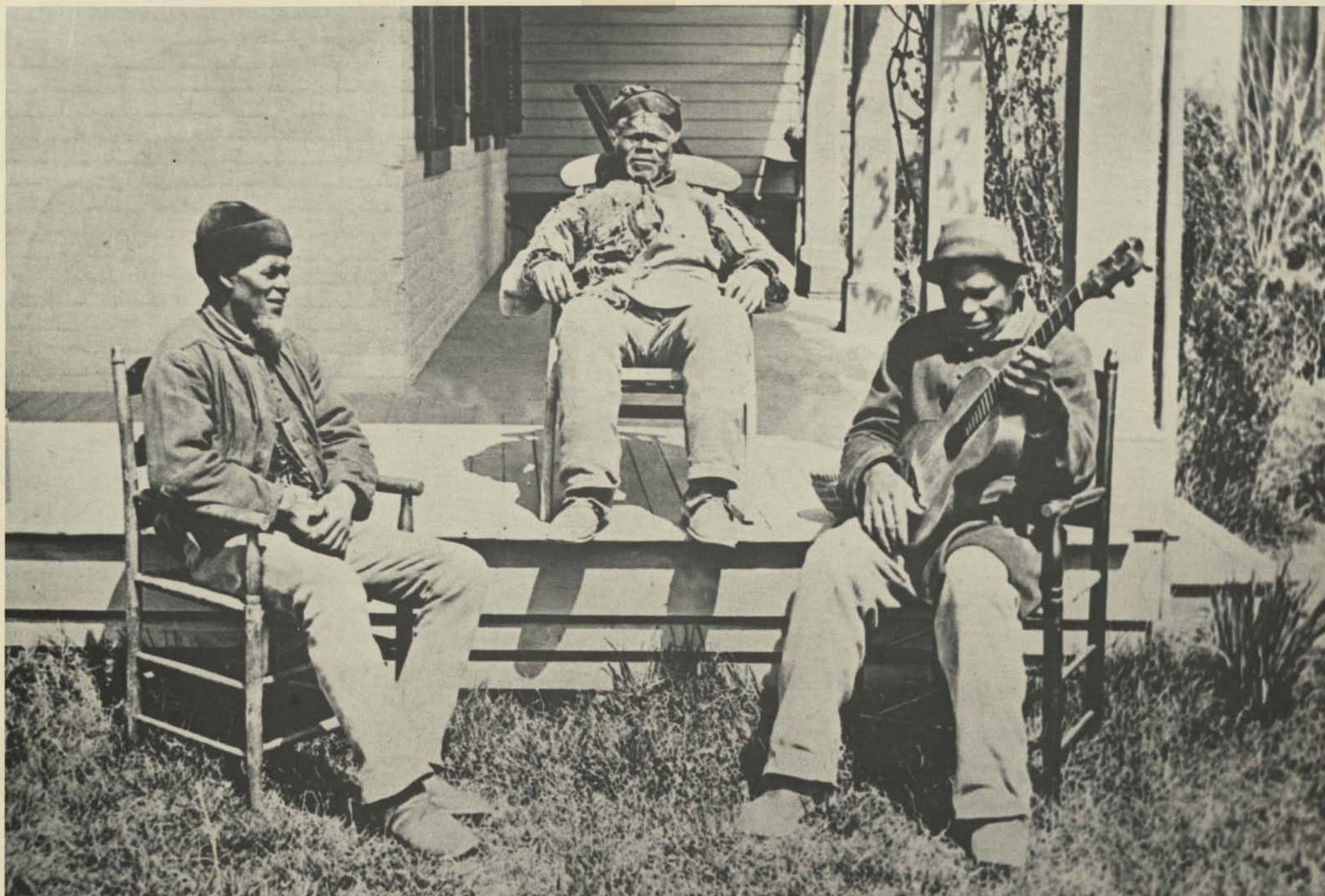


Virginia Traditions



Western Piedmont Blues



No state can boast of longer lasting and more varied folk traditions than Virginia. Many of her material traditions — such as barns, houses and plows — remain as permanent, unchanged documents of her early settlers' life style. Her performance traditions — songs, tales and fiddle tunes — also help us understand something of the everyday social life and beliefs of Virginia's people. These performance traditions, however, because they have been continually changing and developing from the moment of their creation, are difficult to identify and document accurately. THE BLUE RIDGE INSTITUTE of FERRUM COLLEGE exists to seek out and document both the material and performance traditions found in Virginia.

Blues music, perhaps the most popular and pervasive form of traditional Black folk song, is actually a relatively late entrant into Black musical tradition. Although most often associated with the Mississippi Delta, blues music exists throughout the South and each locale has its own regional stylistic preferences. This record, BRI 003, examines the blues as it exists today in Virginia's western piedmont section. The recordings within are from both older and recent field recordings and previously issued

commercial efforts. BRI 001, an earlier release in the VIRGINIA TRADITIONS series produced by the BLUE RIDGE INSTITUTE of FERRUM COLLEGE, deals in a similar manner with non-blues secular Black music. The two LPs when used together give a good overview of Virginia's secular Black music traditions. BRI 002, also an earlier release, examines a different aspect of Virginia's folksong — the British ballad as it exists and has developed in southwestern Virginia.

★ A BOOKLET OF FULL DESCRIPTIVE AND ANALYTIC NOTES IS ENCLOSED ★

*** Front cover — Unidentified musician and dancer, ca. 1890s. Courtesy Cook Collection, Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia.

*** Back cover — Piazza of Griggs Hall, Hampton Institute Campus, ca. 1880-1890. Courtesy Archives, Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia.

*** This record produced under National Endowment for the Arts/Folk Arts grant No. R70-54-140.

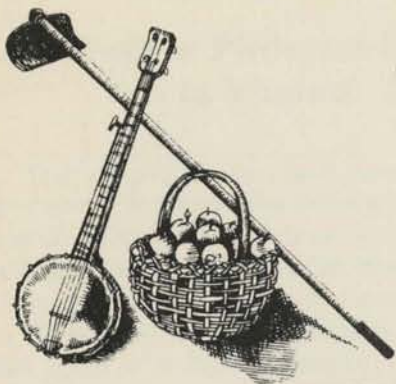
SIDE 1

1. MY LITTLE WOMAN Clayton Horsley
2. PENITENTIARY BLUES John Tinsley
3. TAMPA BLUES James Lowry
4. WHO'S BEEN FOOLING YOU? Marvin Foddrell
5. WON'T YOU BE KIND? Luke Jordan
6. JAILHOUSE BLUES Rabbit Muse
7. PEAKSVILLE BOOGIE Richard Wright
8. SLOW DRAG Turner Foddrell
9. KARO STREET BLUES James Lowry

SIDE 2

1. MY GAL'S DONE QUIT ME Luke Jordan
2. GOING UP TO THE COUNTRY Turner Foddrell
3. RABBIT STOMP Rabbit Muse
4. LOOKING FOR MY WOMAN Marvin Foddrell
5. RED RIVER BLUES John Tinsley
6. DON'T THE MOON LOOK PRETTY ... Clayton Horsley
7. EARLY MORNING BLUES James Lowry
8. TELL ME BABY Herb Richardson

BRI Records, Ferrum College, Ferrum, Virginia 24088
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VIRGINIA TRADITIONS

BRI 003



Western Piedmont Blues

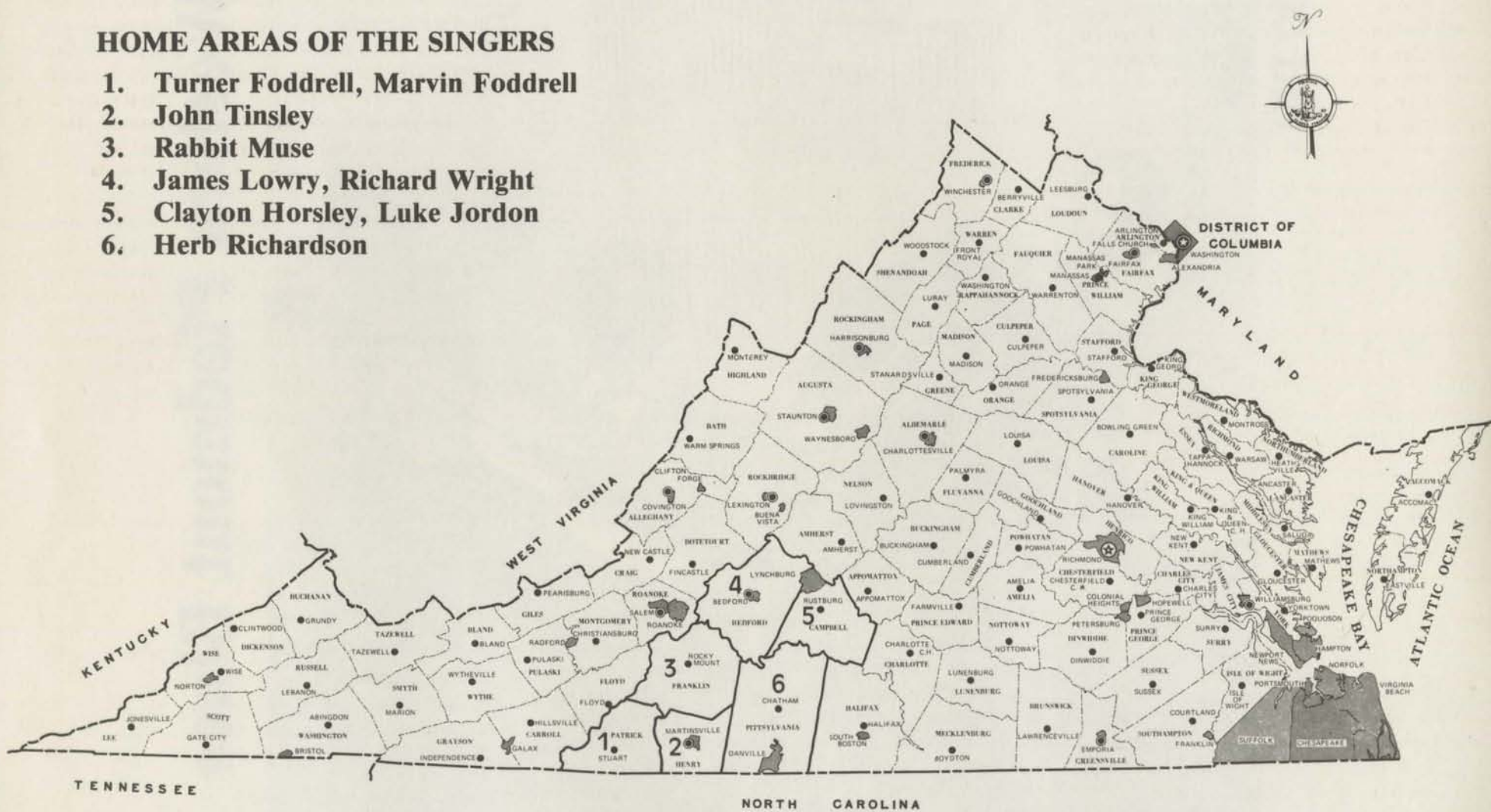
Guitar player with dancer, circa 1890.

