerged as the major recording center for Tennessee; in fact, it was second only to Atlanta in popularity as a regional recording center. Victor used Memphis as its major location in the South, and began to send recording crews there each spring and fall to do sessions that lasted for weeks. To be sure, much of the material recorded in Memphis was blues or jazz, but a significant percentage was country music. It was after one of these long Memphis sessions, in late September 1928, that the Victor crew, probably on their way back to Atlanta, stopped over in Nashville to sample the talent.

There was no lack of it there in 1928; and by the latter part of that year several Nashville stars had already journeyed to other locations to make records. As early as July 1924, even before the WSM barn dance program took to the air, Uncle Dave Macon and Sid Harkreader went to New York to record for the Aeolian Vocalion company; in March 1926 champion fiddler Uncle Bunt Stephens recorded for Columbia in New York; Uncle Dave Macon and Sam McGee recorded for Vocalion in New York in April 1926; and the Macon-Fruit Jar Drinkers session was in May 1927, again for Vocalion in New York. Dr Humphrey Bate and the Possum Hunters had gone to Atlanta about May 1928 to record for Brunswick, while Uncle Jimmy Thompson had recorded 18 months previously for Columbia in the same location.

Then in the latter days of March 1927 several WSM stars journeyed to Atlanta to record for Columbia. These artists included Obed Pickard, the Golden Echo Quartet (a gospel group), Deford Bailey and others. As noted earlier, the resulting releases sometimes identified the artist as "of Station WSM, Nashville, Tenn.". This may simply have meant that WSM paid for the trip; but doubtless the labelling was good publicity for both station and artist. We must remember that in the late '20s, when there were far fewer powerful stations than now, a strong station's audience was by no means restricted to a city or even state. WSM was heard (then as now) throughout the eastern half pf the US, and artists performing on WSM were known not merely in Tennessee but throughout the country; the call-letters WSM on a record would therefore be recognised by many buyers.

So the Victor recording crew, that fall of 1928, had good reason to think that a recording session in Nashville might yield interesting results: most of the artists in Nashville had already proven themselves over the airwaves. In fact Sid Harkreader, who remembers this session, though he did not participate in it, thinks that the radio stations may have asked the Victor people to come in. Though the artists recorded were all on Nashville radio at the time, they were not all on WSM; some were on WLAC and WBAW. But it is quite likely that one of the stations did initiate the session.

No one remembers for sure who was in charge of the recording crew, but it was probably Ralph S. Peer, one of the most famous talent scouts and producers in country music history. It was Peer who, just a year before, had discovered Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family; and he is credited by historians with first presenting country music to the American public, when he recorded what is generally considered the first hillbilly record, by Fiddlin' John Carson in Atlanta in 1923. He later became well known as the founder of the Southern Music publishing business. But in 1927 and '28 he was travelling for Victor, recording blues and hillbilly records.

The Nashville session began on Friday, September 28, 1928, and lasted through October 6, 1928. A note in the Victor files indicates that the session was held in the YMCA building; most of the temporary studios for field recording sessions were set up in halls or ballrooms in the belief that their acoustics were better. However, several of the participants recall rather clearly that the session was held in the WSM studios in the old National Life and Accident Building. It is possible that the recording crew could for some reason have switched locations, but it seems improbable. In face of the dearth of hard documentary evidence, the question of the location may never be completely resolved.

Nine groups in all were recorded, all of them known through broadcasting at the time, and some quite famous today: the Binkley Brothers' Clodhoppers, Paul Warmack and the Gully Jumpers, the Poplin-Woods Tennessee String Band, the Crook Brothers String Band, Theron Hale and his Daughters, Deford Bailey, Blind Joe Mangrum and Fred Shriver, the Vaughan Quartet and the Gentry Family Quartet.

On Friday, September 28, the opening day, two groups recorded: the Binkley Brothers with Jack Jackson (four numbers) and Warmack's Gully Jumpers (one number). But something was wrong with all these takes - perhaps the machinery was not working properly - and both bands had to rerecord their numbers on Tuesday, October 2.

So it was on Monday, October 1, that the first Nashville records to be released to the general public were made. The artists were the Gully Jumpers, the tunes "Tennessee Waltz" and "The Little Red Caboose Behind the Train", and the coupling Victor V-40067. (Though this original record is rather hard to find, "Little Red Caboose" is included on the RCA-Victor "Vintage" LP The Railroad in Folksong /LPV-532/.) Though we don't know all the details yet, it appears now that this coupling has the honor of being the first product of the Nashville sound.

Other groups that recorded during this session produced music equally interesting and exciting, and much of it makes good listening still today. The Crook Brothers, the Poplin-Woods band, Theron Hale, the Binkley Brothers and the Gully Jumpers have all been discussed, and these recordings in particular commented on, in the chapter on "The Hoedown Bands"; Blind Joe Mangrum is among "The Great Opry Fiddlers"; and Deford Bailey's Nashville recordings are described in his own chapter.

All in all, there was more instrumental than vocal music recorded during this session, and this perhaps reflects the fact that during this first great age of country music instrumental music was as important as, if not more important than, singing. Most of the records from the Nashville session were released in the V-40000 series, "Old Familiar Tunes and Novelties", and most of them were probably on sale in the stores within a month of the session. Out of the 69 sides recorded, only 36 were ever released by Victor; almost half the numbers may still reside in Victor's vaults, unheard by anyone since 1928. The Victor people at the time probably considered the Nashville session somewhat of a failure; at least, the percentage of material released from most other field trips was much higher. And no one returned to Nashville to make any more recordings.

Perhaps the best eye-witness account of what this historic session was really like comes from singer Jack Jackson, who recorded as vocalist with the Binkley Brothers' Clodhoppers. ("Neither of the Binkley brothers even pretended to sing, and the Victor folks said they wanted a vocalist on the records, that they wouldn't even consider them without it, so they called me on the telephone and I went to see them and we got together that way.") Jackson had been signed to a "letter of option" with Victor for almost a year prior to making the Nashville recordings. This was a fairly common practise in early field recording, whereby an advance talent scout spotted likely talent and signed them with a letter that promised to record them in a year; the artists in turn agreeing not to record for any other company before that time. Apparently no money was exchanged in such a signing. Jackson says that a Victor representative (whose name he does not recall) came through Nashville in 1927 and signed several Nashville radio performers to such letters. "They went at it in the slowest way in the world. They'd get you to sign an option for 12 months and then they'd wait 11 months before acting, and then they'd get in in a big hurry. They paid us $100 a record and they wouldn't even talk about royalties with you."

Jackson recalls that the records were made in the WSM studios, "right there on top of the National Life Building, in the same room we broadcast out of." Though the WSM studios were used, he does not think the station was directly responsible for the recording crew coming in; " really, I think they were going to record anyway, and WSM just had the studio." He believes the crew consisted of three men, but remembers no names. Of the technical details of the recording apparatus he recalls little; though he was among the first group to record, the equipment was already set up by the time he went in.

What was it like making records back then?

"Well, the first thing, they tore me all to pieces. . . . They'd make samples and play 'em back to you, and there were certain letters they told me before we started wouldn't come out - S and T, like 'first', that '-st' wouldn't come out, and W - I forget the rest of them. I had to sit there and practice those things. When I got through I didn't sound like myself at all, trying to make them dig into the record. You had to hit those real hard in order for them to come out then. By the time I got through with that - we might have spent the whole first day just doing that - making tests. Trying to get those Ws and '-st' - anyway, they had a list, they knew what wouldn't take out. They didn't have any trouble recording the instruments, Lord, they had trouble holding them back. They had to set the banjo player almost out in the yard."

Another thing that bothered him was the microphone; "it was just right in my nose; it was just two or three inches - my nose almost touched it." Both these problems disturbed him and he still says that he sounds unnatural on the records. Two of the sides recorded were never released, "Watermelon Hanging on de Vine" and "Rock All Our Babies to Sleep"; Jackson himself has always felt it was because the songs contained derogatory racial references.

As for the non-release of so many of the other recordings made at this session, Jackson doesn't recall ever hearing anyone offer an explanation. Nor was there any local publicity when the releases emerged; "they just kind of appeared; I don't think the newspapers printed a single word about the recordings." (Though the danceband recordings of fellow Nashvillian Francis Craig were promoted.)

Thus in 1928, long before the advent of the LP, stereo and the elaborate studios that now make Nashville a world recording center, a portable unit from Victor

Records, working in a makeshift studio, laid the groundwork for the Nashville sound. The old 78s that we occasionally see today bear no information about personnel, producers or recording site - only their music speaks to us. But in the music is the partial explanation for Nashville becoming the music capital it is today.

The Session

Set out below are the recording data on the Nashville session, as preserved in RCA-Victor files, and collated and published in Brian Rust's The Victor Master Book Volume 2 (1925-1936)(Pinner, Middlesex, England, 1969). The data has been slightly rearranged to clarify the day-to-day progress of the sessions. The information comprises (from left to right) matrix number; numbers of takes recorded at that session; title; release number (if any).

