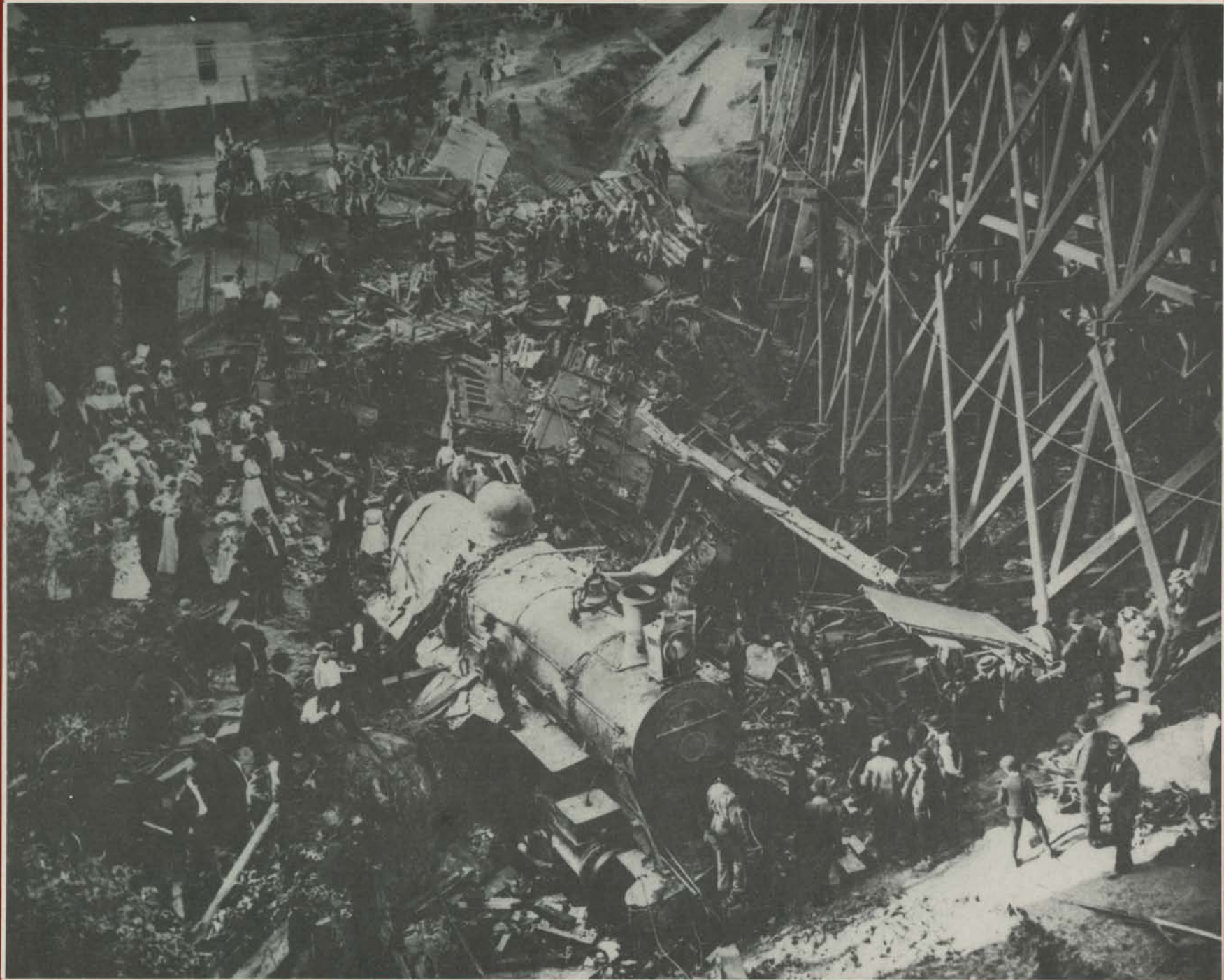


# Virginia Traditions



**Native Virginia Ballads And Songs**





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.

This album of local songs presents a sampler of the rich and varied narrative song tradition which has evolved in Southwest Virginia. These are homegrown products for the most part, written by Virginians about Virginia events. As historical

products and expressive works, they give us important glimpses into the ever-evolving culture of the region. Recorded over more than a fifty-year span, these songs represent a range of influences from traditional balladry to the commercial recording industry. Together, they offer a composite picture of Southwest Virginia's complex and rich heritage.