Photo courtesy Cook Collection, Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

HOME AREAS OF THE SINGERS

1. Turner Foddrell, Marvin Foddrell
2. John Tinsley
3. Rabbit Muse
4. James Lowry, Richard Wright
5. Clayton Horsley, Luke Jordon
6. Herb Richardson



Western Piedmont Blues in Virginia

Only a hundred years have passed since blues was created by Black Southerners from the raw materials of the black folk tradition. As a form of traditional music, it is young; yet blues has already left its mark at many levels in American music.

Today it is possible to identify a number of blues types: downhome or country blues, closest to the original blues of the rural South; vaudeville or "classic" blues from the 1920's featuring composed songs performed by female singers backed by jazz musicians; hillbilly or mountain blues, the form and sentiment as adapted by white rural singers; city blues and "rhythm and blues," a powerful, electric adaptation of blues developed principally in Northern cities for black audiences after the Second World War — an immediate ancestor of rock and roll; plus a variety of instrumental blues in the jazz idiom. These are only the direct descendants of early blues. Blues is a component to a greater or lesser extent in many other American musical styles. The very phrase, "the blues" has been accepted as part of the American vocabulary meaning "melancholy," and the word appears often in popular songs which have nothing to do musically with the blues.

As broad as its influence may be, the concept of blues remains elusive. People who use the word do not always intend the same meaning or the same degree of precision. Sometimes blues names a musical form of particular harmonic and metric structure; sometimes, like the word "soul," it symbolizes a set of attributes characteristic of black culture. Other times it simply describes a mood. But the roots of the blues have survived changing circumstances and the passing of generations to remain a vigorous musical tradition. It still thrives in the South where it first grew.

This collection brings together a sampling of traditional blues played in the Virginia Piedmont during the last fifty years. It stands as an illustration not only of the continuity of the Virginia blues tradition, but also of its variety.

The home of the music heard in this collection is a region of gently rolling hills which ascend suddenly and steeply into the Blue Ridge Mountains. Settlers from the east began to arrive in the middle of the eighteenth century and had well established local governments by the time of the Revolution. Lynchburg, Martinsville, and Danville were laid out between 1785 and 1795 and by the end of the century, all the present urban centers of the region had been established.

Agricultural activity in the rural western Piedmont during the nineteenth century centered on a number of crops, but tobacco was the staple.

Even after the introduction of bright tobacco and flue curing, Piedmont planters continued to fire cure their dark leaf and sell it to small local factories, where it was processed mostly as chewing tobacco. Tobacco required a great deal of care and handwork at every stage of its production. It was the black population of the region that provided much of the labor in the factories as well as in the fields. Some of the modern black communities of the western Piedmont began as settlements for blacks who gathered to work in tobacco industries.

The western Virginia Piedmont was not entirely agricultural. With the tobacco industry booming, the population of the urban areas began to swell, and other industries contributed to rapid growth and cultural change. In 1895, for example, Danville was the site of seven textile mills operating from the water power of the Dan River. It was also the largest loose-leaf tobacco market in the world. The growth of the towns was a significant factor in the lives of rural blacks.

Black musicians in the country often played in one another's homes at Saturday night frolics, social gatherings, and at country stores, generally without pay. However, for local and itinerant musicians, the growing population centers offered potential audiences who had ready cash and a willingness to spend it on musical entertainment after working long hours in the factories. The street was the most accessible stage. Playing there was pro-

fitable in the evenings when it became a place for socializing, especially in front of business establishments where traffic was heavy, and on weekends when most of the workers still had their pay in their pockets.

In the late summer, musicians also played in or near the tobacco warehouses. Large crowds of farmers gathered to sell their crop at auction to the tobacco companies, provided an ideal market for musical entertainers. Since farmers of both races lingered in the warehouses awaiting the sale of their tobacco, the most successful musicians were the ones who could play to the musical tastes of the widest audience. Black musicians might play string band songs and popular music of the day, as well as blues. A broad repertory is characteristic of many of the musicians who appear on this record.

Playing at the warehouses or on the street during the selling months was lucrative but seasonal. Regular work could be had at local house parties that were held nearly every weekend in the black sections of the towns. Some parties were money-making ventures for bootleggers who sold their product and paid the musicians a set fee. Many house parties were informal events where the musicians played for tips, food, and drinks. These social events drew professionally successful local musicians, as well as those less professionally inclined and was certainly an important setting for the exchange of musical ideas and the development of blues.



A community husking bee.



Virginia State Library

Sorghum making.

Virginia blues singers may have learned much from contact with local musicians, but for many of them, music education began at home. Turner and Marvin Foddrell, Richard Wright and Rabbit Muse all learned to sing from their fathers. William Richardson learned guitar from his father, Herbert, who learned from his father, John. Blues is often associated with the stereotyped wandering performer, but music in the Piedmont was frequently a family affair. Posey Foddrell, whose wife was also a musician, taught all of his children to play. Rabbit Muse was a member of a family band that included his parents and a cousin. It is important that musicians growing up in musical families be exposed to a number of different instruments besides guitar. This exposure may have something to do with the characteristic Southeastern blues sound, as musical techniques from other instruments were carried over to blues.

The phonograph record is recognized as a central source of musical education for bluesmen. Just as it was inevitable that traveling shows would spread musical styles past local boundaries, it was inevitable that readily accessible 78 rpm records would affect the style and repertory of local musicians. The recorded work of the most popular performers also tended to influence and blend regional styles although it was more a result of larger social trends in modernization and migration than of mass media. The wide dissemination of music through records did not mean the end of traditional blues; rather, the media provided a means for the recirculation of traditional material back into the oral tradition.

Blacks may have occasionally bought blues records (from the local outlet, by mail, or from traveling salesman) with the intention of learning the songs, and people may have danced to these records instead of to music provided by live musicians. Still, the blues was social music. Its life was not on a disc but rather at the house party and country frolics, the tobacco warehouse and on the street. None of the performers on this collection can claim to be totally free of the influence of records. Rabbit Muse confesses to playing the family's wind-up phonograph at a slow speed, the better to hear the instrumental work and take down the words. John Tinsley listened carefully to Blind Boy Fuller's records and moved his capo around, trying to "find his sound." In fact, Fuller was the single most influential recording artist in the Piedmont. All the musicians who have been newly recorded for this album do one or more of his songs.



78 RPM Record

BRI photo by Kip Lornell

Fuller was himself a Southerner, active mainly in Durham, North Carolina. Buddy Moss, from Atlanta, and South Carolinian John White were also significant figures. For harmonica players, Sonny Terry was a primary model. Performers from more distant areas of the South also reached the ears of Piedmont musicians through records. James Lowry's "Karo Street Blues" is a version of "One Dime Blues," recorded in 1926 by Texas bluesman Blind Lemon Jefferson; like Fuller, enormously popular in 1930's.

Gifted individuals have always guided the course of folk traditions. Because of this, some blues scholars have chosen to define regional styles in terms of their best selling, and most frequently recorded and emulated musicians. For many, Blind Boy Fuller is the epitome of Southeastern blues, and deserves to be the central component of the definition of Southeastern style. The problem is that such an approach places too much emphasis on the peculiar style of a single individual, and cannot account for the variety in the region's music. Bastin argues that Fuller should be viewed not as, "a father figure . . . but as a fine eclectic artist, a synthesizer who was capable of assimilation and able to transform material into his own individual style on the broad base of the Piedmont blues." What Fuller seems to have done, drawing together elements from local tradition, imported material, 78 rpm recordings and personal innovation is more accurately characteristic of Southeastern blues than of his style.

Blues appeared relatively late in the Southeast. Perhaps the Piedmont was special and different because of the lower density of its black population (as compared to the plantation belt of the deep South), less abject poverty, and milder forms of racism. In the Southeastern states the existence of legal and social segregation in schools, churches, and recreational events did not preclude a degree of cooperation, even communication across racial lines less common in other areas of the South. Turner Foddrell of Patrick County recalls that "black and white were all raised together when I was young. I had white friends from children on up. Even though we didn't go to school together, that didn't stop everything." One of the things it didn't stop was musical exchange. Turner's father like numerous black musicians in Piedmont, played regularly with an integrated string band. His brother Marvin plays songs by Ernest Tubb as well as blues, and Turner himself has performed with a bluegrass band. Rabbit Muse has played with a well-known bluegrass band led by Don Reno and "Red" Smiley. John Tinsley learned guitar from a neighbor who played blues guitar, but his neighbor's brother, also a musician, preferred hillbilly music. John's preference lay with blues but the difference in the

brothers' styles is significant and suggests that black music was not tightly homogenous or impervious to outside influence. John plays a country hit from the early 1950's, Hank Williams' "Your Cheating Heart," in addition to the blues.