Friday, September 28

BINKLEY BROTHERS' CLODHOPPERS

47098-1,2	Watermelon Hanging On De Vine	
47099-1,2	Little Old Log Cabin In The Lane	
47100-1,2	Give Me Back My Fifteen Cents	
47101-1,2	All Go Hungry Hash House	

PAUL WARMACK & HIS GULLY JUMPERS

47102-1,2	Tennessee Waltz	

Monday, October 1

PAUL WARMACK & HIS GULLY JUMPERS

47102-3,4	Tennessee Waltz	V-40067
47103-1,2,3	Put My Little Shoes Away	
47104-1,2	I'm A Little Dutchman	
47105-1,2	The Little Red Caboose Behind The Train	V-40067

Tuesday, October 2

BINKLEY BROTHERS' CLODHOPPERS

47098-3	Watermelon Hanging On De Vine	
47099-3,4	Little Old Log Cabin In The Lane	V-40129
47100-3,4	Give Me Back My Fifteen Cents	V-40048
47101-3,4	All Go Hungry Hash House	21758
47106-1,2	When I Had But Fifty Cents	V-40129
47107-1,2	It'll Never Happen Again	21758
47108-1,2	Rock All Our Babies To Sleep	
47109-1,2	I'll Rise When The Rooster Crows	V-40048

DEFORD BAILEY

47110-1,2	Lost John	
47111-1,2	John Henry	23336,23831
47112-1,2	Ice Water Blues	V-38014
47113-1,2	Kansas City Blues	
47114-1,2	Casey Jones	
47115-1,2	Wood Street Blues	
47116-1,2	Davidson County Blues	V-38014
47117-1,2	Nashville Blues	

Wednesday, October 3

THERON HALE & DAUGHTERS

47118-1,2	Listen To The Mocking Bird	V-40019
47119-1,2,3	Turkey Gobbler	V-40019
47120-1,2,3	Beautiful Valley Waltz	
47121-1,2,3	Kiss Waltz	
47122-1,2,3	Jolly Blacksmith	V-40046
47123-1,2,3	Wink The Other Eye	
47124-1,2	Hale's Rag	V-40046
47125-1,2	The Old Race Horse	

GENTRY FAMILY QUARTET

47126-1,2,3	You Can't Make A Monkey Out Of Me	V-40013
47127-1,2	Hop Along, Sister Mary	

PAUL WARMACK & HIS GULLY JUMPERS

47128-1,2,3	Robertson County	V-40009
47129-1,2	Stone Rag	V-40009
47130-1,2	Hell Broke Loose In Georgia	
47131-1,2	Five Cents	

Thursday, October 4

POPLIN-WOODS TENNESSEE STRING BAND

47132-1,2	Sally, Let Me Chaw Your Rosin Some	
47133-1,2	Flop-Eared Mule	
47134-1,2	Dreamy Autumn Waltz	V-40080
47135-1,2	Lovers' Call Waltz	
47136-1,2	Pray For The Lights To Go Out	
47137-1,2	Are You From Dixie?	V-40080
47138-1,2	Honey, Honey, Honey	
47139-1,2	Robert E. Lee	

Friday, October 5

CROOK BROTHERS' STRING BAND

47140-1,2	My Wife Died On Friday Night	V-40020
47141-1,2	Going Across The Sea	V-40099
47142-1,2,3	Job In Gettin' There	V-40020
47830-1,2	Love Somebody	V-40099

VAUGHAN QUARTET

47143-1,2,3	I Want To Go There, Don't You?	V-40045
47144-1,2	When All Those Millions Sing	V-40071
47145-1,2,3	The Master Of The Storm	21756
47146-1,2,3	Sunlight And Shadows	V-40097
47147-1,2	My Troubles Will Be Over	V-40071
47148-1,2	His Charming Love	V-40045
47149-1,2	What A Morning That Will Be	21756
47150-1,2	In Steps Of Light	V-40097

Saturday, October 6

BLIND JOE MANGUN-FRED SHRIBER (sic)

47151-1,2,3	Mammoth Cave Waltz	
47152-1,2,3	The Rose Waltz	
47153-1,2,3	Bacon And Cabbage	V-40018
47154-1,2,3	Bill Cheetam	V-40018
47816-1	Cradle Song	

GENTRY FAMILY QUARTET

47155-1,2	Jog Along, Boys	V-40013
47156-1,2	In The Evening Take Me Home	
47157-1,2	Jesus Paid It All	
47158-1,2	The Church In The Wild Wood	

NOTE: only original Victor releases are noted, but some masters were leased later to Bluebird, Sunrise, Montgomery Ward and even the British Zonophone label.

THE DIXIELINERS
McGEE BROTHERS & ARTHUR SMITH

THE GREAT HOEDOWN BAND TRADITION OF THE OPRY DEVELOPED through the '20s and finally reached its peak of development in early 1930 with a band called the Dixieliners. There are some people - this writer included - who are prepared to argue that the Dixieliners might well have been the greatest stringband of the time, but in view of the fact that it made no recordings, the assertions must remain qualified and tentative. The band was composed of Arthur Smith, fiddle; Sam McGee, guitar and banjo; and his brother Kirk, banjo and guitar. In Smith and Sam McGee the Dixieliners boasted two of the most influential instrumentalists in the South. Arthur Smith's fiddling affected generations of fiddlers, and Sam McGee virtually invented flat-top solo guitar-picking.

The Dixieliners only existed for seven years, and its members had exciting separate careers both before and after the band was formed. The McGees had worked for years with Uncle Dave Macon and were established artists before they teamed with Smith in 1930; Arthur Smith, for his part, had played on the Opry and informally for years around the area. Both continued to influence the music after 1937. The McGees went on to become one of the Opry's most venerated institutions, playing continuously on it for more than 50 years. But while these three major musicians were joined in a remarkable synthesis in the '30s, the Opry and Opry music had some of its finest hours.

Since the members of the Dixieliners had separate careers, they demand separate stories; and since the McGees were the first established as major artists, the story must begin with them.

When you first see them together, it's not hard to guess that Sam and Kirk are brothers: both are slight, lively men with twinkling eyes and an easy laugh, and both are remarkably approachable and friendly. Both speak in soft, self-assured tones, and it's hard to tell them apart on the 'phone: both have a rather nasal, hollow Williamson County accent, and both salt their talk with rural metaphors and allusions that they have come by honestly. And for professional musicians of 50 years' standing, both are genuinely modest men; the concept of "image" is absolutely alien to them. When they do a show, they dress in neat, conservative outfits of ties, coats and western boots; they will have none of Nudie's spangled uniforms that characterise many of their fellow Opry performers. But the brothers do have distinct personalities. A visitor to Franklin today is likely to find Kirk in his modern, air-conditioned real estate office just off Interstate 65, and Sam on his farm about five miles south of town, working in his tobacco or driving his tractor in the hayfield. Yet there is no simple city-boy/country-boy distinction between them; if Kirk seems a bit more sophisticated and personally complex than Sam, it is rather a personality trait than external circumstance. Musically Kirk is perhaps more aware of the role of the McGee Brothers in country music history; he is generally more conscious of what they have done and what they are doing. Sam is an instinctive and intuitive person; he is more subjective, more submerged in the music than Kirk. Kirk's attitude toward his music suggests the early commercial days of the '30s and '40s, with its direct audience contact, its structured formality, its schedule of tent-shows and state fairs. Sam's musical instincts are more aligned with the old fiddlers and banjo-pickers who used to gather informally at his father's farmhouse and play into the wee hours of the morning in their insatiable love for the music. Kirk himself admits: "Sam's the great showman, and he's always left it to me to get the business." Thus Kirk has usually acted as MC for the brothers' shows, while Sam has usually dominated the musical portions with his technical virtuosity. Though the brothers today find themselves a bit uneasy in these traditional roles, both realise that these differences have helped to keep them together, that one temperament complements the other in a complex but highly rewarding relationship.

> Sam McGee died in an accident on his farm on August 21, 1975. Sadly this chapter now becomes, in part, his obituary. It has been left as it was written, in the present tense: befitting a man whose character and music will live on in the memories of his many friends and admirers.
>
> THE PUBLISHER

[illegible] CONTEST
[illegible] C. D. LOVELESS

[illegible] D. Loveless, formerly [illegible] County and a well [illegible] of Maury the past [illegible] won first prize in a contest with nine other [illegible] in one of the most thrilling [illegible] contests to have been [illegible] here in years. The affair was [illegible] by a large crowd at the [illegible] of Hickman County High school on Monday evening, in charge of [illegible] Bosco Bagby, post commander of Richard Graham post, American Legion, sponsor of the event which [illegible] a series of affairs arranged for the day.

W. B. Divinney of Beaverdam, was declared winner of second honors; and Elihu Peery of Swan, son of E. B. Peery, was given special mention and publicly credited with brilliant playing. The decision of five selected judges was reported as having been influenced by the extreme youth of Peery, the judgees having been under the impression that the contest was between [illegible] fiddlers. These judges were: Mrs. Forrest Nixon, teacher of music, Centerville; Mrs. Houston Allen, violinist and teacher, Nashville; Geo. W. Grimes, Littlelot; Dewey A. Greer, Sugar Creek; and L. W. Aydelott, Swan.

The program began with a medley which partook of the nature of a jumble of seasound, each contestant playing an air unannounced and unknown to other contestants, the judges or the audience.

Only old-fashioned airs were included in the program, which was as follows: "Turkey-in-the-Straw", Kirk McGee; "Leather Breeches", J. F. McGee; "Red Dress", J. A. McGee; "Love Somebody", W. W. Poteet of near Franklin; "Tennessee Wagon", G. Cliff Bates of Beaverdam; "Who's Been Here?", Elihu Peery; "Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo", D. D. Madden; "Sally Gooden", C. D. Loveless; "Arkansas Traveler", Robert Arnold; and "Yellow Creek", W. B. Divinney. Each contestant played a second round of selections, a gradual process of elimination deciding the winner.

During an intermission a dance contest between Bates and Divinney proved a popular feature, the decision having been deferred.

A delightful feature of the program, not listed officially yet proving one of its strong points, was the clever work of Sam McGee of near Franklin, a versatile musician and comedian whose accompaniments and interpolated song numbers kept the audience clamoring for more. Somehow, this gifted young man produced unheard-of music from the guitar; worked tirelessly in accompaniments for practically all contestants, and injected a comedy relief into the program with an infectious smile which won his audience and held them to the close of the program. Requests from thruout the audience kept McGee working during the delayed decision of judges.

Music was always a family affair with the McGees. By the time Sam was born in 1894 his father had already established a reputation in the rural Williamson County community as a fine old time fiddler. He would join forces with his brother, an in-law named Brice Poteet, and other neighbors who would drop in for marathon picking sessions that lasted well up into the night. "Time didn't mean so much to them as it does to so many now," recalls Sam. "They'd stay up 'til two or three o'clock in the morning playing, country waltzes, breakdowns, two-steps. I'd be there, taking it all in, until they made me go to bed." Kirk came along in 1899 and soon both boys were making music as well as listening to it; Sam learned to play the banjo first ("My father wanted somebody to play accompaniment after him") and Kirk learned to play the mandolin and banjo. (Later Sam branched out to guitar, Kirk to guitar and fiddle.) Their first teacher was their father, who knew some "300-400 old fiddle tunes". (Kirk incidentally recalls that while their father played many of the traditional tunes still played today, like "Mississippi Sawyer" and "Bonaparte's Retreat", "he seemed to play them more slowly than they do today. Every note was clear and sharp.") Their father also steeped the boys in local history, such as the nearby Battle of Franklin, and their mother sang them old Civil War ballads and "Christian songs" like "Wayfaring Stranger". Vocal music was transmitted primarily by their mother; there was not much of it at the late-night picking sessions presided over by their father.