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

\*\*\*Front cover — Wreck of the Old 97 in Danville, Virginia, 1903, courtesy of Southern Railway.

\*\*\*Back Cover — Staged reenactment of the Hillsville Courthouse Shootout showing the positions of the men when the incident started, circa 1912. Courtesy of Rufus H. Gardner.

\*\*\*This record produced under National Endowment for the Arts/Folk Arts Grant No. R80-54-242.

BRI Records, Ferrum College, Ferrum, Virginia 24088.  
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SIDE 1

1. CLAUDE ALLEN — Hobart Smith..... 3:28
2. SIDNEY ALLEN — Spence Moore..... 1:53
3. POOR GOINS — James Taylor Adams and Finley Adams..... 3:52
4. THE VANCE SONG — Branch W. Higgins..... 2:10
5. THE FATE OF DEWEY LEE — Spence Moore..... 2:53
6. THE FATE OF TALMADGE OSBORNE — Ernest V. Stoneman... 2:59
7. THE WRECK OF THE 1256 — Vernon Dalhart..... 4:09
8. THE WRECK OF THE OLD 97 —  
Kelly Harrell and Henry Whitter..... 3:40

SIDE 2

1. THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CHARLIE POOLE —  
Ted Prillaman..... 2:19
2. THE STORY OF FREEDA BOLT — Floyd County Ramblers..... 3:35
3. THE BALLAD OF CATY SAGE — J.C. Pierce..... 3:35
4. THE CYCLONE OF RYE COVE — Carter Family..... 1:59
5. THE STORY OF THE FLOOD — Stanley Brothers..... 3:06
6. THE PINNACLE MOUNTAIN SILVER MINE — Helen Cockram... 2:03
7. THE NEW RIVER SONG — Jim and Artie Marshall..... 2:51
8. HIGHWAY 52 — Little "Doc" Raymond and  
The Coleman Pardners ..... 2:47
9. THE BALLAD OF FANCY GAP — Jim and Artie Marshall..... 4:47





# VIRGINIA TRADITIONS

BRI 004



Native Virginia Ballads

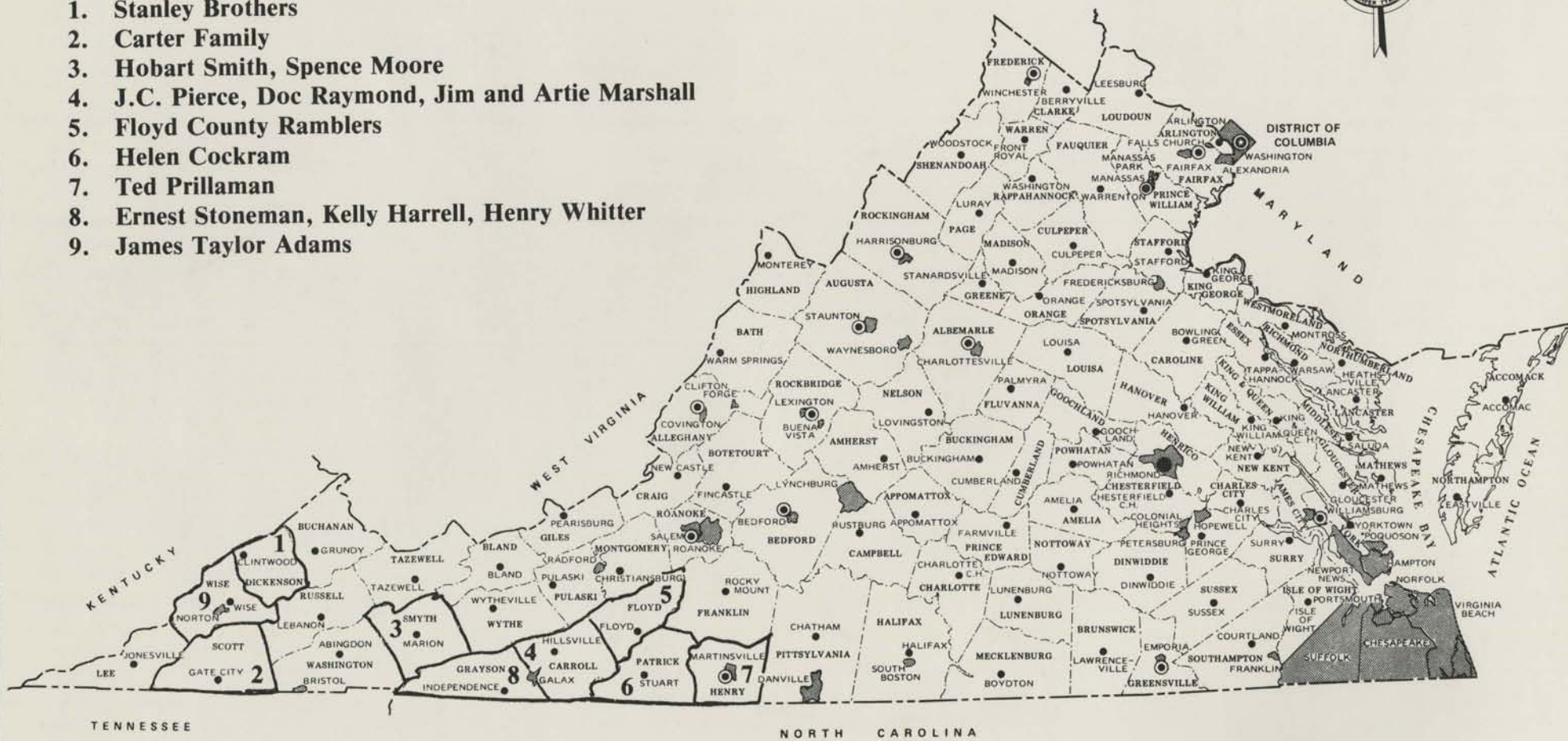
The "Old 97" after it wrecked in Danville, Virginia on September 27, 1903.  
Photo Courtesy Southern Railway System