The string band tradition, emphasizing fiddles and banjos, dance tunes and older lyric songs, has certainly influenced Southeastern blues.² String band music was more firmly established among both blacks and whites in the Southeast than it was in the Mississippi delta. It served both to dilute the more purely black traditional forms of music such as work songs and hollers and to contribute to the survival of the older kinds of music. Even musicians who grew up in the 1930's and 1940's when blues was popular, learned tunes from older fiddle, guitar and banjo players of the community who were steeped in music that predated blues and songs from both traditions coexisted. Southeastern musicians were apparently willing to add blues songs to their stock of performance material. By the time the blues was geographically dispersed in the Southeast, it acquired a lighter, gentler and more sprightly character than the strong dance tune tradition which set it apart from the heavier blues of the deeper South.

Although the cultural and musical factors which shaped it are clear, the Virginia blues style is hard to characterize. In a general sense, East Coast blues musicians prefer rhythmically complex, ragtime-derived guitar work — finger picking; a clearer, gentler, more precisely enunciated vocal style; and a smoothly lyrical rather than jagged and guttural sound. None of these points can be listed as a Southeastern stylistic feature without some qualification.

Patterns that are difficult to isolate on a regional level, however, sometimes can be sensed locally. The apparent regional nature of "Tampa Blues," (represented here by a recording made in 1953 by James Lowry in Bedford County) suggests that specific repertoires occur in isolated spots within the Virginia Piedmont. Interviews with other musicians in the Bedford and Campbell County area suggest that "Tampa Blues" was widely performed there at one time. Of six musicians interviewed, five were familiar with the song, and all those who perform it tend to use the same style and approximately the same verses. Yet none of the musicians of the western Piedmont outside Campbell and Bedford County either played the song or knew it; a significant fact in light of the testimony of older musicians that "Tampa Blues" was in circulation as early as the 1930's. Whether the song had strong local life because it was associated with a local performer who did not travel outside his home area, or

because the verses had some importance for local people that it did not have for outsiders, or for some other reason, the phenomenon is interesting and suggests a promising area for future research.



Courtesy - Cook Collection, Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia

The Blues as a Musical Form

Because of the variety of its forms, it is difficult to come up with a concise definition of the blues. The following description is generally accurate, but overlooks a number of complications and exceptions for the sake of simplicity.

The quickest, clearest approach to the blues is a formal one, describing the stanza pattern and the metric structure of the typical blues. The most common blues verse contains three lines of text, the second repeats the first:

*Thirty days in jail, with my back turned
to the wall.*

*Thirty days in jail, with my back turned
to the wall.*

*Lookie here, Mr. Jailkeeper, put another
gal in my stall.*

The first line sets up a situation or establishes tension in some way. The repetition of that line increases the tension and suspense. The final line releases the tension. The compact, often metaphorical language of many blues verses adds to their effectiveness.

Blues with stanzas containing three lines, as in the example above, are sometimes called "twelve-bar" blues, (the number of measures in each verse). It is by far the most common verse structure in blues, but other verse lengths are used occasionally, including two-line (eight-bar) and four-line (sixteen-bar) verses. In some blues, such as John Tinsley's "Red River Blues," two and four-line stanzas are used alternately. In others, such as "Who's Been Fooling You" by Marvin Foddrell, four lines of text are made to fit into a three-line musical structure. A number of other permutations are possible.

Regardless of the length of the verse in blues, the singing of the words does not occupy the entire line, but it is divided between the voice and the accompanying instrument. The performer sings the words to guitar accompaniment for the first part of each line, and then allows the instrument to take over for the second part. This alternation between voice and instrument is fundamental to blues. The notes the performer actually sings and picks on his guitar are not exactly those found on a properly tuned piano, but are instead twisted and slurred, particularly the third and seventh notes of the scale. These have been called "blue notes," and are found everywhere in black traditional singing. Some researchers have theorized that blues notes are the result of the superimposition of African scales on European ones. Another possibility is that blues notes and slurred notes in general, approximate the sounds of human speech. Twelve-bar blues may be most common, but if you actually count the beats and measures of some "twelve-bar" performances, you will find such odd stanza lengths as 11 or 14½, owing to a relaxed sense of phrasing on the part of the performer. Blues singers tend to think in terms of phrase rather than the measure. Eleven of the seventeen blues on this album are three-line blues, but only four of them are a perfect twelve bars in length. The chords used in blues, too, tend to vary from performance to performance. In short, blues cannot be reliably defined by formula alone.

Blues is a flexible medium of expression, often performed by a single individual who is free to allow the lines to run long or short, give greater or lesser prominence to the instrumental part, and shift the verses around as he goes. Since blues vary widely according to the performer's preferences, descriptions of the "typical" blues above do not necessarily match what a given performer produces.

The folk singer is often considerably detached from the subject matter of his song. The balladeer, for example, may sing of an event far removed in time and place from that of his performance. Blues is essentially personal. If the performer is not actually singing about himself and his own experiences, at least he is taking that



Prints Collection - Danville, University of Va. Library

Danville - Setting tobacco - peg planting, Pittsylvania County. Photo by P.I. Flournoy. May 1940.

dramatic stance. There are a few female blues singers, but nearly all downhome blues singers are men and common themes are women, love and sex or any number of combinations thereof. For some singers, these are essential blues subjects; however, the range of themes is actually much broader.

The blues came originally from a disaffected and impoverished population at the turn of the century. It was a time when Southern blacks were faced with increasing economic hardships and a rising tide of racism and Jim Crow legislation. The tedium and hardship of sharecropping and its shattering effects on the family; the unending cycle of poverty; loneliness and the lure of the wandering life; the violence of society under stress: all of these are underlying themes in early blues. As one writer has put it, the blues song is, "a sort of exalted or transmuted expression of criticism or complaint, the very creation and singing of which serves as a balm or antidote."³

But the response to desperate conditions is not necessarily self-pity. The popular understanding that singing the blues expresses one's personal misery is not always true. Blues may be miserable, but it may also be angry, ironic, jovial, witty, lyric, tender, satirical, moral, reflective or absurd. Subjects may embrace historical events, heroic personages, sexual relationships and issues of social protest, as well as the personal feelings of

the singer. This utility as a means of personal expression - equal to the challenge of almost any subject or tone - is probably a major reason for the blues' survival.

One element rare in blues is religious piety. Blues often satirize preachers, the church, or pious hypocrisy. Though spoken asides such as "Lord, Lord" abound, genuinely devout statements of religious commitment are almost nonexistent. The church officially opposes the blues and the life it stands for and more than a few blues singers have turned to church music, repudiating blues and all other secular music as worldly and sinful. Yet in one sense the preacher and the bluesman are both acting as spokesmen for community. The difference is simply that each draws on a different source of power and inspiration. There are many blues singers who, rather than choosing one kind of music to the exclusion of the other, move comfortably between blues and gospel with no apparent sense of hypocrisy.

Blues lyrics do not tell a story in the narrative sense of a ballad. Most blues are unified only in the loosest sense. There are a number of blues standards which are identified only by their opening stanza; with successive verses being drawn by the individual singer from a collection of traditional, "floating" verses. A few performers are capable of inventing new lyrics at the instant of performance. Even singers who are not so quick-

witted can be said to make a personal statement by pulling these stock, "floating" lyrics into a song and so making it, in one sense, "original."

There are difficulties in ascribing the status of originality to any folk song, since continual recreation is the essence of the folk process, but it is particularly difficult with blues. Complex layers of tradition, imitation, and innovation make the point at which a song becomes unique, impossible to determine.

The Cultural Roots of the Blues

The folk music of black America upon which the blues was built was neither a direct survival of African forms nor an imperfect imitation of white music, though both theories have had their defenders. Instead it was an inspired mix of African tradition and European musical forms forged during slavery and still evolving. It is unfortunate that the earliest observers of black music-making in America were the poorest reporters.⁵ Many did not even bother to describe, but flatly condemned what they had heard as indecent, decadent and bestial. Even observers of good will had difficulty finding words to describe music that was unlike any they had ever heard. Historical record abounds with inarticulate descriptions and imprecise adjectives such as "wild" and "barbarous." We cannot construct early Afro-American music from such vague reports. Within them though, it is possible to recognize features similar to ones in the music of contemporary black Americans: litany-style repetition of lines, the call-and-response form, rhythmic complexity, physical movement in time with music and a taste for improvisation.

Some of the earliest observers to set down black music in musical notation were nineteenth century northern abolitionists whose political and religious motivations predisposed them to be most interested in the religious music of the slaves. William Francis Allen and his associates during the Civil War gathered a few secular songs, but it was the spirituals (twelve of which were taken down in Virginia) that dominated their pioneering collection, *Slave Songs of the United States*.⁶ This book contained few transcriptions of the secular, social music of the day which might have been among the ancestors of the blues. For the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth popular and scholarly attention to black music continued to be almost exclusively focused on the spirituals. It was not until the 1920's, some years after the origin and diffusion of blues, that solid documentary evidence began to appear.

Even if the historical record does not provide much information on the musical forms which became the blues, it is possible to interpolate back to that period by using recent recordings of the same forms that were widespread then.

Mentioned in documents as far back as the eighteenth century is the work song, a type of strictly vocal music used to accompany virtually any kind of labor. It is often mentioned by blues historians as the source for much of the musical material that went into the blues. There are two good early references to work songs which appears in George Tucker's novel, *The Valley of the Shenandoah*, (1894). The second, an actual transcription of a corn song, containing a brief text and notated melody is included in Allen's collection of slave songs. It is the only secular song from Virginia in that collection.⁷

Work songs were never satisfactorily documented until folklorists began to make field recordings in one of the few places where black work gangs still used work songs to coordinate labor — southern prisons.⁸ It is on these recordings that the essential call-and-response character of the work song becomes fully evident. Whenever a group of laborers were engaged in a communal task, wood chopping for example, it was the song leader's job to produce an indefinite number of verses, either stock lines drawn from memory or new ones from his imagination, while the rest of the group functioned as a chorus, answering the leader's solo by imitating it or singing a regular refrain.