By the time both boys were in their early teens they were playing professionally for local dances. "Professionally" may be putting it mildly; they generally got 10 cents a set for playing square dances, and some of the thrifty Tennessee farmers could make sets go on for 15-20 minutes. Sam recalls thinking that he was "really cleaning up" when he made $1.50 playing his first dance about 1906. Though the boys' father would not play with them at dances for religious reasons, Sam and Kirk found other mentors: Sam played with an old fiddler named Willie Williams, while Kirk learned banjo licks from an old man named Felix Bennet. Other music soon came to influence the boys' developing styles. When their father bought a country store, they began to listen to the various black musicians who would hang around the store and play; some of them used the guitar, then (c. 1910) a rare instrument in rural America. Sam remembers being very impressed with the music of a black man named Jim Sapp; his music would "just ring in my head," he recalls. "And I still play his tune, the 'Jim Sapp Rag'." Blacks also taught the brothers about different guitar tunings, and the use of slide notes. By the early '20s both McGees had begun playing the new instrument.

When all is said and done, however, the black blues influence on Sam and Kirk has probably been overstressed by contemporary folklorists eager to make connections between black and white musics. The blues was only one of a number of formative influences. Equally important was popular ragtime and turn-of-the-century parlor music. Sam's first recorded vocal number, a record which he still thinks highly of today, was "If I Could Only Blot Out the Past". This was a sentimental Victorian lament by Gussie L. Davis (actually black, but working in the idiom of Northern popular songwriters); Sam, however, learned it orally from a cousin who had in turn learned it from an older source. When Sam picked up the song in the '20s it was considered "old" then. (It had in fact been published in 1896.) Both brothers also learned a number of songs indirectly from sheet music; Sam had an in-law who could read music, and he would listen to her sing and play a piece, and pick it up "almost at once". Kirk, for his part, attended a rural singing school and recalls learning a lot from the old Vaughn songbooks so popular in middle Tennessee. "Only a Step From the Grave", a cautionary song which he later recorded, was learned out of one of these songbooks. As a result of these varied influences, the McGee repertoire was, and is, one of the most refreshingly eclectic in the business; neither brother had any puritanical notions about song sources; if a song fit, they took it and put the unique McGee stamp on it.

About 1925 Sam met one of the legendary entertainers of the mid-Tennessee area, Uncle Dave Macon. Though Macon had begun flirting with the new-fashioned media a year before, in 1924, when he had made his first records for Vocalion, his forte was old-fashioned person-to-person entertainment. Armed with only a banjo, a bagful of old vaudeville, blues and folk songs, and a fund of well-tested anecdotes and stories, he had begun to tour the countryside putting on "entertainments" in schoolhouses and meeting halls. In 1923 he teamed with fiddler Sid Harkreader, and in 1925 Sam met them both in Franklin. How Uncle Dave and Sid spent the night at Sam's place, and Uncle Dave discovered Sam's musical abilities, has already been told in the chapter on Macon. Two weeks after the meeting Sam closed up his blacksmith shop and went with Uncle Dave and Sid to the Loew's Theater in Birmingham for a two-week stand. Sam appeared in a rustic scene and played a guitar solo for the buck-dancer Bob Bradford. Thus began Sam's 20-year association with Uncle Dave. A year later Kirk joined them on many of the tours.

Many nights the McGees and Uncle Dave held forth alone on a makeshift stage in obscure little schoolhouses. Later, when records and Opry appearances had made the team more widely known, they joined several medicine shows, vaudeville acts and circuses. Kirk recalls working with Sam and Uncle Dave on the Mid-West Circus:

> "We were the only musical act along. There were jugglers, guys that did handstands and all that, but we were the music. We did about 30 minutes on stage, sung and fiddled just like we were back in the mountains. Uncle Dave would get off what jokes there were. I remember the way the act started. Uncle Dave says, 'Boys, what are we going to play for the folks?' And my line was: 'Uncle Dave, let's do the number that we did at the little schoolhouse back over in the mountains the other night. Do you remember what it was?' And he'd say, 'Oh, yes, so-and-so.' And we'd do that number. And we always would up with a square dance; had two or three girls travelling with the show that helped the dance. I was fiddling, did one or two numbers with the banjo, and Sam played guitar."

Once, when the show toured in the Midwest, Kirk recalls:

> "I remember one place we played, Madison, Wisconsin, and mine was the first five-string banjo they ever saw. They couldn't figure out what this thumb string was for. They had seen a tenor banjo, seen it strummed, but they had never seen a banjo picked five-string style."

The Macon apprenticeship (if it can be called that, since both brothers continued to play off and on with Uncle Dave up through the '40s) taught the brothers a lot about music and a great deal more about entertaining. Though they still do numerous Uncle Dave songs, like "Coming From the Ball", "Burglar Bold" and "Late Last Night When Willie Cam Home", both regret they did not have the foresight to preserve more. Sam recalls that Uncle Dave had a trunk full of old jokes and songs written down over the years, and thinks it was sold at the auction of the Macon household following his death in 1952. A natural comedian in his own right, Sam can, if pressed, recreate many of Uncle Dave's stunts and jokes on the banjo but seldom does so in public. "I didn't learn much about playing from him," he says, "but I did learn how to handle an audience."

One of Sam's favorite Uncle Dave stories actually describes a contest where he defeated the older man in a banjo competition.

> "You see, Uncle Dave was rated as one of the greatest up until the time he died. And he was the greatest entertainer, but when it come to playing, there was a lot of them that could beat him playing. Once we were at a contest in Birmingham, about 1926, and both signed up for the banjo contest. Going down there when the time come, Uncle Dave says, 'Sammy, I'll make a deal with you. If you'll give me half you win, I'll give you half I win.' And I said, 'That's a deal!' and we shook hands on it, because Uncle Dave was so well known, he was sure to win. Got down there and they played by numbers and played behind curtains and nobody's name was called and the audience couldn't see who was playing. I played two numbers, one right into the other, 'Old Black Joe' and 'Swanee River'; of course, I couldn't tell much about it, but I thought I was playing pretty good. They went on, maybe thirty banjo players. Well, I got the first on that, and Uncle Dave, he didn't get anything. He says, 'Now don't tell that on me: that'd hurt me.' And I never did tell many people about it 'til after he was dead; I still don't know if it would be right to tell it now, but it's the low-down truth."

Since Macon and the McGees lived only about 30 miles from Nashville, it was natural that they should quickly become regulars on the barn dance show after it got under way. In one of Sam's classic one-liners:

> "They came down here and sais they wanted players who were outstanding in the field - and that's where they found us: out standing in the field."

Sam apparently appeared first on the program with Uncle Dave; however, Judge Hay was so impressed that he wrote Sam a personal letter saying that he hoped Sam could

come back, and that he would help assure the continued success of the show. Kirk also soon appeared on the show, and he and Sam began to play by themselves and with others of the numerous stringbands on the early Opry. For a time Sam played with George Wilkerson's Fruit Jar Drinkers, and both brothers were on the first Opry tour that WSM sent out. With Dr Bate and the Possum Hunters, the McGees toured the Midwestern RKO vaudeville circuit in a successful attempt to popularise stringband music and proselytise for the barn dance. Sam was also beginning to attract attention with his guitar solos, and recalls getting a lot of fan-mail about the type of guitar and the tunings he was using.

By this time Sam was enjoying success with phonograph records as well. He had accompanied Uncle Dave to New York for a Vocalion session in April 1926, and at the suggestion of recording engineer Jack Kapp he completed the session with a few numbers on his own. There were five pieces: two vocals and three incredible guitar solos, "Buck Dancer's Choice", "Franklin Blues" and "Knoxville Blues". Each of the solos is divided into two or three distinct movements, much like a ragtime composition, and contains elements of blues, ragtime and "parlor guitar" licks. These records, as much as anything, defined the McGee style that persists to the present. At the time Sam was gratified to find that the records sold quite well, and he was amazed at the amount of his first royalty check. He went on to appear at four other Macon sessions, and at each he recorded some McGee specialities; Kirk joined him on two of these dates. At the May 1927 Fruit Jar Drinkers session (discussed earlier) the McGee brothers recorded their first duets, including Sam's famous "C-H-I-C-K-E-N" song and "Salty Dog Blues". Shortly after this Sam began recording with his unique Mastertone guitar-banjo, producing masterpieces like "Easy Rider" and "Chevrolet Car" in 1928, and the accompanying part to Macon's "Wreck of the Tennessee Gravy Train" in 1930.

The brothers took their first recording dates pretty much in their stride. Sam:

"I didn't think too much about it - oh, I was pleased and all that - but the thing was, when I got my first royalty check, that really impressed some of my family."

Kirk:

"When I saw my name on a record for the first time, I was at the top of the world then. And it made a splash in the community: it got us more work, more shows at schoolhouses and all. But being on the Opry meant more to me than being on records. Getting on the Opry, that's what everybody wanted to do."

Neither brother went out of his way to keep personal copies of these original records; "people just carried them away; we didn't think they'd ever be valuable."

In 1934, when the Depression had curtailed much recording activity, Kirk sent an audition record of himself, Sam and Uncle Dave to the Gennett company. This resulted in a last great session in August 1934, which produced Sam and Kirk's rendition of "Brown's Ferry Blues", Sam's astounding "Railroad Blues" with its unique guitar pulls and famous vocal -

"Met a little gypsy in a fortune-telling place;
She read my mind, then she slapped my face"

- and a few final numbers with Uncle Dave. But the great recording days of old time music were past; Uncle Dave's recording career was nearly completed, and the McGees were not to record by themselves again until their "rediscovery" in the '50s.

The McGees had actually, by 1934, been playing with Uncle Dave on a rather irregular basis. A more frequent companion was Arthur Smith, a fiddler with a Kirk Douglas grin and a fierce devotion to traditional music.