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

## COUNTY SEATS & INDEPENDENT CITIES

1. Stanley Brothers
2. Carter Family
3. Hobart Smith, Spence Moore
4. J.C. Pierce, Doc Raymond, Jim and Artie Marshall
5. Floyd County Ramblers
6. Helen Cockram
7. Ted Prillaman
8. Ernest Stoneman, Kelly Harrell, Henry Whitter
9. James Taylor Adams





## "Come Listen Good People, Wherever You Are, And Hear The Sad Story You've Been Waiting For."

The songs on this album all concern people and events in southwest Virginia.<sup>1</sup> They are homegrown products for the most part, written by Virginians about Virginia events. Recorded over more than a fifty-year span, these songs represent a range of styles from unaccompanied singing to bluegrass, and a range of influences from traditional balladry to the commercial recording industry.

Though these are Virginia songs, it is important to remember that they emerged from a regional culture not bounded by state lines. Southwest Virginia shared with its mountain neighbors a self-reliant culture, careful about change and mindful of the past. New songs were restitched from old ideas, so that important events could enter the tradition.

Before the earliest recording on this album was made, the seeds of change were present. The railroads had been built, coal mines were changing in the face of the land and textile mills had moved in with their factory towns. A new pattern of culture was laid over the old, but the transition was not a simple, one-way process. The individual was faced with new decisions. Some chose to preserve the old ways of life and music, while others rushed to accept developing trends. Both tendencies are present today, as they have been throughout the period covered by this album. Although the songs on this album have been arranged in an attempt to chronicle major shifts which have occurred in the local ballad, the actual process was involved and overlapping.

Virginia is fortunate both in the wealth of its musical traditions and in the diligence with which those traditions have been recorded. These songs, written for home consumption, are the more valuable because they are so closely tied to the people of southwest Virginia. Each song tells two stories. First there is the historical event on which the song is based. The second story is more subtle for the songs tell us about the people who wrote and sang them. Together they present a rich and deep family portrait.

### The Ballad and the Broadside

Storytelling and music have always held positions of high importance in people's lives. A good story and a good tune are never far apart, particularly where people depend on their talent and creativity for entertainment. From the earliest period in the culture of western Europe, tales have

been sung. Sometime during the 16th century the urge to tell stories in song developed into a new form — the ballad.