The responsorial structure of the work song is, in fact, echoed throughout the black tradition in music. The spiritual song, though sung in a different context, frequently has the same structure, rhythm and feelings and must be considered among the antecedents of blues. Black preaching, too, is responsorial, as chanted lines from the pulpit are answered by shouted responses on the part of the congregation. In the blues, sung by an individual rather than a group, the call-and-response takes the form of a dialog between the singer and his instrument, with the voice dominating the first half of each line and the instrument responding with a melodic or rhythmic figure in the second half. This structural relationship is more obvious in some performances than others. On this album it is perhaps most apparent in the playing of Clayton Horsley.

The field holler is another black musical form worthy of mention as a possible ancestor of blues. It is related to the work song but strictly an individual rather than a group performance. The field holler is a free form unaccompanied cry, part song and part speech. It may be used as a signal, a greeting, an introspective accompaniment to solitary work, advertising for a street vendor or in other ways as a medium of personal expression. The holler shares melodic similarities with the blues in its personal tone and opportunity for improvisation. Paul Oliver notes that the early blues were loose, personal and had simple verses that were easily adapted by field hands as hollers.⁹ It is

likely that the same stock of lyrics were used in both blues and hollers, but the blues went on to develop into more progressive forms, while the hollers remained relatively static.

Another black vocal tradition which preceded blues was black ballads. Verse-and-refrain songs like "Frankie and Johnnie" and "John Henry" were popular among black singers around the turn of the century and no doubt influenced the development of the still young blues. The ballads probably provided lyric material and it is possible that they also served as a connecting link between the simple one-line chants of work songs and hollers and the twelve-bar blues structure.

Another component of early blues was instrumental and dance music. Two varieties of instrumental music are relevant. One, the midwestern-based ragtime piano tradition of the 1880's and 1890's was a model for the intricate ragtime guitar style often associated with Southeastern blues. The other was string band dance music. Less African in its essence and indistinguishable in many cases from white string band music, it was a part of the black tradition for many years before the origin of the blues, and in Virginia was particularly strong.

The use of the guitar has also been a major influence on the evolution of the blues. It is now by far the favorite choice of accompanying instrument by downhome bluesmen, but other instruments were popular in the black musical tradition prior to the development of blues: fiddle and banjo, accordion, harmonica and jawharp, and numerous rhythm instruments.



Filling the curing barn, Pittsylvania County.
Photo by P.I. Flournoy, July, 1940.

None proved as suitable for blues as the guitar. Before it was assimilated into the black folk tradition, the guitar had enjoyed favor as an instrument for serious and popular music and was frequently found in the drawing rooms of young women in polite society. Towards the end of the nineteenth century black folk musicians began to discover its many advantages; its utility as a rhythmic and chording instrument, its ability to hold a sustained tone and even to approximate the sound of the human voice. The banjo was good for chording, but its sharp, strident sound was not consistent with the smooth lyricism of the blues. Further, the guitar had flexibility; it could be played at different volumes, chorded simply, picked rhythmically for dancing, fretted with a slide for special effects or electrified. In the hands of a skilled player, it could even provide bass, rhythm and melody simultaneously. In the 1930's, the use of magnetic electrical pickups on guitars added to the instrument's flexibility. With the industrial growth of the late nineteenth century and the success of large mail order houses, guitars were relatively inexpensive and available.

The guitar became the ideal blues instrument. The style in which it was played, though owed much to the traditional techniques of the dance instruments, particularly banjo. Some researchers suggest that the open tunings used by some blues guitarists (in which all the strings are tuned to sound a chord when played unfretted), originated as imitations of typical banjo tunings. Blues itself rooted in the rhythms of dance music and the string band tradition. There are blues singers alive today who use the dance term "reel" to describe songs very similar to blues.

But the unknown singers who first found the blues and pushed it along to its present form were not members of a pure folk tradition. They were not isolated from the effects of mass media, other musical traditions, and commercialism. The singers of folk and popular music have always rubbed shoulders and exchanged ideas and the blues, though it may have been born down home, did not stay there. One of the first commercial institutions to carry blues into new contents was the minstrel show.

Minstrel show music began in the first half of the nineteenth century as a kind of popularization or parody of black music, performed by white singers in blackface. Some of these singers had never even heard authentic examples of the music they claimed to be performing. By the turn of the century, blacks as well as whites performed in "blackface" in these travelling shows. Some, like Rabbit Muse of Rocky Mount, Virginia wore blackface. The minstrel stage became a musical crucible filled with any and every form; white versions of black songs, imitations of plantation songs written by whites, elegant and sentimental

musical compositions, light opera, popular music, jazz, ragtime, and fragments of authentic folk music, white as well as black. In the early years of this century, travelling minstrel shows, medicine shows, vaudeville troupes and the like, were not only a source of material for rural musicians of both races but a training ground for the performers who travelled with them.¹⁰ Even singers who never left home felt the effects of exposure to the shows which passed through their communities.

The travelling shows were only the first form of popular entertainment to serve as a medium of exchange of blues songs and styles. Phonograph records and later on radio, had a similar mixing effect on black traditional music. The converging of different musical forms, popular as well as folk, into the blues was so complex and so complicated by mass media that today it is almost impossible to isolate the various traces of its history and know exactly how they influenced each other.

The Documentation of Blues in Virginia

Blues historians now believe that today's blues existed in something close to its present form in the deep South late in the nineteenth century. No one can suggest a specific date or place of origin, or even produce evidence when it was first called "blues". Probably there was no single point of creation. It's more likely blues came into being through the slow shaping of traditions into a new form which may not have been immediately recognized as new.¹¹ One of the earliest datable references to blues comes from W.C. Handy, the black minstrel show performer, composer and popularizer of blues. He first heard of the blues in Tutwiler, Mississippi in 1903. But evidence does not indicate that blues songs were widely sung in the Southeastern states until perhaps a decade later; possibly after being introduced by travelling musicians and medicine show performers.

Written documentation of the presence of blues in the Southeast during the early period is rare, mostly because researchers who would have been in a position to observe black music were interested in other things. During the years from 1890 to 1920, formative ones in the evolution of the blues, attention was not given to black secular music in Virginia, with one notable exception. In the 1890's, Virginia's Hampton Institute began researching black folklore and documenting the results through articles in the *Southern Workman*, sponsoring tours of black performers and on cylinder recordings. The products of this effort provide an interesting, if gapped, glimpse into the nature of black folk culture in Virginia around the turn of the century; however, these efforts shed little light on the blues.

One of the earliest publications which contains material suggestive of blues is Howard Odum's collection of secular songs from Georgia,

collected between 1906 and 1908 and published in 1911.¹³ Organized documentation of black music in the Southeast did not begin until the 1920's, a period of rising interest in the folk music of black America.

Four groundbreaking sociological treatments of black music (two of which Odum co-wrote) were published in that decade.¹⁴ One of these books comes close to dealing directly with blues. Newman Ivey White's *American Negro Folk-Songs* (1928), contains a brief chapter on blues and a number of blues-like texts collected in Durham, North Carolina a decade earlier. Although none of his texts were actually from Virginia, it is reasonable to assume that Virginia singing at that time would not have been radically different from that of North Carolina. These early academic collections have their weaknesses. They tend to display more scholarly interest than understanding of black culture; they lapse at times into a patronizing tone and they focus primarily on song texts to the exclusion of music. At the same time, they add to the evidence that the blues was probably established as a vigorous popular form in the Southeast by the second decade of the twentieth century.

Sheet music, another source of published information on black music in the 1920's, was intended for popular rather than academic audiences. A good example of the sheet music arrangements of black folk songs (many of them, spirituals) which rolled off the presses of Northern music publishers in those years was *Eight Negro Songs* (1924). It is a small collection of religious and secular songs learned from the singing of blacks in Bedford County, Virginia and arranged for piano and solo voice.¹⁵ It is not likely that these tidy arrangements, (made by the editor from the singing of the collector rather than the original performers) are accurate documents of the songs as sung by blacks. Nevertheless, several of the songs in the collection strongly suggest blues in both melody and lyrics, and deserve a place in the history of Virginia blues.

Such glimpses into early Southeastern blues are few. Until the blues revival of the 1960's, no extensive research into blues was published. Even among these recent studies, several of which are cited in the bibliography, there is little more than passing attention to Virginia. Most of the attention is lavished on the major blues regions of the deep South and the urban areas where blues activity was most intense. The closest any book-length treatment of blues has come to Virginia is Bruce Bastin's study of Southeastern blues, *Crying for the Carolinas*, which takes Georgia and the Carolinas, rather than Virginia as its focus.

The best source of information on the evolution of the blues does not come from scholarly sources. It comes from the commercial recordings

made and distributed by American record companies beginning in 1920, when the blues was already at least two decades old. Between that year, when Mamie Smith recorded "Crazy Blues" for Okeh Records and the years of the Great Depression, when economic realities forced cut-backs in the recording industry, a treasury of folk blues was set down on records by companies who had discovered the market potential of "Race Records", as they were called at that time. The earliest recordings of that decade were made by female "classic" blues singers and jazz bands but after 1926 increasing numbers of authentic rural singers were brought by company talent scouts into recording studios. It is this body of music, much of which survives today because of the diligent efforts of collectors to save rare 78 rpm discs from oblivion, that is the foundation of our knowledge of early blues.¹⁶

Early Virginia blues records

Probably the first Virginian to record was Luke Jordan. In 1927, he travelled to Charlotte, North Carolina then a recording center for both black and white music. He cut four sides for Victor: "Church Bell Blues," "Pick Poor Robin Clean," "Cocaine Blues," and "Travelling Coon." Little is known of Luke Jordan's life. Born in 1892, he lived in or around Lynchburg for most of his adult life and became well known as a local street singer and recording artist. He died there in 1952. His records seem to have been popular with the black residents of Lynchburg. Many of them remember him and his songs today, but other biographical details about the musician have been lost. The two performances heard here, "My Gal's Done Quit Me" and "Won't You Be Kind," were recorded during Jordan's second visit to the studio in November, 1929. Jordan had a feeling for personal, original blues composition.¹⁷ He was a skilled singer and a capable guitarist with a light touch characteristic of Southeastern blues.