Arthur Smith was from Humphries County, Tennessee, 40-50 miles due west of Nashville, and spent much of his life in nearby Dickson County. It was a hilly, heavily wooded area that is hard to travel in even today, and the natives were accustomed to making their own entertainment. Arthur came from a large family - he had 13 brothers and sisters - and many of them were musical. His father was an old time fiddler and he soon taught Arthur; the family recalls the boy playing at the age of four, standing the instrument up to play it because he was too small to hold it under his chin. When he was a young man Arthur met an old fiddler named Grady Stringer from Poplar Grove, near Dickson, who taught him much of the famous "Smith style". Kirk McGee recalls that Arthur willingly admitted in later years his debt to Stringer.

By 1925 or thereabouts Arthur began working for the railroad as a lineman. He had a railroad car fixed up to live in and as his work took him around Tennessee he would just put in for the night and take out his fiddle to play. Jack Jackson recalls playing with Arthur in his rialroad "cabin" many nights. About 1929 Arthur joined his brother Homer, a guitar player, and began

playing regularly on the Opry. The appearances were still secondary to Arthur's job with the railroad; he was now working with the NC&SL line. Arthur also, from time to time, played a driving clawhammer style of banjo, and on one or two occasions other members of his family joined him on the Opry programs.

In 1930 Sam and Kirk McGee, having heard Arthur and Homer Smith play on WSM, decided to find out who this interesting fiddler was, and sought him out at his home. The three men found soon that they had a lot in common: each had learned from fiddling fathers, and all three shared a common repertoire of middle Tennessee fiddle tunes. More important, all three were demanding and exacting musicians, superb technicians, and serious about developing their skills. They soon began playing together on WSM, and since the NC&SLRR was commonly called the "Dixie Line" they named their band the Dixieliners.

Kirk McGee recalls that at first he and Sam would pick up Arthur from his job on Friday afternoon, travel throughout the weekend playing dates, and return him for work Monday morning. But as the band became more and more popular through their radio appearances, Arthur was able to quit railroading and become a fulltime professional musician. This was also facilitated by the establishment in the early '30s of the Artists Service Bureau of WSM, which helped the Opry acts get bookings for personal appearances. At first the Dixieliners got about $25 for an appearance, but WSM took 15% of the sum for promoting the tour. Managers usually got another 20%, and a similar amount often went for expenses (usually renting a school or hall for the show). But the work was lucrative enough for the Depression years, and the trio spent most of the early and mid-'30s touring during the week and playing the Opry on Saturday night.

Though both Arthur and the McGees considered themselves musicians first and entertainers second, the McGees had some qualms about giving the public such strong doses of uncompromising old time music. Sam recalls that the typical Dixieliners concert was relatively free from novelty music, and had a very high percentage of old time, traditional, Southern fiddle and stringband music. Arthur especially "didn't have a lot of showmanship", at least at first; "he was very solemn," says Kirk. "He didn't have a lot of flash, I guess you'd say." But Arthur's incredible fiddling more than made up for his lack of showmanship; "he just whipped it out and played," says Kirk, "but they sat up and listened." To be sure, the group did duets and trios on the shows. "Arthur could sing high tenor, and the shows weren't all instrumental," Kirk remembers. And Arthur had a couple of divergences from "pure" fiddling: he played his little tricks with "Mocking Bird", and he developed the knack of singing in harmony with his fiddling, as on numbers like "Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Feet?"

Arthur, in fact, was a rather intense, strong-willed man. He took almost everything seriously, from fiddling to fishing. Kirk's favorite story about Arthur illustrates this:

> "He liked to fish, and down close to Waverly, why, the railroad ran along close to the river there. There was this special hole, he knew the fish were in there. Well, he was gonna dynamite the river and get the fish. Well, you can't just go dynamitin' a river, even back then. So Arthur, he knew the train schedules, 'cause he used to work for the railroad. He decided he would time that dynamite to go off just as the train passed and no one would hear the blast, it'd be covered up by the train, you know. So fixin' up this dynamite, he cut the fuse too long, and when this freight was comin' by, he lit it. And - well, it didn't go off 'til the freight had got way around the hill. All the county heard the blast. But he got the fish. Boy, he got 'em."

Opposite, Sam McGee with Uncle Dave Macon. Above, the Dixieliners at a WSM mike: Sam McGee, Arthur Smith, Kirk McGee.

But in contrast to the rather lively McGees, Arthur was quieter and more conservative in public. Sam recalls that Arthur didn't entirely approve of some of his "cutting up"; a favorite stunt of Sam's, when the group needed to get through a crowd in a hurry, was to throw a "fit": he would scream, jerk, bug his eyes, and Kirk and Arthur would have to "restrain" him. "We got through the crowd," says Sam, "but sometimes Arthur thought it was a little foolish." Kirk tells another anecdote which illustrates this facet of the McGee-Smith relationship.

> "Once we were up in East Tennessee, playing a school up there. There was a fellow, a miller, he came down, he wasn't going to be able to stay for the show. He says to me, 'I just want to see Arthur Smith - I'm not going to see the show, but I just want to see Arthur Smith.' And I pointed him out: 'Why, that's him over there.' And he said, 'My goodness, what a big nose. No wonder that fellow can play the fiddle.' It kind of plagued Arthur. You know, he didn't want nobody to notice his big nose. It wasn't unreasonably big, but he did have a nice one. Well, I told him what the fellow said, and he worried about it for several days."

One of the great tragedies of the '30s is that the original Dixieliners did not record together in their

prime. Most of Arthur Smith's records he did under his own name featured the guitars of the Delmore Brothers, not the McGees. No one really seems to know why this was so, but one answer is that the recording companies were still very cautious about recording in the Depression years. The Delmores had established a good working relationship with Eli Oberstein, Victor's chief travelling A&R man, and were helpful in getting Arthur a contract. In January 1935 Arthur recorded eight fiddle solos for Bluebird, including masterpieces like "Blackberry Blossoms", "Mocking Bird" and "Red Apple Rag". But as in many such cases the fiddling was too pure, too good to be commercial. Oberstein told the Delmores that he would have to drop Smith because of poor sales. Alton Delmore had to break the news to Arthur, who took it hard. Finally Alton suggested coming up with some tunes that would have some vocal content and would be more commercial, and Arthur agreed. Alton explained this new approach to Oberstein and he agreed to give Arthur a second session, again with the Delmores helping. This date produced the best-selling "More Pretty Girls Than One" and assured Arthur of a Bluebird contract. For the rest of his career on Bluebird he had to split his recording repertoire between commercial and traditional tunes; some of the slower, Tin Pan Alley love laments are looked down upon by Smith fans today, but they kept Arthur recording. Besides, he apparently composed a number of the commercial tunes as well as his famous fiddle pieces.

Arthur Smith's fiddling style was more influential in the South than that of any other fiddler except, possibly, Clayton McMichen. He helped bring the smoother "long bow" technique into the Southeast, but unlike many Texas long bow fiddlers Smith played with extraordinary drive and speed. He combined his masterful noting with a tumbling, breakneck pace that made his music almost impossible to dance to, but a treat to listen to. He should be given more credit for anticipating bluegrass-style fiddling, and it is no coincidence that Bill Monroe still speaks highly of him. At any contest in the Southeast, and in fact all over the country, countless "Arthur Smith" tunes still show up today in all manner of guises. "Red Apple Rag", "Goofus", "Love Letters in the Sand", "Florida Blues", "Mocking Bird", "Pig in the Pen", "Peacock Rag" and "Green Valley Waltz" are just some samples of his legacy.

Arthur left the Opry and his friends the McGees in about 1937 to go west to try his hand in western music and cowboy pictures. He played with singers like Jimmy Wakely and toured with groups like the Sons of the Pioneers and singer Molly O'Day. But his style wasn't all that well suited to the demands of Western Swing and Hollywood cowboy music; cowboy star Ray Whitley recalled that Arthur was "very limited" in the kind of music he could play. Arthur finally returned to Nashville, where in the late '50s he was reunited with the McGees (through the efforts of Mike Seeger) and made a number of concert appearances and records. He died in 1973.

Sam and Kirk also went on to other things after the Dixieliners broke up. For a time they provided the musical portion of the comedy act of Sarah and Sallie. In the '40s they toured with Bill Monroe, doing a 30-minute comedy and music set at the end of his show. They continued to play regularly on the Opry, though for a time they were reduced to doing primarily comedy songs like "Barefoot Boy With Boots On", "The Man Who Comes Around" and "C-H-I-C-K-E-N". They too benefited by the folk revival of the '50s, and began touring more in the North and attracting new audiences. Today they remain one of the last bastions of traditional music on the Opry. Sam, at 82, hasn't lost much of his virtuoso guitar style, and Kirk remains the wittiest and cleverest raconteur on the Opry. When President Nixon came to visit the Opry in 1974, when it moved into the new Opry house, a distinguished writer from The New Yorker magazine singled out Sam and Kirk's guitar duet of "San Antonio Rose" as the highlight of the evening. As one of them later said, "Arthur would have been proud."

THE TRANSITION YEARS

THE EARLY DEPRESSION YEARS BROUGHT SLOW BUT RATHER distinct changes to the music of the Opry. The show, and the music, began its shift away from the folk tradition to commercial country music; it started to become less a manifestation of traditional Southern music and more of popular culture. Judge Hay continued to fight his battle to keep the show "down to earth", but he must have sensed even as early as the '30s that it was a losing one. For one thing, as we have seen, older Tin Pan Alley tunes had a habit of entering Southern oral tradition and many an artist in the '20s learned a song orally from his father or grandfather only to discover that it had been published in 1880 or 1890. Judge Hay recognised this, and he wrote in 1946: "The line of demarcation between the old popular tunes and folk tunes is indeed slight. We have just as much trouble, if not more, now sorting them out." In order to attract the kind of audience the station demanded, Hay had to get artists who could make a broad appeal. By the early '30s network radio had established itself and it must have taken considerable willpower for WSM to resist the NBC Saturday-night fare in favor of the Opry.* The hoedown bands and traditional Opry fare, regardless of their authenticity, simply didn't have this broad appeal.