Folksong scholars recognize the ballad as a distinct form of song set aside from lyric song, not only by a coherent narrative, but by the particular way in which the story is told. Typically, a ballad does not give the whole story, but focuses on a single, powerful episode. It presents the action in a series of scenes, jumping from one to the next in a fashion which has been called "leaping and lingering."<sup>2</sup> Dialogue is the most common means of advancing the action and the listener is often left to guess what has taken place. The narrator is strictly impersonal. No comments are made on the action, no morals are drawn, and no glimpse of the actors' inner workings is given.

It appears that classic balladry was at its height at a time when most ballad singers lived in close-knit, homogeneous communities. Contact between singers was close and the songs were spread, like gossip, by word-of-mouth. Such oral tradition played a major shaping role by paring away extraneous details and settling the song into forms acceptable to those communities.

A homogeneous community, however, did not produce a standardized song. The individual singer in such a community still had a limited range in which to display his own talents. Consciously or not, the singer recreated the ballad with each singing. The most creative singers introduced new forms into the community. As ballads crossed and recrossed communal and even national lines, variations of the same story arose. Scholars distinguish these by calling forms of a ballad in which the story is significantly altered or rearranged, "versions," and those in which there are only minor changes, "variants."

Francis James Child, a Harvard English professor, depended on the evidence of such variation when he isolated 305 distinct ballad stories which he felt comprised the stock of British traditional balladry. His collection, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, published in full by 1898, traced the relationships of ballad versions to an extent never since equalled. However, Child's collection was limited to manuscript and printed versions, for he believed that the singing of traditional ballads had ceased. As a result, it represented Child's own conception of the ballad tradition.

Child's work acted both as a spur and a hindrance to his followers. Some raised the status of the ballads in his collections to a sacred canon - the "Child Ballads." Obsessed with the apparent antiquity and anonymity of the ballads, they developed a number of conflicting theories to account for their origin. The foremost of these was

the theory of communal origins, developed by Francis Gummere. It argued that the initial creation of a ballad was actually a community event, in which all the members would contribute ideas and lines to the emerging song. The controversy over this theory finally subsided as a result of the work of another group of Child's followers - those who turned to the field.

The initial motive of this group was to determine whether any of the old ballads survived in tradition. To their surprise and delight, they found a good number of the old songs. A generation of collectors set out with missionary zeal to find as many ballads as possible before they vanished. In this journey, they found that the Child canon actually comprised only one portion of the living song tradition. The majority were lyric and sentimental songs, non-Child ballads found on both sides of the Atlantic and an enormous number of ballads which had been written in America. The presence of so many songs with known authors which were accepted into the singing tradition defeated the notion of communal creation.

What Child and his followers were attempting to collect and describe were products of an idealized ballad society, intensely independent and entirely oral. Such societies have certainly existed and were even prevalent at one time, but the creation and survival of the ballad did not depend on such a setting. From a very early period in British balladry, print played a major role in tradition in the form of the broadside ballad.

For almost four hundred years, single printed sheets called broadsides have been used to bear news and advertisements. In a semi-literate society, where broadsides were sold by street hawkers, it was natural to turn news stories into songs that could be performed by the sellers, particularly where oral ballads had already established a tradition of sung narratives. Not only was this commercial venture successful, it flourished - providing a livelihood for countless "hack" poets. The portion of London known derogatively as "Grub Street" in the 18th century was inhabited largely by these commercial song writers, a true forerunner to "Tin Pan Alley."

The broadside broke with the older ballad pattern in several important ways. While the older ballad was impersonal and dramatic, the broadside ballad was sentimental and depended less on dialogue. The broadside poet took great delight in spelling out every gruesome detail — nothing was left to the listener's imagination. This can be partially explained by the literary origin of the broadside ballad. It was, after all, a vehicle for sensational news. Along with this seems to have been a need to comment on the action, to attempt to understand the motivation of the actors. The

<sup>1</sup>Southwest Virginia includes the area of the Western Piedmont and west to the state line.

<sup>2</sup>Francis B. Gummere, *The Popular Ballad* (New York: Dover Books, 1959, copy of 1907 ed.)



broadside poet often took a moral stance for the entire community and intruded his own personality into the song by passing judgment on the actors.