Other Virginians were active in the pre-war commercial recording period too. William Moore, an exceptional ragtime guitarist who lived in Tappahannock, Warsaw and later in Warrenton, Virginia recorded nine performances for Paramount in Chicago in 1928. Harry Gay of Gate City, Virginia, along with his partner Stephen Tarter of Knoxville, Tenn. performed in the coal camps of the Southwestern part of the state in the 1920's and early 1930's, and recorded for Victor at Bristol, Tennessee in 1928.¹⁸ Another Virginian active in the mining camps was Carl Martin of Big Stone Gap, Virginia, a multi-instrumentalist who first recorded in 1934 in Chicago and continues to be musically active today.¹⁹

One important set of recordings from this period was not made by commercial recording companies but by folksong collectors under

government sponsorship. In May, 1936 John Lomax and Harold Spivacke, working under the auspices of the Archive of American Folksong in Washington, spent several days recording a variety of songs, among them three guitar accompanied blues, from the inmates of the Virginia State Penitentiary at Richmond.²⁰

Economic stability, advances in recording technology, and expanding markets in the years following World War II encouraged the proliferation of small, independent record companies and it was in this context that Virginia blues singers were next recorded.

One such musician was John Tinsley. He was born in Franklin County in 1920 and began to play guitar around the age of fifteen. Tinsley was influenced by the recordings of Blind Boy Fuller and Buddy Moss — both extremely popular during these years and by Fred Holland, a guitar playing neighbor, he performed with during the 1940's. His only recording was for Mutual, a small company based in Bassett, Virginia. (It was also the only blues the company ever released.) The two songs, "Trouble Blues" [sic], and "Keep Your Hands Off Her," were cut in 1952 and released as Mutual M-213 but few copies were sold. John subsequently turned his attention to church work but was recently encouraged to take up his blues again. Two of his recent performances are presented here.²¹

The three songs by James Lowry that appear in this collection were donated to the Folksong Archive of the Library of Congress by radio station WBLT of Bedford, Virginia. The station signed on the air in 1953 and according to relatives, Lowry had a regular morning program on the station for several months of that year. Jim Synan, the present station manager, recalls that at first WBLT used local talent for live broadcast but switched almost exclusively to records and transcriptions before the year was up. Lowry himself resided for many years in Lowryville, a small community about five miles southwest of Bedford and supported himself by doing odd jobs. He seems to have been in his early forties when he broadcasted over WBLT and was active in the Bedford musical scene until the early 1960's, when he moved to the midwest with members of his

family. One relative has suggested that Lowry died in Ohio in the mid-60's but that is not confirmed. Lowry played harmonica and organ as well as guitar and recorded some religious songs in addition to his blues.

Even though country blues is no longer widely popular among black Americans, the American blues tradition continues to survive through lesser known musicians across the South. Growing numbers of these performers have been sought out and recorded by researchers and specialty record companies with an interest in the older forms of black music, particularly since the recent revival of interest in folk music. Among the best known of the contemporary Virginian blues singers is John Jackson, a singer and guitar and banjo player whose work has been brought to public attention through the combined efforts of Chuck Perdue and Arhoolie Records. Jackson, a native of Rappahannock County now residing in Fairfax, is a versatile performer whose repertory includes ballads and dance tunes as well as blues. Another native Virginian with an eclectic repertory is Pernell Charity, a resident of Waverly in Surry County, Va. Newly recorded performances by several other relatively unknown Virginia bluesmen are presented in this collection.



FOOTNOTES

1. Bruce Bastin, *Crying for the Carolines* (London: November Books, 1971), p. 28.
2. Ibid.
3. Harold Courlander, *Negro Folk Music U.S.A.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 124.
4. For details on formulaic structure of lyrics in blues, see Jeff Titon, *Early Downhome Blues* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), Ch. 5; and John Barnie, "Oral Formulas in the Country Blues," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 42 (1978)
5. For a thorough summary of early reports of the music of blacks in America, including lengthy excerpts, see Dena Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).
6. William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951; first published 1867).
7. The passage from Tucker's novel is quoted in Epstein, p. 173; the song appears in Allen, p.68.
8. Recent recordings of work songs include *Wake Up Dead Man* (Rounder 2013), *Afro-American Spirituals, Work Songs, and Ballads*, (Library of Congress L3), and *Negro Prison Songs from the Mississippi State Penitentiary*, (Tradition TLP 1020); for details and analysis, see Howard Odum

and Guy Johnson, *Negro Workaday Songs* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1926); and Bruce Jackson, *Wake Up Dead Man: Afro-American Worksongs from Texas Prisons* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 1972.

9. Paul Oliver, *Story of the Blues* (Philadelphia: Chilton Press, 1969), p.29.
10. A field recording of an actual medicine show is *Peg Leg Sam: The Last Medicine Show* (Flyright LP 507-508); for a history of minstrel shows, see Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford, 1974).
11. For discussion on the origin of blues, see Oliver, pp. 27-28; Titon, pp. 24-26; and Samuel Charters, *The Country Blues* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1959).
12. W.C. Handy, *Father of the Blues* (New York: Sidwick and Jackson, 1957), p. 73.
13. Howard W. Odum, "Folk-song and Folk-poetry as Found in the Secular Songs of the Southern Negro," *Journal of American Folklore* 24 (October-December 1911).
14. Howard Odum and Guy Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1925, 1968); Odum and Johnson, *Negro Workaday Songs*, 1926; Dorothy Scarborough, *On the Trail of Negro Folksongs* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925); and Newman Ivey White, *American Negro Folk-Songs* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928).
15. Alfred J. Swan, ed., Francis H. Abbot, collector, *Eight Negro Songs from Bedford County Virginia* (New York: Enoch & Sons, 1923).
16. For full discographical citations see Robert Godrich and William Dixon, *Blues and Gospel Records 1902-1942* (London: Storyville Press, 1969).
17. For more information see Don Kent, "On the Trail of Luke Jordan," *Blues Unlimited* 66 (October 1969), pp. 4-6.
18. For more information on Stephen Tarter and Harry Gay see Kip Lornell, "Stephen Tarter," *Living Blues* 27 (June 1976), p. 18; and Roddy Moore and Kip Lornell, "Tarter and Gay Revisited," *Living Blues*, pending.
19. For interviews with Carl Martin see Pete Welding, "An Interview with Carl Martin," *78 Quarterly* 1, No. 2 (1968); and J. Roderick Moore and Kip Lornell, "On Tour With a Black String Band in the 1930s: Howard Armstrong and Carl Martin Reminisce," *Goldenseal*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (October 1976), pp. 9-21, 46-52.
20. Lomax's blues recordings from that field trip have been reissued on *Red River Runs* (Flyright LP 259).
21. For more information on John Tinsley see Kip Lornell, "John Tinsley," *Living Blues*, No. 36 (January 1978), p. 9,11; A recent recording is *Country Blues Revived* (Outlet STLP 1012.)



BRI photo by Kip Lornell

WBLT Radio

SELECTED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bastin, Bruce. *Crying for the Carolines*. November Books, London, 1971. Bastin supplies an historical and geographical overview of blues activity in the southeastern United States, concentrating on North and South Carolina.
2. Charters, Samuel. *The Bluesmen: The Story and the Music of the Men Who Made the Blues*. Oak Publications, New York, 1967. Charters describes the blues music found in several geographic regions of the South and focuses upon several of the key performers found in each region.
3. Courlander, Harold. *Negro Folk Music U.S.A.* Columbia University Press, New York, 1963. This survey of the traditional music of black Americans includes a chapter on blues.
4. Kent, Don. "On the Trail of Luke Jordan," *Blues Unlimited* no. 66 (October, 1969), 4-6. This article is the primary written source for information concerning Luke Jordan and was based on interviews with Lynchburg residents and musicians who knew him.
5. Lornell, Kip. "Down in Virginia: Sam Jones and Pernell Charity," *Living Blues*, no. 13 (Summer, 1973), 25-27. Lornell gives biographical and historical information on two Afro-American musicians who live in Waverly, Virginia.
6. Lornell, Kip. "John Tinsley," *Living Blues*, no. 36 (January/February, 1978) 9 & 11. This article gives an historical account of Tinsley's life, particularly his early musical experiences.
7. Oliver, Paul. *The Story of the Blues*. Chilton Press, Philadelphia, 1969. Oliver has written an accurate precise history of the blues from its origins until the late 1960s.
8. Pollack, Bill. "John Jackson," *Living Blues*, no. 37 (March/April, 1978), 11-12. Pollack takes a succinct look at the musical and personal life of John Jackson who lives in Fairfax, Virginia.
9. Titon, Jeff. *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1977. This book is an in-depth scholarly study that looks at blues from social, historical and ethnomusicological perspectives.
10. Welding, Pete. "An Interview with Carl Martin," *78 Quarterly*, no. 1, vol. 2 (1968). This oral history goes into great detail about this Virginian's career as a musician and concentrates especially on his life prior to his "rediscovery" in the 1960s.