Thus the Opry acquired its first fulltime professional musicians, the Vagabonds, the Sizemores and the Delmore Brothers. These artists devoted themselves fulltime to their music and were thus able to perfect their styles and expand their repertoire in ways the amateur bands could not possibly hope to. With them to the Opry came an awareness of music publishing, performance rights, contracts, royalties, recording sessions. WSM hired a music librarian, Vito Pellettieri, to build up the station's library of sheet music and to take care of copyright clearances, and another announcer-program manager, David Stone, who in the '30s took over more and more of the Opry management. Economic and social pressures were forcing the Opry itself to "go uptown".

Professionalism on the Opry meant changes in both the style and the content of the music. Musical styles other than the traditional Southern ones began to manifest themselves in the music. The Vagabonds injected the smooth, polished, middle-of-the-road harmonies so characteristic of the Midwest's WLS National Barn Dance. Smilin' Jack and his Missouri Mountaineers (Jack Shook with Nap Bastian, Dee Simmons, Bobby Castleman, and Alcyone Bate singing) provided a touch of the very popular western, or cowboy, music. Also joining the crew in 1934 were Zeke Clements and his Broncho Busters. A press release of September 1934 noted:

> "Featured with Zeke is Texas Ruby, a lady with a bass voice, and three cattlemen who left their ponies to plunk a guitar. The Broncho Busters feature western folk songs and a few of the hillbilly tunes."

Blackface comedy made a lasting impression on the show in 1931 when the station hired Lasses White to do "sustaining blackface" and produce a fullscale minstrel show, first heard on Friday nights but later moved to Saturday nights just before the Opry. Lasses teamed with Lee Davis "Honey" Wilds to form the famous team of Lasses and Honey. Variety reported, on November 15, 1932, that the act "will compare with any blackface program on the air, not excepting Amos 'n' Andy." When Lasses went west to Hollywood, Honey continued with a variety of partners in the act called Jamup and Honey.

Another comedian on the show was Robert Lunn, who was on the air by 1934 doing his famous "talking blues" pieces. Lunn, from Franklin, Tennessee, where he was born in 1911, came to Nashville to work as bellboy at the Hermitage Hotel. His amateur musical efforts were observed by WSM's Vito Pellettieri, who engaged him for the Opry. Among Lunn's early sponsors were the Strike-A-Light Match Company and Clark's Teaberry Chewing Gum. His original "Talking Blues" was an immediate radio success and attracted heavy fan-mail.**

But perhaps the greatest infusion of pure comedy came with the arrival, about 1933, of two sisters from Chattanooga who called themselves Sarie and Sallie. In real life Mrs Edna Wilson and Mrs Margaret Waters, the sisters started on WSM weekdays doing dialect sketches. Hay recalled:

> "Their understanding of women who live in rural sections of the South was truly amazing and their ability to put into words these observations was likewise remarkable."

Sarie (Mrs Wilson)'s humor was rather caustic and brittle, while Sallie played the role of a good-natured sister. Hay soon had the duo on the Opry regularly, and they were among the most successful of Opry tour groups, often being teamed with the McGee Brothers.

All of these groups helped move the Opry into a different and more eclectic format. They provide an effective rebuttal to the common notion that Opry stringband instrumental styles gave way suddenly to Roy Acuff and modern country vocal music in 1937. As we have seen, vocal music was a staple on the Opry from

* One program they couldn't resist from the Saturday NBC network was "Amos 'n' Andy"; in the early '30s the Opry simply stopped at 9.00 pm while WSM inserted the famous blackface show.

** See the liner notes to Lunn's Starday LP "The Original Talking Blues Man - Robert Lunn with Jug and Washboard Band" (SLP228).

GRAND OLE OPRY

the first year with artists like Uncle Dave Macon and Dad Pickard. But it is only in the early '30s that vocal music really begins to vie seriously with instrumental as the dominant Opry style. And three groups really blazed the trail for this newer kind of music: the Vagabonds, who came first but lacked a genuinely rural orientation; Asher Sizemore and Little Jimmy, who had a rural repertoire but little distinctive style; and finally the Delmore Brothers, who combined both rural style and rural content in a performing manner that was to affect all of country music.

THE VAGABONDS

Bill Malone, author of Country Music, U.S.A., the definitive history of the music, in a recent discussion of musical changes on the Opry said of the Vagabonds:

> "The real change in the music came in the early 1930s, when a number of groups began to come to the Opry, drawn by the growing popularity of the show. Really altering the future was a group called the Vagabonds. The Vagabonds were a very smooth-sounding trio . . . who were very much aware of the kind of music that was nationally popular in the 1930s and tried to inject such music into their performances. But it wasn't so much the songs they sang that were important; it was the style in which they did them. The Vagabonds anticipated the smooth, crooning style that was later to become paramount with Eddy Arnold."*

Though other Opry performers before tham had made tentative attempts to break away from the old time mold, the Vagabonds made little pretense at all of being a group of rustics singing old traditional Southern melodies. They were suave, sophisticated, thoroughly professional city slickers - yet they were one of the most popular groups on the show in the early '30s.

The original Vagabonds that came to WSM in 1931 were Herald Goodman, Curt Poulton (the guitarist) and Dean Upson. The Vagabonds represented a number of important firsts for the Opry. They were the first major group on the show that was not composed of native Southerners; all three were from the Midwest, and, as Judge Hay said, "each the son of a minister of the gospel." They were among the first groups that had had formal musical training; not only did they know how to read music, but they knew the ins and outs of the music business, including publishing and copyright laws. They were perhaps the first group that did not feature its own instrumental band music for backup; most of the time they sang accompanied only by Poulton's guitar. They saw themselves strictly as singers, not as instrumentalists. And finally, and most importantly, they were the first fully professional group to be on the Opry; that is, they were the first regular starring group that depended on its music alone for a living.

Opposite, top left, an early Opry tent-show, c. 1930. Top right, the Vagabonds. Center right, Lasses and Honey, and left Lasses White's full minstrel troupe in the early '30s. Bottom, Smilin' Jack and his Missouri Mountaineers: unknown (accordion), Owen Bradley (vibes), Mack Magaha (fiddle), leader Jack Shook (guitar), Dee Simons, Nap Bastian (guitar), George Cooper (bass). Magaha was later to become a prominent bluegrass fiddler, and Bradley a distinguished Nashville A&R man and producer.

The trio was originally organised by Dean Upson at WLS in Chicago in 1925. In the beginning it had a different personnel, but in 1930, as the group began a two-year run over KMOX, St Louis, Herald Goodman joined them. Curt Poulton had joined Upson in 1928. By the time they came to the Opry they had already broadcast over the national NBC and CBS networks, and had spent 52 weeks on the Anheuser-Busch program on NBC. They had written a very successful hit song, "When It's Lamp Lighting Time in the Valley", one of the earliest and most enduring country standards. After they arrived on the Opry they went on to record other successful numbers like "Ninety-Nine Years", "Little Shoes" and "Little Mother of the Hills".

As Malone noted, the importance of the Vagabonds was not merely in their repertoire, though that was different from other Opry members'. A 1933 WSM pressbook, sent out to theaters interested in booking Opry acts, noted that the Vagabonds could do "either popular or heart songs". "Popular" does not seem to have meant Broadway or show tunes, if we can judge from their recordings, but rather older Tin Pan Alley material or original compositions. They also included a number of "sacred" tunes - not gospel songs, but usually old hymns - in their performances. But regardless of what they performed, they stylised it with their perfect, complex harmonies. Judge Hay realised this and accepted it. He wrote:

> "They could hardly be called 'country boys', but they loved folk music and handled it with a background of formal musical training, which smoothed it as against the usual renditions handled in a strictly rural fashion."

By the overall standards of pop music in general, which in the early '30s saw the development of the Mills Brothers, the Boswell Sisters and the Rhythm Boys, the Vagabonds were not all that unusual; but on a stage where most of the singing had hitherto been the traditional old time type of Uncle Dave Macon and the Pickards, the Vagabonds were a sensation.

The Vagabonds also made a personal impression on the rest of the Opry cast. As fulltime professionals with show business experience, and as special "stars" with special privileges, they incurred a certain amount of awe and at times resentment. Alton Delmore recalled, on one particular occasion,

> "They were one of the best and most accurate singing groups I have ever heard since or before. They were leaving soon for their annual vacation away from WSM, as they always did. And we got the crumbs when they left. We were never recognised by our bosses like the Vagabonds were. . . ."

Alton's attitude was probably not too untypical of the Saturday-night regulars'. The difference was obvious even on tours: the 1933 pressbook described above reveals the following pay scale for the group:

1 time per week	$75.00
3 times per week	$175.00
6 times per week	$300.00

This is about three times the rate listed for a more traditional Opry band, the Dixieliners. Part of this was due, no doubt, to the fact that the Vagabonds were simply very popular, and had a wide-based audience, not only in the South but also in the Midwest. But it was

* Speech before the National Popular Culture Association, St Louis, May 1975.

also a reflection of the fact that the group was making it way by music alone. This is also why the Vagabonds were anxious to record, and were probably the only regular Opry group to record much in the early Depression years. In 1933, for instance, they did some 31 sides for Bluebird, and most of them did well enough to be reissued several times. Judge Hay summed up the essence of their professionalism:

> "Having had considerable experience in the show business, they were publicity conscious and used that knowledge in their new connection /with WSM/. They went in for pictures and stories which added to their build-up."

And the Opry regulars, seeing the way of the future, watched and learned.

The Vagabonds remained on the Opry for some time, with only a few personnel changes. Herald Goodman left in the late '30s to form his own band, and Curt Poulton became active in organising and emceeing tours and playing guitar spots. Dean Upson eventually became an executive with WSM and the Opry itself. But in their day they brought to the Opry the soft, smooth, middle-of-the-road vocal sound that was becoming so characteristic of the country's other great country music station, WLS. And they vastly broadened the appeal of the Opry sound.