Over time, the broadside developed its own conventions. The most familiar of these is the 'come-all-ye,' an opening formula which calls together an audience and advertises the story to follow. "Come all good people, far and near, A lamentation you shall hear," sang the broadside hawker as he gathered together the buying public. Often the 'come-all-ye' was tailored for the particular story: "Come all ye jolly soldiers bold, That live by tuck of drum; I'll tell you of a rank robber, Now on the seas is come." Another important convention developed particularly in American broadsides was the formal moral which closed the song. The moral made an editorial comment on the song, and warned the audience against similar behavior. Often it was combined with another 'come-all-ye' as a fitting reprise: "Come all ye pretty fair maidens, A warning take by me, And be sure you quit night walking, And shun bad company."

The immense vitality of the broadside press was due not to support in the large cities, but to its enthusiastic acceptance by those very pockets of rural singers who have been idealized into untarnished carriers of purely oral tradition. In fact, a complicated dialogue arose between the city and the country. Some large broadside presses even had talent scouts who combed the countryside for interesting songs — one might call them commercial folklorists — and brought back many of the same ballads that later found their way into Child's collection. In turn, the broadside press carried new songs into oral tradition and infused the old songs with new life. When British settlers carried their precious musical heritage to America, the broadside ballads held equal place with the older songs.

### The Native American Ballad in Virginia

We know that the people who settled in the hills and valleys of Virginia were song writers as well as singers from the moment they set foot in the new land. Possibly the earliest surviving Virginia ballads were written just before the Revolution in the wake of Lord Dunmore's War. In 1774, Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, sent a troop of 3000 soldiers to suppress a Shawnee uprising in the western part of the colony, which then included present-day West Virginia. Several ballads about the event were widespread and were collected in the nineteenth century. Charles H. Lewis of Staunton found one pasted to his grandmother's Bible in 1845:

- (1) *Ye daughters and sons of Virginia incline  
Your ears to a story of woe;  
I sing of a time when your fathers and mine  
Fought for us on the Ohio*
- (2) *In seventeen hundred and seventy four,  
The month of October, we know  
An army of Indians, two thousand or more,  
Encamped on the Ohio.*
- (3) *The Shawnees, Wyandottes, and Delawares, too,  
As well as the tribes of Mingo,  
Invaded our lands, and our citizens slew,  
On the south of the Ohio.*
- (4) *Andrew Lewis the gallant, and Charley the brave,  
With Matthews and Fleming also,  
Collected an army, our country to save,  
On the banks of the Ohio . . .*
- (7) *They marched thro' the untrodden wilds of the  
west,  
O'er mountains and rivers also,  
And pitched, at Point Pleasant, their bodies to  
rest,  
On the banks of the Ohio.*
- (8) *The Army of Indians, in Battle array,  
Under Cornstalk and Elnipsicow,  
Was met by the forces of Lewis that day,  
On the banks of the Ohio.*
- (9) *They brought on the battle at breaking of day,  
Like heroes they slaughtered the foe,  
Till two hundred Indians or more, as they say,  
Were slain by the Ohio.*
- (10) *The Army of Indians did mourn and her daughter  
did weep,  
For Saul and his host on Gilbow  
We'll mourn Colonel Fields and the heroes who  
sleep  
On the banks of the Ohio.<sup>3</sup>*

Many ballads of this type must have been printed as broadsides, judging from those surviving in archives. Some date from the Revolutionary War: "A New Song, . . . on the causes . . . events . . . end and consequences of the war with Great Britain;" and a number remain from the Civil War: "The Battle of Manassas," "The Night Before Richmond," or "The Yankee Stampede" (sung to the tune of "Root, Hog Or Die").<sup>4</sup>

However, these are probably not typical of the bulk of the local ballads composed in Virginia throughout the nineteenth century. These have survived because they interest the historian, but the scholar and the singer do not always see eye to eye. The number of songs in archives is contrasted by the tiny number collected in the field. For every song about a military campaign, there were probably twenty about a local feud, hanging, or accident. Our best examples of the type of local ballad

composed in Virginia during its first two centuries are the songs collected by the Virginia Folklore Society and the Federal Writers' Project in the first part of this century.

The Virginia Folklore Society was founded in 1912 by C. Alphonso Smith, a professor at the University of Virginia, and was part of the ballad-collecting movement inspired by Child's collection. Though its avowed purpose was the collecting of all Virginia versions of Child ballads, it did not overlook the rich harvest of other folk songs at hand. When Arthur Kyle Davis, the archivist of the collection, published *Folk-Songs of Virginia* as a checklist of the songs collected up to 1949, over three-fourths of the material was outside the Child collection. The Federal Writers' Project, a subsidiary of the Works Project Administration (WPA), sent folklore collectors throughout Virginia between 1938 and 1942. The material they collected, now housed at the Alderman Library of the University of Virginia, contains a similarly high proportion of non-Child songs.