SELECTED ANNOTATED DISCOGRAPHY

1. "Pernell Charity-The Virginian", Trix 3309. This album contains 15 selections by this Variety, Virginia guitarist. The songs includes Charity's own blues plus his interpretations of Blind Boy Fuller, Lightnin' Hopkins and others.
2. "Blind Boy Fuller 1935-1940", Blues Classics 11. Fuller was a North Carolinian who exerted an immense influence over Virginia blues musicians through his many 78 RPM recordings and this record features 14 representative songs.
3. "John Jackson-In Europe", Arhoolie 1047. John Jackson lives in Fairfax, Virginia and has two other albums on Arhoolie (1025 and 1035), but these live recordings feature more blues.
4. "Muse Blues" Outlet 1005. This record is a blend of musical styles (pop, country, sentimental, and blues) that features Muse's singing, kazoo and ukelele.
5. "Alec Seward-Saturday Evening Party", Blue Labor 103. Seward was born and raised in Newport News, Virginia but migrated to New York City in the 1920s. These selections were recorded during the 1960s in the company of Brownie McGhee and others.
6. "John Tinsley-Country Blues Roots Revived", Outlet 1012. This album contains 12 blues selections performed by Henry County guitarist/vocalist Tinsley. He is accompanied on some selections by his son William on piano and J.P. Young on harmonica.
7. "East Coast Blues 1924-1935", Yazoo 1013. This regional sampler contains several examples of Virginia blues musicians who recorded for commercial companies during the era of 78 RPM records and includes Luke Jordan, William Moore and Alec Seward.
8. "Old Virginia Blues", Mamlsh 3819. This state-wide sampler contains selections by Virginia blues musicians who recorded for commercial companies during the era of 78 RPM records and includes Luke Jordan, William Moore and Alec Seward.

These records may be difficult to locate in many record stores and I suggest either of these mail-order firms if you have problems purchasing these records:

Southern Record Sales
5001 Reynard Avenue
La Crescenta, California 91214
Roundhouse Records
P.O. Box 474
Somerville, Massachusetts 02144



Clayton Horsley

BRI photo by Kip Lornell

1. MY LITTLE WOMAN — Clayton Horsley, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Lynchburg [Campbell County], Virginia, April 14, 1977, by Kip Lornell. 3:07.

Clayton Horsley was born in 1929 and raised in Amherst County, twenty miles northwest of Lynchburg. He grew up listening to the recorded blues of popular blues singers such as Big Bill Broonzy, Muddy Waters, and Blind Boy Fuller, the latter perhaps the biggest single influence on his own music, though he also learned songs from local musicians. Clayton came from a musical family - his brother and two sisters also played the guitar and was active at house parties and other gatherings around Lynchburg until a growing family and job responsibilities forced him to stop playing regularly. "My Little Woman" probably derives from one of Fuller's recordings but its exact source is uncertain. Clayton's guitar work, which resembles Fuller's, is perhaps the best example in this collection of the adaptability of the guitar to an essentially vocal form like the blues. Here, and also on "Don't the Moon Look Pretty," the instrument not only supports the singer rhythmically and harmonically but becomes a second voice, at times duplicating the vocal line, at times answering it, and in the final stanza of this song, taking over the third line completely. Clayton phrases each line loosely, allowing both the voice and the guitar line room to stretch out.

*Yes I've got a woman, sweet as she can be.
Well I've got a woman, sweet as she can be.
She's a long tall woman, she's all right with me.*

*Well I love that woman, she treats me nice and kind.
Well I love that woman, treats me nice and kind.
She's a brownskin woman, she sure do treat me right.*

*I'm goin' ask that woman, will she be my wife.
I'm goin' ask that woman, will she be my wife.
She can boil that water, suit my appetite.*

*She stays with me in the morning, stay with me day and night.
She stays with me in the morning, stay with me day and night.*



Photo by Kip Lornell

John Tinsley

2. PENITENTIARY BLUES — John Tinsley, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Bassett [Henry County], Virginia, September 20, 1977, by Kip Lornell. 3:54.

John Tinsley began playing guitar under the direction of a neighbor, Fred Holland, in his native Franklin County. Born there in 1920, he was a young man when the records of Blind Boy Fuller and Buddy Moss were popular and still performs many of their numbers. John's only blues recording was made in 1952 for Mutual Records and after that he devoted himself mainly to sacred music. Only recently has he returned to blues. The loneliness and misery of prison is a common theme in blues and this recording is a representative example, based not only on traditional thematic elements but on personal experience as well. John never got along well with his step-father, an unpleasant character and in 1949 escalating disagreements culminated in a serious quarrel, during which John shot and wounded the man. There was an inquiry and John spent six months in jail. The bonding of personal experience to traditional models which produced this song is fundamental to the blues and makes the question of "originality" a difficult one to answer. John's relaxed vocal is accompanied by an unobstructive guitar part which wanders outside the rigid four beats per bar metric pattern.

*Chance I had for my justice, the judge had decided my time.
Chance I had for my justice, the judge had decided my time.
If I find you guilty, it'll be a penitentiary crime.*

They was having my trial, the Commonwealth was talking so wild;

*Having my trial, the Commonwealth was talking so wild
I'm going to send you away from here, you'll be gone a great long time.*

They gave me life in the penitentiary, I say, Lord Judge, lookie here.

Give me life in the penitentiary, I said, Lord Judge, lookie here.

He said, Man you is lucky, I started to sentence you to the electric chair.

*I wrote my wife a letter, wife I'm long, long gone.
I wrote my wife a letter, wife I'm long, long gone.
I'll be an old man, if I live to get back home.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:

Leroy Carr, "Prison Bound Blues" [Vocalion 1241];
Sam Collins
"The Jail House Blues" [Gennett 6167; OJL - 2]
Rubin Lacy, "Mississippi Jail House Groan" [Pn. 12629; OJL-8]

3. TAMPA BLUES — James Lowry, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Bedford [Bedford County], Virginia, in 1953, by radio station WBLT. 2:01

James Lowry was active in the Bedford area during the 1950's and performed for a short time on WBLT, where the songs heard were recorded. "Tampa Blues" was apparently well known among musicians in Bedford and Campbell Counties as far back as the depression. One commercially released version of the song, perhaps the only one, was recorded by two obscure musicians, Skoodle-Um-Doo and Sheffield for Manor Records in 1943. It may be that at least one of these musicians was from Bedford or Campbell County or learned the song from someone there. "Tampa Blues" is a four line, sixteen-bar song that bears some affinity to black ballads with refrains as well as to the standard blues. Lowry's accompaniment on what sounds like a poor quality guitar is ragged but drives the song with authority.

Says I'm going, yes I'm going, you know your crying won't make me stay.

*Say the more that you worry, the further you drive me away.
I have bought my ticket, son, I'll tell you what you better do,
Beat on Tampa, settle down.*

Say, listen conductor, can I ride your blind?

*Say, conductor say, Don't you know this train ain't mine?
You done bought your ticket, son, I'll tell you what you better do,*

Beat on down Tampa and get down.



Courtesy of Mrs. Nancy Lowry

Left to right - James Lowry, Bud Lowry, William Lowry and Virgie Lowry C. 1950/1951

*Hey, pretty mama, can I get a job with you?
I done bought my ticket, I'll tell you what I believe I'll do,
Beat on Tampa, settle down.*

*Don't take no woman, for to be your friend.
Cause she'll lead you to the jailhouse, from there to the pen.
She will buy her ticket, tell you what she will do,
Beat on down Tampa, make a fool of you.*

Settle down, settle down, settle down.

4. WHO'S BEEN FOOLING YOU — Marvin Foddrell, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Stuart [Patrick County], Virginia, October 1, 1976, by Kip Lornell. 1:53.

Marvin Foddrell was born in 1923 into a family very much involved in traditional music. His father was a well known musician in Patrick County and his brother, Turner, is heard elsewhere on this album. Because of family responsibilities, Marvin has been relatively inactive in music for a number of years but lately has appeared with Turner at local musical events and also at folklife festivals sponsored by the National Council on the Traditional Arts, the Smithsonian Institution and the Blue Ridge Institute of Ferrum College. "Who's Been Fooling You" is probably derived from a popular recording on Victor by Arthur Crudup dating back to the late 1940's. The verses contain twelve bars each but the lyrics are fit to the music in such a way that the first line contains twice the usual vocal material, while the second two lines function as a refrain.

*Roll up my britches, roll 'em above my knee,
Flirting with my baby, flirt with who I please.
Tell me who, baby who been fooling you?*

Yeah, you're three times seven and you don't know what you want to do.

*Told me you love me, now you want to leave.
All I can do, hang my head and grieve.*

Tell me who, baby, who been fooling you?

Yeah, you're three times seven and you don't know what you want to do.

*Leaving here baby, won't be back till fall.
I don't find my baby, won't be back at all.
Tell me who, baby, who been fooling you?*

Yeah, you're three times seven and you don't know what you want to do.

Tell me who, baby, who been fooling you;

Yeah, you're three times seven, and you don't know what you want to do.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:

Arthur Crudup, "Who's Been Fooling You" (Victor 34-0725).
Arthur Crudup, "Who's Been Fooling You" (Delmark 614).
Scott Dunbar, "Who's Been Fooling You" (Arhura Mazda SDS-1).

5. WON'T YOU BE KIND — Luke Jordan, vocal and guitar. Recorded in New York City, November 18, 1929, by the Victor Recording Company. 3:00.

Luke Jordan remains one of blues' enigmas, despite resourceful work by researchers Don Kent and Kevin Cleary. Jordan was born on January 28, 1892 possibly in Campbell or Appomattox County but lived in Lynchburg from the late teens until his death on June 25, 1952. He was never known to hold a regular job and his fondness for fishing and consuming alcohol is often reported by acquaintances. Jordan seems to have had several "signature" songs, "Cocaine Blues" and "Church Bell Blues," but it is unclear whether he is remembered today because of his recordings or his personal appearances. "Won't You Be Kind" is rarely associated with Jordan by his musical peers and elderly residents of Lynchburg who remember him, perhaps because the record appeared originally on Victor's slower selling 38,000 series (V 38,564). The song, formally similar to Marvin Fodderell's "Who's Been Fooling You," draws mainly on verses which are well known in oral tradition but the lyrics of the refrain and the peculiar Latin-rhythm guitar solo figures which appear between verses are innovative.

Well, I'm so glad the law has passed,

You uptown gals got to cut your own grass.

REFRAIN: Oh won't you be kind, to your kitchen,

I mean your dining room, scrub out your pantry now,

Won't you be kind, keep your backyard clean.