ASHER SIZEMORE & LITTLE JIMMY

The shift on the Opry away from the instrumental format to the vocal format manifested itself in a variety of ways, but one of the most significant was sentimentalism. Child performers have always been popular on the American stage, and the Opry had its share of these in the popular Pickard Family. When the Pickards left the Opry for good in 1933, their sentimental tradition was passed on to 26-year-old Asher Sizemore and his small son Jimmy. The Sizemores flourished on the Opry from 1933 to 1942, and "Little Jimmy" became in a short time the most popular pre-teen in country music.

Asher Sizemore himself came from the mountains of eastern Kentucky; he was born in Manchester and began his career as a bookkeeper for a coal mining company in Pike County. (Characteristically Judge Hay romanticised this into Asher being a coal miner.) He married Odessa Foley, the daughter of a minister, and a few years later their first son, Jimmy, was born, on January 29, 1928 at Paintsville, Kentucky, on the Big Sandy River. By 1931 Asher was appearing on radio in Huntington, West Virginia, and within a year had moved on to Cincinnati (WCKY) and Louisville (WHAS). WSM's Harry Stone was responsible for hiring Asher and Jimmy for the station in 1933. They were one of the first groups the station actively sought out to hire, and one of the first fully professional groups on the station.

Because Asher and Little Jimmy were a fully professional group, and because WSM was still not paying its country artists a living wage, the duo had to find ways to supplement their radio income. They tried recording, going to San Antonio in 1934 to do some dozen sides for Victor's Bluebird label. The records were not immensely successful, but some attracted attention. One was "Little Jimmie's Goodbye to Jimmie Rodgers" (B-5445), a topical lament about the famous "Singing Brakeman" who had died the year before. Others were "Chawin' Chewin' Gum", an old Carter Family tune, and "How Beautiful Heaven Must Be", one of Uncle Dave Macon's favorite numbers. Asher and Little Jimmy also went on tours, but quickly found their most successful way of supplementing their radio income was through the mail-order sale of songbooks. For a time in the '30s, starting in 1933, before they came to WSM, Asher began to publish one of these songbooks almost annually. Judge Hay was impressed with the idea, which was new to Opry artists then. He later recalled:

> "They got out a song book which sold by the thousands. The fact is, it was a phenomenal success. They broke records with their personal appearances on the road and people crowded into the studio to watch them work."

Asher and Jimmy specialised in "heart songs" - sentimental numbers full of references to mother, death, heaven and morality. Their first (1933) folio (the cover of which is reproduced below) listed, on the contents page, the following titles, in this order: "Shake Hands With Mother Again", "Sweet Hour of Prayer",

"The Dying Boy's Prayer", "The Dying Cowboy" and "The Dying Girl's Farewell". The duo always closed their programs with a prayer, and had a noted minister, Thomas B. Ashley, write the introduction to their songbook.

In 1933, when Little Jimmy was five, his father boasted that "he can sing from memory more than two hundred songs and there are numerous others that he joins in with dad on the chorus." Asher also reported that "after each engagement Little Jimmy always asks the question, 'Dad, how much dough did we make tonight?'" Judge Hay, not quite used to seeing so young a child enter upon so professional a career, was concerned "for fear the emotional strain would be too much for Jimmy." Jimmy, however, survived quite well, and by the late '30s the act was expanded to include his younger brother "Buddy Boy". World War II temporarily broke up the act.

Asher himself came from an area rich in traditional music, and one might well expect him to have become an excellent populariser of traditional material. But this was not the case. His folios contain a surprisingly small percentage of genuine traditional songs; popular pieces like "Barbara Allen", "What'll I Do With the Baby-O" and "Put My Little Shoes Away" are there, but most of the rest are 19th-century heart songs. Hay explained that Asher was very good at talking to an audience and introducing his songs, so the song material itself might not really have been a large part of their success. Asher was certainly as aware as Hay of the value of image, and sought by both tours and songbooks to expand the nature of radio as a medium. In this, certainly, Asher and Jimmy were pioneers.

Little Jimmy lives today in Arkansas, and still does radio work. Buddy Boy, the younger son, was killed in Korea in 1950. Asher died in Arkansas some years ago.

THE DELMORE BROTHERS

The third and probably most important of the transition groups on the early Opry was the Delmore Brothers, who joined the show in the spring of 1933. To the casual fan the Delmores, Alton and Rabon, might be seen as just another duet act from the '30s, when the music suddenly blossomed with popular acts like the Callahan Brothers, the Monroe Brothers, the Shelton Brothers and the Bolick Brothers (the Blue Sky Boys). But the Delmores were far more than just another duet act; they were one of the very first of these acts, and they retained their popularity longer than many of the others. They generally sang original songs, and they sang them in a close-harmony style that influenced generations of country performers. Though they were certainly a transitional group on the Opry, they were in fact one of the most vital transitional groups in country music history; they linked the blues, ragtime and shapenote singing of the rural 19th-century South with the polished, complex, media-oriented styles of the '30s and '40s.

The Delmores were transitional in another sense, too, for they were among the first country acts to appeal to a wider audience. As we have seen, any fully professional act on the Opry in the early '30s - that is, any act trying to make a living at its music - had to appeal to a wider audience than the barn dance one; they had to be able to hold down weekday shows on WSM in order to get enough of a salary to exist. The Delmores learned to do this well, and even to transmit this appeal to records; some of these, like "Beautiful Brown Eyes" and "More Pretty Girls Than One" (both recorded with Arthur Smith), were among the first "crossover" hits in the music, selling to both rural and urban audiences. Like the Sizemores and the Vagabonds, the Delmores were literate and sophisticated, but unlike them they had a genuine folk base for their music. The Delmores had not only style but content - not a content derived from 19th-century sentimental songs or popular heart songs, but from the rich folk traditions of northern Alabama. And this content was filtered through the creative imagination of one of the music's finest composers, Alton Delmore.

Though much of the Delmores' success came from their innate skill and drive, part of it came from their being in the right place at the right time. Jazz critic Whitney Balliett has written of the importance of the development of the hand mike in the changing styles of American pop singers: it moved them away from the loud, booming style of the acoustic era to the subtle nuances of the Crosbys and Sinatras. A similar argument could be advanced for the development of country singing. In the '20s it was necessary for the Carter Family or Riley Puckett to generate enough volume to allow them to be heard under rather primitive staging conditions. But by the '30s radio had made it possible to sing softly and still be heard, and by the middle of the decade sound systems had developed to the point where in-person concerts could accomplish the same end. The first generation of country stars - Jimmie Rodgers, the Carters, the Skillet-Lickers, Uncle Dave Macon - could not depend entirely upon radio to establish their reputations; their artistic style was not really suited to the new medium. But the second generation sensed the absolute need to fit their art to the medium, and the Delmores were among the first of this generation. With radio their carefully crafted harmonies could be appreciated, and their effective lyrics understood.

Both brothers were born in Elkmont, Alabama - Alton on Christmas Day, 1908, and Rabon on December 3, 1916. Their parents were tenant farmers who struggled to eke

out a living in the rocky red clay of north Alabama, and the brothers had hard times for much of their early life. But musical talent ran in the family: the boys' mother and uncle both were skilled gospel singers who could read and write music. Their Uncle Will, in fact, was a wellknown area music teacher who had composed and published several hymns and gospel tunes. Often the entire Delmore family would sing at revival meetings and all-day singings held in tiny churches throughout the South. Alton's mother taught him to read the old shapenote music, and he learned even more by attending the various singing schools held in rural churches.

By the time Rabon was 10 - about 1926 - the brothers were playing together and singing the close-harmony duets for which they later became famous. They sang informally in the community and at local fiddling contests. Alton recalled later that a major influence on their singing had been the amateur gospel quartets that flourished (and still flourish) in the

rural South. Rabon was also learning to play the fiddle at this time, and Alton often backed him on guitar. The brothers began to win first place repeatedly in the singing divisions of the Limestone County area fiddling contests, and local newspapers began to praise them. Alton, who was working at this time as a printer and a cotton gin hand, recalled: "We never tried to sing loudly. We couldn't have if we had wanted to because we both had soft voices."

Their first successful appearance at a fiddlers' contest was on the Elk River in western Limestone County. Alton wrote later:

> "It came time for Rabon and me to play and some of the fine bands had already been on the stage and made a big hit with the crowd. . . . The only thing was we could not play as loud as the others had played. . . . We picked out two of our best ones. I think the first one was 'That's Why I'm Jealous of You'. We sang it a lot in those days and it was a good duet song. When we first began to sing the crowd was kind of noisy but we hadn't got through the song before there was a quietness everywhere. You could have almost heard a pin drop. Then we knew we had a good chance at the prize, even if there were only two of us. When we finished there was a deafening roar of applause. If the crowd had not quieted down there probably would never have been an act called The Delmore Brothers."*

Encouraged by this success, Alton began writing radio stations and record companies asking for a tryout; he got firm but polite refusals. Then the Delmores met up with the Allen Brothers, a successful duet from nearby Chattanooga who had recorded a string of records for Columbia and Victor, including a lot of "mountain blues" material like "Salty Dog". The Allens were sympathetic to Alton's plight, and suggested that he begin stressing his original material in their auditions. They did this and in 1931 landed an audition with Columbia Records.

Throughout the '20s Columbia had dominated the old time record market with their famed 15000-D series, but the Depression was hitting the record business hard by 1931, and the end of the splendid series was soon to come. The Delmores' single coupling, "Alabama Lullaby" and "Got the Kansas City Blues" (Columbia 15724-D), which they recorded in Atlanta on Wednesday, October 28, was one of the last releases in the series, and it could not have sold many copies, for the company's initial pressing order was only for 700. The promised contract was not forthcoming; in fact, Columbia itself was to be virtually out of the record business - at least temporarily - in a couple of years' time. But the trip to Atlanta had other benefits. The brothers met several of the great artists from Columbia's catalogue, including Riley Puckett, Clayton McMichen, Fiddlin' John Carson and Blind Andy Jenkins. These greats of a passing age all praised the Delmores' singing. Alton recalls that John Carson told the other musicians in the studio, "Now if you want to hear some real singing, just shut up and listen to these two boys and then I'll bet you'll be glad you did." Then John and Andy Jenkins asked the brothers to play "a song or two" just for them. "What would you like us to play?" Alton asked. "Oh, just anything you boys want to sing and we'll help you," replied John. Alton recalled,

> "I was dubious about the last part of his statement but we fired into 'Left My Gal in the Mountains' and before we were half way through all those record stars were over there with us, singing along just like a choir. It was, and still remains, one of my biggest thrills of all time in show business."