Though both ventures were originated and directed by professionals and academics, most of the collecting was carried out by interested amateurs. Often local people who turned to their neighbors and even themselves as sources, were aware of the scholarly interest in older ballads, but could not turn a deaf ear to the music all around them. "This ballad may not be useable at all," wrote Emory L. Hamilton of Wise to the Federal Writers' Project, "since the author was Goldia Beal of Norton, Virginia."<sup>5</sup> "The Death of Charlie Gregory" was nonetheless included. Collectors like Hamilton and James Taylor Adams of Big Laurel, Virginia were largely responsible for preserving the texts of these local songs.

A quick survey of the songs they collected brings out some common themes in local balladry. By far, the two most common subjects are bad men and disasters. The exploits of outlaws such as Talt Hall, Buster Beverly, and Carmichael (Carr Mitchell) are celebrated and condemned at the same time in their songs. The perilous coal mining industry, which was calling increasing numbers of men away from the farms of southwest Virginia, left its mark in such songs as "The Red Jacket Mine Explosion," "The Explosion at Derby," and "The Powellton Labor Train Explosion." A smaller number of murder ballads appear ("The Death of Edmund Connor," "Jack Harold," "Frank Bowen") one or two war ballads ("The Gladeville Skirmish") and a few comic ballads ("The Ground of Bishopville," "The Hurricane Poker Crew"). These themes are common to all American balladry, as a glance through G. Malcolm Laws' survey of *Native American Balladry* will show.

<sup>1</sup>Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg, eds. *Documentary History of Dunmore's War*, pages 436-437, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1905.

<sup>2</sup>Ray O. Hemmel, *Southeastern Broadside Before 1877: A Bibliography* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1971.)

<sup>3</sup>Arthur Kyle Davis Collection, Manuscript Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.



The native Virginia songs take up the conventions of the broadside and adapt them to their particular place and time. The 'come-all ye' is by far the most popular formula, appearing like clockwork in almost every song. It is fitted to new occupations: "Come all you good hearted miners" (Lawrence Harrell) and to modern times: "Listen all you reckless drivers" (Charlie Gregory). Such openings have the full force of tradition behind them.

Even more important is the concluding moral. In a region deeply touched by the frontier camp meeting, the broadside moral helped place otherwise inexplicable events in an orderly, God-ruled universe. Where tragedy came as a result of man's misdeeds, it served as a reminder for the entire community: "Don't never drink any liquor; Don't never drink beer; Be good to all your fellowmen, Live a Christian life while you are here." (Buster Beverly). When tragedy came as an act of God, it was a remainder to be ever prepared for death: "Fathers, sons, husbands, and sweethearts, Your train sometime might explode. So be prepared at any time, And stay on the righteous road." (The Powellton Labor Train Explosion.) In this guise, the local ballad was even used by preachers. Copies of "The Red Jacket Mine Explosion," written by Rev. Robert McGlothlin of Mt. Heron, were distributed at Pentecostal revivals.

The collections made by the Virginia Folklore Society and the Federal Writers' Project Show that Virginia balladry was very much a family affair. The songs are firmly rooted in the local soil, so much so that a good number can be connected with their authors. "The Hurricane Poker Crew," for instance, the story of riotous poker game in the Hurricane Section of Wise County, was written by Tebe Lewis, one of the players. Wayne Damron, a miner from Wise, wrote two songs about personal tragedies: the accidental poisoning of his brother's family and the loss of his own wife. Some songs are identified simply by their author's name, such as "The Dave Maggard Song," or "The Chant Branham Song," while tradition has already blurred the names of other authors to "an old miner" or "a street singer." A special place must be given to twelve-year-old Charles A. Hudson of Pulaski, who wrote "The Powellton Labor Train Explosion," "Buster Beverly" and "Lawrence Harrell."<sup>6</sup>

The local knowledge these songs demanded of their audience probably means they did not get far beyond their immediate community. The distance of one county may have been too far for some of them to travel. However, within their own locale they were well-known and some were sung


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enough for the variations familiar to scholars of tradition to creep in.