Luke Jordan

*I was walking down Fifth Street, turning out Main,
Looking for the man, sells cocaine.*

(Refrain)

*There goes Aunt Dinah, a good old soul,
She makes her living by cooking light rolls.*

(Refrain)

*Got a nickel's worth of whiskey, a dime's worth of gin,
I'm gonna pay that gal five dollars to be her friend.*

(Refrain)

*Got a nickel's worth of beefsteak, a dime's worth of lard,
I'm goin' to ?*

(Refrain)

*She's got a face like a washboard, mouth like a tub,
I'm goin' learn that gal the washboard rub.*

(Refrain)

6. JAILHOUSE BLUES - Lewis "Rabbit" Muse, vocal and ukelele. Recorded in Ferrum [Franklin County], Virginia in 1976 by Rod Shively for Outlet Records. 1:35

The ukelele is a Hawaiian version of a Portuguese mandolin introduced there in the 1870's and was brought to the United States by Hawaiian musicians in the early decades of this century. It enjoyed some popularity in jazz bands and in popular music circles but its use in blues has been rare. Rabbit Muse was born in 1908, picked up the instrument in his mid-teens after seeing it played



Rabbit Muse

in a travelling show and eventually fronted a family band which included guitar, accordion and washboard. Rabbit has remarked that his specialty is jazz and another recording by him on this collection, "Rabbit Stomp," features the ukelele strummed in a jazz style but for "Jailhouse Blues" he has neatly adapted a blues-guitar and finger picking style for the ukelele. His voice and touch are light, in the Southeastern style and the effect is lightened all the more by the choice of instrument. The song is a random assembly of stock blues verses, the first two of which give the song its title theme. Rabbit Muse has played frequently on the streets of Rocky Mount but his career includes work in various stage shows, folk festivals, fiddlers contests and appearances on Club 88, a Roanoke TV program.

Thirty days in jail with my back turned to the wall.

Thirty days in jail with my back turned to the wall.

Lookie here, Mr. Jailkeeper, put another gal in my stall.

Don't mind being in jail, but I got to stay there so long.

Don't mind being in jail, but I got to stay there so long.

Well, every friend I'm having done shook hands and gone.

You better stop your good gal from tickling me under my chin.

You better stop your good gal from tickling me under my chin.

'Cause if she keeps on tickling me, I'm sure gonna take her on in.

Good morning blues, blues how do you do.

Good morning blues, blues how do you do.

Well I just come here baby to have a few words with you.

Well I just come here to have a few words with you.

Photo by Henry Smith, courtesy of Kevin Cleary

BRI photo

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:

Texas Alexander, "Penitentiary Moan Blues" (Okeh 8640)
Smokey Hogg, "Penitentiary Blues" (Blues Classics 16)
Bessie Smith, "Jail-House Blues" (Columbia A4001; Columbia GG 30126)

7. PEAKESVILLE BOOGIE — Richard Wright, guitar. Recorded in Bedford [Bedford County], Virginia, February 18, 1978, by Kip Lornell. 1:55.

Richard Wright, born in 1949 in Bedford County, is one of the younger generation interested in traditional blues. His teacher was his father, William Wright. William himself learned his music from older musicians around the Bedford area, including Johnny Younger, Glascoe Younger and Robert Saunders, as well as from phonograph records but is no longer active as a blues singer. It is not uncommon for mass media to play a role in the transmission of traditional music and several songs from Richard's repertory are a case in point: William learned Fuller's "Rattlesnaking Daddy" and Buddy Moss' "Ride To Your Funeral" from records, but Richard learned them directly from his father. Richard also plays the Bedford County favorite, "Tampa Blues." "Peakesville Boogie" is an easy going, free form instrumental, cast into the basic three line blues pattern but tailored to allow the soloist to vary his tempo and phrase length and to engage in relaxed improvisation. Peakesville is the rural section of Bedford where Richard lives.

8. SLOW DRAG — Turner Foddrell, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Stuart [Patrick County], Virginia, November 17, 1977 by Kip Lornell. 3:40.

Turner Foddrell, like his brother Marvin and father Posey, has lived in Patrick County all his life and today operates a country store eight miles south of Stuart. One of the most interesting things about "Slowdrag" is the way the standard twelve-bar blues, but instead of rounding the verse out with the third line, the singer repeats the second line again and doubles the third line as well, producing an unusual stanza length of twenty bars. There are no known recorded antecedents for this song, though it is lyrically and melodically similar to "Brownie Blues" recorded by Steve Tarter and Harry Gay in 1928 (Victor 38017). Turner learned it from his father.

*Slowdrag, slowdrag, what's the matter now?
Slowdrag, slowdrag, what's the matter now?
Oh slowdrag, slowdrag, what's the matter now?
You don't love me and I don't care no how.
You don't love me and I don't care no how.*

*Well my good gal quit me, she don't wear no black.
Well my good gal quit me, she don't wear no black.
Well my good gal quit me, and she don't wear no black.
Well it won't be long before she comes slowdragging back.
Well it won't be long before she comes slowdragging back.*

*Hey, hey what's the matter now?
Oh come here baby, what's the matter now?
Oh come here baby, what's the matter now?
You don't love me and I don't care no how.
You don't love me and I don't care no how.*

*Hey brown, sit down on my knee.
Oh come here brown, sit on my knee.
Oh come here brown, sit on my knee.
And you tell me how you've been treating me.
And you tell me how you've been treating me.*

*Hey slowdrag, slowdrag, what's the matter now?
Oh slowdrag, slowdrag, what's the matter now?
Oh slowdrag, slowdrag, what's the matter now?
You don't love me and I don't care no how.*

*Well my good gal quit me, she don't wear no black.
Well my good gal quit me, and she don't wear no black.
Well my good gal quit me and she don't wear no black.
Well it won't be long before she comes slowdragging back.
Well it won't be long before she comes slowdragging back.*

9. KARO STREET BLUES — James Lowry, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Bedford [Bedford County], Virginia in 1953 at radio station WBLT. 2:59

Blind Lemon Jefferson was one of the most prolific and influential blues artists to record in the 1920s. His records sold well and he was in the Paramount Studios regularly between 1926 and 1929. "Karo Street Blues" is based on a popular Jefferson recording, "One Dime Blues," cut in 1927; the lyrics are similar and it uses the same sixteen bar blues form with the third line duplicating the first and second.

*I was standing down on Karo Street one day.
I was standing down on Karo Street one day.
I was standing down on Karo Street on day.
One dime was all that I had.*

*I'm broke and ain't got a dime.
Said I'm broke and ain't got a dime.
Yes, I'm broke and ain't got a dime.
Said, any man fall in tough luck sometime.*

*Do you want your friend to be bad like Jesse James?
Do you want your friend to be bad like Jesse James?
Do you want your friend to be bad like Jesse James?
Said take two pistols, hop me a passenger train.*

*Said she stood in the rain, she got soaking wet.
Yes she stood in the rain, till she got soaking wet.
Said she stood in the rain, till she got soaking wet.
Said she was crying to every man she met.*

*Will you change my dollar, give me a lousy dime?
Will you change my dollar, just give me a lousy dime?
Said will you change one dollar, give me a lousy dime?
Said I want to feed that hungry man of mine.*

*Mama don't treat your daughter mean.
I said mama, don't treat your daughter mean.
I said mama, don't treat your daughter mean.
Said you're the meanest woman a man most ever seen.*

*Said I went downtown, bought the morning news.
Yes I went downtown and bought the morning news.
Said I went downtown and I bought the morning news.
Didn't have but a dime and I bought a cigar too.*

Aside: What do you think about the news boys? Didn't have but a dime, boys, don't worry. Brought himself a newspaper and something to eat.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:

Blind Lemon Jefferson, "One Dime Blues" (Biograph 12040)
Willie Trice, "One Dime Blues" (Trix 3301)
Butch Cage, "One Dime Blues" (Anhoolie 1005)



Side 2

1. MY GAL'S DONE QUIT ME - Luke Jordan, vocal and guitar. Recorded in New York City, November 18, 1929, by the Victor Recording Company. 3:10.

Though they may have a general thematic unity, the verses of the typical blues are independent lyrical statements. "My Gal's Done Quit Me" is unusual in that there is a logical narrative sequence to the verses, outlining the events of the woman's departure in the order they occurred. It is a lyric blues bending in the direction of a ballad. (Some black ballads like "John Henry," by contrast, have undergone a reduction and condensing of their narratives as they are cast into lyrical blues form.) "My Gal's Done Quit Me" is possibly a Jordan original but it contains a number of stock verses. Its strength is Jordan's precise guitar work and his high, clear voice.

*Buddy, my gal has quit me, the talk's all over town.
Buddy, my gal has quit me, the talk's all over town.
She left me a note later on the kitchen table and said Daddy I'm Alabama bound.*

*I went running to the station, wringing my hands and crying.
I went running to the station, wringing my hands and crying.
Crying, come back pretty mama, God's sake don't go this time.*

*I done bought my ticket, Daddy I'm compelled to ride.
I done bought my ticket, Daddy I'm compelled to ride.
Say you know when you had me, man you couldn't be satisfied.*

Spoken: Tell the truth, mama, tell it.

*Then she showed me a ticket, just as long as my arm.
Yes she showed me a ticket, long as my right arm.
I said, You'll be riding it so long, I'll think you're dead and gone.*

*I had the railroad blues, I didn't have that railroad fare.
I had the railroad blues, I didn't have that railroad fare.
Said my shoes ?*

*I woke up this morning with traveling on my mind.
I woke up this morning with traveling on my mind.
Happen to feel in my pockets and i didn't have a lousy dime.*



BRI photo

Turner Foddrell

2. GOING UP TO THE COUNTRY — Turner Foddrell, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Stuart [Patrick County], Virginia, July 25, 1977 by Kip Lornell. 2:48.

Turner's repertory comes from three sources: records, his father and his own imagination. "Going Up To The Country" falls into the third category (though it draws on stock phrases), one of the few of Turner's own songs which is not an instrumental. The title itself is the least original part of the song and is shared by a number of blues songs, the first of which to be recorded was "Goin' Up the Country," cut by Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks) for Columbia in 1928. Structurally, the song has two stanza forms, a set of verses with twice the usual lyric material in the first line and a verse in the usual pattern that functions as a refrain. The random repetition of verses and refrains is rounded out by a scat vocal using nonsense syllables.