Alton then began writing to Harry Stone, the manager of WSM. "We all knew," he said later, "that the Grand Ole Opry was the greatest show on the air at the time. Or at least people in the South thought so, and we were Southerners." But for a year Stone wrote back offering little encouragement. The brothers hung on.

> "We were still playing school houses and any other place we could book and still the old fiddlers' contests, and we brought home some money nearly every time - precious money that kept some food on the table, along with daddy's help. We were treated almost as celebrities in our home Limestone County, Alabama, but we didn't have the money to make the thing real."

Finally in 1932 the boys auditioned successfully for the Opry, and they were given a regular 30-minute slot, replacing the Pickard Family.**

The Delmores' stay on the Opry was stormy and controversial at times, but it gave them the exposure and national audience they needed. They became popular at once, and soon they were receiving more mail than any other Opry performer except Uncle Dave Macon. They read much of their mail, made up lists of numbers that were requested, and Alton even typed many personal letters in reply. They had an unusual rapport with their audiences, but were disappointed at not being able to get any tour bookings.

In April 1933 the brothers journeyed to Chicago to make their first Bluebird records. They drove up with that other popular singing group from the Opry, the Vagabonds. Eli Oberstein was in charge of the session, at which 17 sides were recorded, including two of the brothers' most enduring numbers, "Brown's Ferry Blues" and "Gonna Lay Down My Old Guitar". Alton had composed the former as a contest song. When they had almost been bested by a group singing "comic" songs, he decided that if the public wanted comic songs he would give them one. He named it for an old ferry site near the Delmore home on the Tennessee River. The brothers had been playing on WSM for a year before Harry Stone heard them doing the number in a jam session and insisted they include it on their programs.

The Delmores soon became the most successful recording group on the Opry. Yet during their early days on the show they were at times struggling to make ends meet. Like the Vagabonds and Sizemores, they needed weekday appearances on WSM to subsist; but unlike them they had not come to the station as seasoned entertainers. Alton described their plight this way:

> "There were two classes of entertainers at WSM. The staff members, the ones that got paid every

* This quote, and most of Alton's other reminiscences in this chapter, is from his autobiography Truth Is Stranger Than Publicity (see note on p. 77).

** The brothers almost blew their audition, however, when they tried to sing "When It's Lamp Light-Lighting Time in the Valley". The Vagabonds were in the room and walked out when they heard the first bars. It had been their hit, and they had been performing it constantly on the Opry for months (though the best-selling *record* had been another group's).

Top, Arthur Smith, Dr Bate, Uncle Dave and George Hay admire a WSM award. Center, the Opry personnel pose in business suits, c. 1934-5. Bottom, the "transported" Opry, on stage at the Hillsboro Theater, c. 1935.

week and knew they had a good job and security, and the other class, the Grand Ole Opry talent, who played only once a week and were paid a very token fee for each Saturday night. Rabon and me found ourselves in the middle of the group. We didn't get a good salary but we played three times a week on the morning shows and sometimes on other programs they had when they needed someone like us."

The brothers finally solved this problem by booking personal appearances, first with Uncle Dave Macon, and later with Kirk McGee, Arthur Smith and a very young Roy Acuff.

The Delmores left the Opry in 1938, plagued by personal problems and personality conflicts. In the next 10 years they moved across the South, appearing on a dozen stations from Cincinnati to Del Rio, Texas. They continued to create fine music, and many of their greatest triumphs were to occur after they had left the Opry. The King records they made in the '40s and early '50s became at least as popular as their earlier ones. But neither of them ever forgot that their initial audience was built up during their stint on the Opry. Rabon died in 1952, Alton in 1964.

COMING! SPECIAL ATTRACTION
Radio Star's Revue
21 People
In a Big Tent
2 DAYS, SEPT. 2nd and LABOR DAY
FIRST SHOW AT 1 P. M.
Fair Grounds Princeton, Ind.
GRAND OLD OPERA FROM W.S.M.

DR. HUMPHREY BATE AND HIS POSSUM HUNTERS
with ALCYONE BATE, Blues Artist
WSM RADIO ARTISTS, BRUNSWICK RECORDING ARTIST, RKO VAUDEVILLE ARTISTS

DELMORE BROTHERS AND KIRK McGEE
RECORDING ARTISTS AND RADIO ENTERTAINERS FROM WSM.
SOMETHING DIFFERENT IN HARMONY, SINGING, FIDDLIN', GUITAR AND BANJO PLAYIN'.
A GENUINE HILL BILLY ACT FROM THE TENNESSEE MOUNTAINS

JOHN C. DENTON
Comedy and Mystery Show

DENTON & DENTON
IN A
Banquet of Magic and Illusions

DOROTHY AND LOUIS
IN A
Special [illegible] Act

Comfortable Seats
[illegible] the Big [illegible]
One Solid Hour of Real Entertainment

In their musical style the Delmores homogenised two rather distinct forms of Southern music: blues and white gospel hymns. The blues is apparent most in their guitar-playing, which has been compared to the "blues ragtime" style of Blind Boy Fuller; the white gospel tradition surfaces in their harmonies, and in the call-and-response pattern used in many of their arrangements.

Alton composed most of the duet's songs around a rather odd tenor guitar lead. Alton taught Rabon how to play the tenor guitar; "I had brought it home with me from Decatur. I taught him the first chords on it and I played it like a tenor banjo. So that's the way he learned to play it." Alton himself developed into a formidable flat-top guitarist; he once amazed Riley Puckett by outplaying him on his own "A Rag". He had other guitar influences than the blues artists around northern Alabama. In his late teens he spent a long time convalescing from an illness;

"I started listening to the various recording artists, Jimmie Rodgers, Carson Robison, Nick Lucas, Riley Puckett and Eddie Lang. These are the fellows I copied mostly. I would take a little from the style of the first one and then the other till I had my own style. And besides playing some of their runs and riffs I emphasized the melody and would play the song like anyone would play it on the piano or violin or any other lead instrument, and that is where my style was different."

In singing, Rabon in most cases sang harmony and Alton lead, but here too the Delmores were innovators. Because of Alton's almost perfect pitch and his ability to read music, the brothers could switch parts back and forth even within the same song. Instead of one singing the high part all the way through, as was usual in much traditional gospel music, the brothers would let the range of the song, and the range of their own voices, dictate who sang what parts of the song. Even then the hard grind of personal appearances took its toll of the brothers' voices. Alton recalls the February 1937 Bluebird session in Charlotte, North Carolina - the one that produced their version of "Southern Moon". He had been fighting a cold and could hardly sing at all; in order to record, the brothers had to tune their guitars down much lower than normal. The records

were good, but Alton felt he did permanent damage to his voice, and was never again able to sing as high as he could earlier.

Alton's lyrics have been so influential on country songwriting that it is hard today to appreciate how original they were in the '30s. They are an odd fusion: the unabashed sentimentality of 19th-century popular music and the frank, realistic portrayal of marital difficulties, unrequited love and rambling, so characteristic of modern country lyrics. "Alabama Lullaby", one of the first songs Alton wrote, and the brothers' theme song, is a fine example of those classic "take me home" country songs that celebrate the bucolic picture of rural America. "Gonna Lay Down My Old Guitar" seems autobiographical at first hearing, but was written at the dawn of Alton's career.

Of course, the Delmores recorded other songs than their own, such as the traditional "Frozen Girl" and the Victorian "Lorena the Slave". Their early repertoire also included songs by writers as diverse as Tom Darby and Jimmie Tarlton ("Columbis Stockade Blues") and Fred Rose (who had a program of piano music on WSM in the early '30s, just before the Opry came on).

Alton composed altogether over a thousand songs, and in fact wrote under four other names. His songs were recorded by pioneers of country music: Uncle Dave Macon recorded some, and Jimmie Rodgers was set to record one before he died. More recently, his songs have been recorded by Tennessee Ernie Ford, Glen Campbell, and even Doug Sahm and Bob Dylan.

Yet Alton had a secret side of his writing virtually unknown to the public: he aspired to be a writer of stories and novels.

> "I had always wanted to write novels and short stories but I didn't get much encouragement from the folks at home. Sometimes people just don't understand a fellow when he is trying to be something they think is away off in the stars. . . . I am still what is termed a frustrated writer. . . but my song writing has helped me to stand the push you get for being creative. The songs satisfy partially, but not wholly, my desire to do something lastingly worthwhile."

Alton in fact completed, before he died, the largest part of a remarkable autobiography, Truth Is Stranger Than Publicity, which may do much to establish his reputation as a "serious" writer. But the music he and Rabon made probably reached and moved more people than many novelists do, and it helped move the Opry, and country music, into a new era.

RECORD LISTING

This listing (compiled by Charles K. Wolfe and Tony Russell) covers two groups of recordings: those made by Opry regulars during the period treated in this book, and those that some of them made in later years, chiefly in the "LP era" of the last 20 years. The former group has been documented only in respect of LP reissues of the original recordings, and very obscure or long-deleted LPs (and EPs) have been omitted. The latter group has been treated more cursorily, except in cases where the artist concerned has remained associated with the Opry, e.g. Sam McGee. Several artists recorded prolifically after World War II (e.g. the Delmore Brothers), but because they were less closely associated with the Opry those recordings are not comprehensively listed here. Track-by-track listings are provided only for reissues of pre-World War II recordings.

All LPs listed here originated in the US except those distinguished by one of the following abbreviations:

(E) = British issue
(G) = German issue
(Au) = Austrian issue

In cases where an LP has been issued both in the US and abroad, the US catalog number is given first.

Asterisked issues are anthologies containing only some titles relevant to this study.

Not all the records listed here are presently available. We have included certain deleted items because of their importance, and the possibility of their future reinstatement. In fact, at the time of writing, the majority of listed LPs are generally available; but, in fairness both to ourselves and to the reader, we would emphasise that the inclusion of a record in this listing is no guarantee of its availability.

ANTHOLOGIES

At the time of writing, no anthology devoted exclusively to early Opry artists exists. However, two such projects are under way:

BLUEBIRD [2-LP set, catalogue number unknown, scheduled for 1976 release]: Grand Ole Opry Pioneer Stars. Including Victor/Bluebird recordings by Deford Bailey, Binkley Brothers' Dixie Clodhoppers, Crook Brothers, Delmore Brothers, Whit Gaydon, Theron Hale, Bradley Kincaid, Lasses & Honey, Uncle Dave Macon, Blind Joe Mangrum & Fred Shriver, Bill Monroe, Poplin-Woods Tennessee String Band, Asher Sizemore & Little Jimmy, Arthur Smith, The Vagabonds, Paul Warmack's Gully Jumpers.

COUNTY 541, 542 [two separate LPs, scheduled for late 1975 or early 1976 release]: titles unknown. Including 25 titles by various artists. We have almost complete details from County Records of the selections planned for these LPs, and this data is included in the relevant artist sections below.

INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS & GROUPS

DEFORD BAILEY

County 541/2 Muscle Shoals Blues/Pan American Blues
Herwin 201* John Henry Blues
Roots(Au) RL-320* Davidson County Blues/Ice Water Blues

DR HUMPHREY BATE

County 531* Ham Beats All Meat
541/2 My Wife Died Saturday Night/Eighth of January/Throw the Old Cow Over the Fence

BINKLEY BROTHERS' DIXIE CLODHOPPERS

County 504* Rise When the Rooster Crows
541/2 Give Me Back My Fifteen Cents

CROOK BROTHERS

County 541/2 Going Across the Sea/Jobbin Gettin' There
Starday SLP-182 Opry Old Timers (with Sam & Kirk McGee)

DELMORE BROTHERS

County 402 The Nashville Blues/Blue Railroad Train/Broken Hearted Lover/Happy on the Mississippi Shore/Til the Roses Bloom Again/Brown's Ferry Blues/Back to Birmingham/Don't You See That Train/Big River Blues/Gonna Lay Down My Old Guitar/Fugitive's Lament/Honey I'm Ramblin' Away
508* No Drunkard Can Enter There
RCA LPV-532/(E) RD-7870* The Cannon Ball
LPV-548* They Say It Is Sinful to Flirt

King 589 16 All-Time Favorites
785 30th Anniversary Album
910/Pine Mountain PMR-218 In Memory
1090 Best of the Delmore Brothers
Pine Mountain PMR-289 The Delmore Brothers
PMR-299 Songs by the Delmore Brothers

THERON HALE & HIS DAUGHTERS

County 541/2 Hale's Rag/Jolly Blacksmith
RBF 18* Hale's Rag

SID HARKREADER

(The following items were recorded by Harkreader

together with Grady Moore /see pp 67-8/.)
County 541/2 Old Joe
JEMF 103* Bully of the Town

SAM & KIRK McGEE

Bear Family(G) BF15517 (scheduled for release in late 1975: including 16 early items by the McGee Brothers)
County 511* Railroad Blues (Sam McGee solo)
523* Knoxville Blues (Sam McGee solo)
541/2 Chevrolet Car (Sam McGee solo)/Old Master's Runaway/Brown's Ferry Blues/Salt Lake City Blues
Yazoo L-1024* Buck Dancer's Choice/Franklin Blues (Sam McGee solos)
Arhoolie 5012 Grand Dad of the Country Guitar Pickers (Sam McGee)
Dailey DR-1009/MBA 6066S Flat-Top Pickin' Sam McGee
Davis Unlimited DU-33021 God Be With You Until We Meet Again (Sam McGee & Bill Lowery)(scheduled for fall 1975 release)
Folkways FA2379 Old Timers of the Grand Old Opry (McGee Brothers & Arthur Smith)
FTS31007 Milk 'Em in the Evening Blues (McGee Brothers & Arthur Smith)
Gues Star 1501 Whoop 'Em Up Cindy (as by Sam & Kirk McGee; actually Kirk McGee & Zeke Clements)
1505 Stars of the Grand Ole Opry (McGee Brothers)
MBA 6067S Pillars of the Grand Ole Opry (McGee Brothers)
Starday SLP-182 Opry Old Timers (with Crook Brothers)

UNCLE DAVE MACON

Camden CAL-898* I'll Tickle Nancy/I'll Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy
(E) CDN-5111* Give Me Back My Five Dollars/Railroadin' and Gamblin'
County 502* Death of John Henry
515* Don't Get Weary Children
521 Sail Away Ladies/Governor Al Smith/Grey Cat on the Tennessee Farm/Way Down the Old Plank Road/Take Me Home Poor Julia/Walking in Sunlight/Rabbit in the Pea Patch/Gwine Back to Dixie/Going Across the Sea/Worthy of Estimation/Rock About My Saro Jane/Just One Way to the Pearly Gates
541/2 Railroadin' and Gamblin'/two others (as yet unspecified)
Decca DL-4760/Ace of Hearts(E) AH135/MCA(Japan) MCL-1071 Farm Relief/Tom and Jerry/I'm the Child to Fight/Kissing on the Sly/Carve That Possum/Late Last Night When My Willie Came Home/Tell Her to Come Back Home/Tennessee Jubilee/The Cross-Eyed Butcher and the Cackling Hen/Sleepy Lou/Sourwood Mountain Medley/Uncle Dave's Travels-Part 1/I'm a-Goin' Away in the Morn/Shall We Gather at the River
Folk Variety(G) FV12503 Hop High Ladies, The Cake's All Dough/Uncle Dave's Travels-Part 2/Part 3/Part 4/Travelin' Down the Road/Molly Married a Travelin' Man/Bake That Chicken Pie/The Man Who Rode the Mule Around the World/Life and Death of Jesse James/Poor Old Dad/Since Baby's Learned to Talk/He's Up With the Angels Now/Summertime on the Beeno Line/Peek a Boo/The Gayest Old Dude in Town/Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy
Folkways FP253/FA2953* Way Down the Old Plank Road/Buddy Won't You Roll Down the Line
Historical HLP-8006 Fame Apart From God's Approval/The Death of John Henry/Old Ties/One More River to Cross/Never Make Love No More/Hop High Ladies, The Cake's All Dough/I'm the Child to Fight/Arcade Blues/She Wouldn't Give Me Sugar in My Coffee/Wait Till the Clouds Roll By/Buddy Won't You Roll Down the Line/Sleepy Lou
RBF RF51 Cumberland Mountain Deer Race/All in Down and Out Blues/From Earth to Heaven/The Gal That Got Stuck on Everything She Said/I've Got the Mourning Blues/Hold That Wood-pile Down/Johnny Gray/Jordan Is a Hard Road to Travel/My Daughter Wished to Marry/The Old Man's Drunk Again/Over the Road I'm Bound to Go/Rise When the Rooster Crows/Go Along Mule (labelled as Tom and Jerry)/Two-in-One Chewing Gum/When the Train Comes Along/Wreck of the Tennessee Gravy Train
19* Jesus, Lover of My Soul
RCA CPL2-0466* Railroadin' and Gamblin'
LPV-507* Cumberland Mountain Deer Race/Railroadin' and Gamblin'
Tennessee Folklore Society TFS101 (scheduled for 1975/6 release: including informal home recordings made in 1950 by Charles Faulkner Bryan)
Vetco LP101 Rise When the Rooster Crows/Hold On to the Sleigh/She's Got the Money Too/On the Dixie Bee Line/Poor Sinners, Fare You Well/Country Ham and Red Gravy/Shout Monah, You Shall Be Free/Over the Mountain/The Bible's True/Hold That Wood Pile Down/Tennessee Red Fox Chase/From Jerusalem to Jericho
LP105 Travelin' Down the Road/New Ford Car/Whoop 'Em Up Cindy/Tossing the Baby So High/Jordan Is a Hard Road to Travel/Station Will Be Changed After Awhile/The Bum Hotel/Peekaboo/Comin' Round the Mountain/Run, Nigger, Run/He Won the Heart of Sarah Jane/Honest Confession Is Good For the Soul

BLIND JOE MANGRUM & FRED SHRIVER

County 541/2 Bacon and Cabbage

ARTHUR SMITH

County 507* Bill Cheathem
Old Timey X100* Dickson County Blues
RCA LPV-507* Chittlin' Cookin' Time in Cheatham County/I'm Bound to Ride/There's More Pretty Girls Than One
Vetco LP104* Blackberry Blossom
LP106* Indian Creek
Starday SLP-202/Pine Mountain PMR-202 Rare Old Time Fiddle Tunes

UNCLE BUNT STEPHENS

County 541/2 Candy Girl
Folkways FP252/FA2952* Sail Away Lady
Vetco LP104* Candy Girl

UNCLE JIMMY THOMPSON

County 541/2 Karo/Billy Wilson
Hilltop JM-6022/Capitol Record Club SQ-92027/Sears SPS-114* Karo/Billy Wilson/Lynchburg/Uncle Jimmy's Favorite Fiddling Pieces

PAUL WARMACK'S GULLY JUMPERS

County 541/2 Robertson County/Stone Rag
RCA LPV-532/(E) RD-7870* The Little Red Caboose Behind the Train

"OPRY ORIGINALS"

A handful of veteran musicians, who go back to the early days of the Opry, are still, at the time of writing, occasional performers on the show. They are:

Alcyone Bate Beasley - now with the Crook Brothers
Herman Crook
Lewis Crook) - the Crook Brothers
Hubert Gregory - an original Fruit Jar Drinker, still with the present group
Burt Hutcherson - formerly with the Gully Jumpers and Possum Hunters, now with the Crook Brothers
Kirk McGee
Goldie Stewart - formerly Oscar Albright's replacement in the Possum Hunters, now with both the Crook Brothers and the Fruit Jar Drinkers

(Other Opry veterans of the '20s and '30s are still living but not active on the show; they include Deford Bailey, Sid Harkreader, Dorris Macon, Grady Moore, Blythe Poteet, Curt Poulton and others.)

Time for the tall pines to pine
The paw paws to paw
The bumble bees to bumble all around
The grasshopper hops and the eavesdropper drops
While gently the old cow slips away

This is your reporter George D. Hay inviting you to be with us again next Saturday night.

- Judge Hay's closing words at the end of each Opry broadcast