*Like to go up to the country, see that baby of mine.
Like to go up to the country, see that baby of mine.
Something tell me, she won't be back sometimes.*

*Like to go up the country, I can't take you.
Like to go up the country, I can't take you.
There's nothing up there a gal like you can do.*

*She's got a face like a fish, a shape like a frog,
When she love you mama, holler whoo hot dog!
I love that gal, better than I love myself.
She's all alone, all alone, on the shelf, on the shelf.*

*Like to go up to the country, I can't take you.
Like to go up to the country, I can't take you.
There's nothing up there a gal like you can do.*

*She's tall like a tree, holler like a crow,
When she love you once, you want to love some more.
I love that gal, better than I love myself.*

*Doodle, doodle-oodle-oo doo doo-doo,
Doodle, a-doodle-oodle-oo doo doo-doo,
Doodle-oodle-oodle-oodle-oo doo doo doo-doo.*

*She's tall like a tree, holler like a crow,
When she love you once, you want to love some more.
I love that gal, better than I love myself.
She's all alone, all alone, on the shelf, on the shelf.*

*Like to go up the country, I can't take you.
Like to go up the country, I can't take you.
There's nothing up there a gal like you can do.*

*She's got a face like a fish, a shape like a frog,
When she love you mama, holler whoo hot dog!
I love that gal, better than I love myself.
She's all alone, all alone, on the shelf, on the shelf.*

3. RABBIT STOMP — Lewis "Rabbit" Muse, vocal, ukelele and kazoo. Recorded in Ferrum [Franklin County], Virginia, May, 1978 by Rod Shively for Outlet Records. 2:05.

This song is not blues in the strict sense but it is close to what has been called "hokum blues," a style of music blending blues, popular music and ragtime jazz, often featuring comical or bawdy lyrics and particularly common among the jug bands of Memphis and other areas in the twenties and thirties. Rabbit plays his ukelele here using a rapid strumming stroke, much as the banjo was played in early jazz bands, in marked contrast to his blues based picking style on "Jailhouse Blues." The kazoo, also known as jazz horn or gazoo, is a humble instrument that has been popular in America probably because of its price (cheap), its size (small) and the level of skill required to play it with little practice (low, though there are vitusoso kazoo players.) Both the kazoo and the other leading small instrument in blues, the harmonica, can be played by the performer whose hands are busy with another instrument with the help of a special rack worn around the neck. "Rabbit Stomp" is a dialog between actual lyrics and the mock lyrics of the kazoo, with the singers' scat vocal somewhere in between.

*Bought myself a suit of combination underwear
To wear in the wind and the chilly air;
I tried to put it on, without exaggeration,
I couldn't pull it off because I lost the combination,
Oh hey hey hey-hey-hey, skee dee-dah be bop bop,
Oh, be bop boppity-bop.*

*She's my lady and my baby,
She's bust out and she's crazy,
She's bandy-legged, pigeon-toed,
She don't skee-dah dah be bop bop
Needun bop bop bah-bop dah-be bop bop, dee-dee dah dah-
dee dah dah,
Dee da da boppity bop.*

*Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey-hey-hey,
Skee dee un dat-un-doe dah bop-um-a bop um-mop.*

4. LOOKING FOR MY WOMAN — Marvin Foddrell, vocal and electric guitar. Recorded in Stuart [Patrick County], Virginia, October 1, 1976 by Kip Lornell. 2:07.

This song is based on Blind Boy Fuller's recording of the same name, recorded in 1935 and issued three times (ARC 35-10-17, Vocalion 02956, and Conqueror 8562). The form here is eight bar blues with the middle line (the repetition of the first line), simply omitted. Guitars with electric pickups were on the market by 1936 and were quickly accepted by blues singers. In the 1940's, the electric guitar became the focal point of the evolution of downhome blues into urban blues and paved the way for the city blues band with electrified guitars and bass, amplified public address systems for vocals and small instruments and drums. Some country blues musicians have adapted the electric guitar to their own downhome styles, notably Mississippi's Fred McDowell and Texas' Lightning Hopkins. Marvin's guitar work here, though he uses an electric guitar, is firmly within the country tradition of the Virginia Piedmont.



BRI photo

Marvin Foddrell

*My baby packed her suitcase, she started to the train.
She was a married woman but I loved her just the same.*

*I started walking, my feet got soaking wet.
Find the woman I love and I ain't stopped walking yet.*

*But did you get that letter I dropped in your backyard?
I would come see you mama, but the other man had me barred.*

*Mmm, mmm, mmm, oh lordy Lord.
Mmm, Lord, mmm, lordy, Lord.*

*I started to write a letter, believe I will go myself.
A letter so slow, a telegram may get there.*

*Just as sure as the bird fly in the sky above.
Life ain't worth living if you ain't with the one you love.*

Mmm, mmm, mmm, lordy, Lord.
Oh, Lord, mmm, lordy Lord.

I stay and get lonely, my head a-hanging low.
I lost the woman I love and she won't be back no more.

Mmm, mmm, mmm, lordy, Lord.
Mmm, Lord, mmm, lordy Lord.

5. RED RIVER BLUES — John Tinsley, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Bassett [Henry County], Virginia, September 4, 1977, by Kip Lornell. 3:05

This song is a favorite among musicians in the Southeast, and has been for fifty years. John learned the song from local performers as a boy in eastern Franklin County during the 1930's as an eight-bar blues but reworked it into a more complicated form combining three-line verses and a two-line refrain.

*Which-a-way, which-a-way, do the red, red river run?
It weren't no river, just a small stream where I come from.*

*It would come a storm some night, come a storm some day.
Come a storm some night, it would come a storm some day.
When that stream would rise, it would wash my troubles away.*

*Which-a-way, which-a-way, do the red, red river run?
It weren't no river, just a small stream where I come from.*

*I would go down to that river, I would sit down on the shore.
Go down to that river, I would sit down on that shore.
Oh Lord hold my hand, don't let me fall overboard.*

*Which-a-way, which-a-way, do the red, red river run?
It weren't no river, just a small stream where I come from.*

*That river is deep and that river is long.
That river is deep and that river is long.
And if I get across, then I'm going back home.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:

Virgil Childers, "Red River Blues" (Bluebird B7464; Flyright 104.)
John Jackson, "Red River Blues" (Arhoolie 1047)
Josh White, "Red River Blues" (Romeo 5267)
Bill Jackson, "Blood Red River" (Testament Y-201)

6. DON'T THE MOON LOOK PRETTY — Clayton Horsley, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Lynchburg [Campbell County], Virginia, April 14, 1977, by Kip Lornell. 3:20.

Most blues songs about women and love are permeated with alienation, dissatisfaction and betrayal. The two exceptions to this generalization on this album, songs which are serious celebrations of rewarding relationships in love, are both performed by Clayton Horsley. "Don't the Moon Look Pretty" draws on common traditional verses, as do many blues, but has moments of lyric originality, as in the lovely image of the second verse.

*Don't that moon look pretty shining through the trees.
Don't that moon look pretty shining down through the trees.
I can see my baby when she don't see me.*

*Looked up at that moon, stars was sparklin' clean.
Looked up at that moon, stars was sparklin' clean.
I got the one sweet little woman the world most ever seen.*

*Eased up to her window, see how sweet she snored.
Eased up to her window, see how sweet she snored.
She made me feel like jumping through the keyhole in her door.*

*Don't that moon look pretty shining through the trees.
Don't that moon look pretty shining down through the trees.
I can see my baby when she don't see me.*



Herb Richardson (left) and William Richardson

7. EARLY MORNING BLUES — James Lowry, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Bedford [Bedford County], Virginia in 1953 at radio station WBLT. 3:14.

This song contains a number of the standard "floating" phrases of blues. The first lines of verses one and five and variants of them are among the most commonly used lyrics in blues and are only two of the large number available to the singer with a retentive memory for building a personalized blues song. Lowry's theme in "Early Morning Blues," as well as his lyrics, are well within the mainstream of country blues. His guitar accompaniment is more unusual; the song's final ninth chord is more common to jazz than downhome blues.

It was four o'clock one morning and the blues came rolling 'round.

It was four o'clock one morning and the blues came rolling 'round.

They rolled so doggone fast, it was soon all over town.

*I was thinking 'bout my baby, everything she said.
Yes I was thinking 'bout my baby, everything she said.
I was all by myself and there was nobody there.*

*Yes I love you baby and I love you for my own.
Yes I love you baby and I love you for my own.
There ain't nothing in this street mama you can't get at home.*

*Yes I love you baby, love you too doggone hard.
Yes I love you baby and I love you too doggone hard.
Who knows how much I love you is only me and God.*

Yes you know I love you baby, that why you treat me so unkind.

Yes you know I love you baby, that why you treat me so unkind.

Say you keep me worried, bothered all the time.

8. TELL ME BABY — Herbert Richardson and William Richardson, guitars. Recorded in Gretna [Pittsylvania County], Virginia, March 8, 1978, by Kip Lornell. 1:26.

The repertory of Herbert Richardson and his son William is eclectic, including gospel songs, rhythm and blues hits from the fifties, string band and march tunes, as well as blues. Music has been a family tradition for at least generations — Herbert, born in 1919, picked up guitar from his own father, John, and a brother, Otis as a young man in Gretna, Virginia and subsequently taught William to play. William who was born in 1945, began playing music in high school and performs regularly with his father. "Tell Me Baby" is typical of instrumental guitar duets — one guitar provides a rhythmic foundation while the other takes responsibility for the melodic figures. One of the limitations of duets such as this is that both performers must maintain a regular structure so that neither loses his place, especially, as here, when there are no lyrics to mark the phrases. "Tell Me Baby", unlike most of the solo twelve-bar blues in this collection, is a perfect twelve bars in length, chorus after chorus.

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Danville - Unloading the "sled" and filling the curing barns, Pittsylvania County. Photo by P.I. Flournoy, July 1940.