Just what determines whether a particular song will break out of its immediate locale and become widespread in a region remains a bit of a mystery. A good tune and a clever tale help, but there must also be something about the song that appeals to those not immediately involved in the event. Sometimes the incident that inspires a song is so unusual and spectacular that widespread interest is guaranteed. The notoriety of the Allen shootout in the Hillsville courthouse or the flamboyant wreck of the Old 97 practically assured the spread of ballads about these events. Certain themes also seem to appeal to particular times. It can be no accident that the large number of train wreck songs are followed by a number of car wreck songs. However, when a song like "Poor Ellen Smith" finds popularity not only within its own locale (Mt. Airy, NC), but throughout the entire mountain region, it is because it touches some basic chord in the minds of most singers.

Finally, the importance of the commercial broadside in spreading these songs cannot be discounted. For all the celebrated isolation of the mountain coves and hollows, the commercial broadside thrived in Virginia as it did in Britain. Hopeful songwriters would publish their own work as broadsides at their own expense. Dock Boggs, the well-known banjo player from Wise County was one songwriter who started in this fashion. Despite the romantic image of mountain purity which still persists, the commercial climate was ready for the invasion of the most dramatic influence on local balladry in this century: the record industry.

### The Record and the Ballad

Although the commercial recording industry had been in existence since the late nineteenth century, record companies did not turn to rural musicians until the 1920's. The development of the radio, which depressed record company sales, was one factor that led to the search for new markets. The most important pioneer in this movement was Ralph Peer of Okeh Records, who had already been responsible for the development of "Race" records aimed at the black audience. A few country musicians like Eck Robertson of Amarillo, Texas and Henry Whitter of Fries, Virginia had already made their way to New York City and talked their way into recording sessions, but it was not until Ralph Peer made a trip to Atlanta in June 1923 that the record industry really noticed the rural market. Peer came to Atlanta at the request of a local businessman who recognized the potential for country music. The recordings Peer made of Fiddling John Carson sold well in the Atlanta area and the record industry took notice. Over the next few years record companies mounted numerous recording expeditions to ferret out the best local talent.<sup>7</sup>

One of the richest areas, they found, was southwest Virginia, where there was a flourishing instrumental tradition. In fact, it was "The Hill-Billies," a band from Grayson and Carroll counties, that gave its name to the emerging musical phenomenon. String bands had existed in southwest Virginia for as long as anyone could remember. They had largely been ignored by folksong collectors because their music was for dancing, with only an occasional vocal number. The record industry was drawn naturally to their infectious sound, but helped promote a shift to more vocal music, since records were meant for listening, not dancing. Bands like Charlie Poole's North Carolina Ramblers, already known in southwest Virginia, gained great popularity through the recordings of their songs. The impact of new styles was heightened by the record industry. Any musician who did not know the

<sup>6</sup>1810.

<sup>7</sup>Bill Malone, *Country Music, USA* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1968) pp. 33-38.



Carter Family style from hearing them in person knew it from their 78 rpm records. The ferment in styles produced a rich and complex stream that can be found today in an astonishing range of sounds living side by side, from the oldest string band to the latest Nashville sound.

It is not a bit farfetched to see the record industry as a direct continuation of the broadside press. As Bill C. Malone points out in *Country Music, USA*, the record industry helped spread a pre-existing tradition, creating the same country-city dialogue that had existed in the broadside. The record companies themselves were well-aware of their role; as Victor catalog says of its records: "They belong with the old fashioned penny-ballad, hobo-song, or 'come-all-ye.'"<sup>8</sup> The record company talent scouts, too, who visited the southern Appalachians in search of new songs, were commercial folklorists in the style of the agents sent out by broadside printers. The record was a broadside that sang.

The local ballad had an important part in this musical ferment. The record scout, as opposed to the folklorist, was often more interested in local compositions than in widespread traditional songs. Commercial music brought with it the consideration of copyright, giving local songs the advantage of novelty. Record companies called such local ballads 'event' songs. Some country musicians, like Rev. Andrew Jenkins of Atlanta, were known for their ability to turn out event songs on demand. Carson Robison, whose whistling often accompanied Vernon Dalhart's recordings, reduced the writing of event songs to a set formula. If such an approach seems coldblooded and commercial, the Grub Street hack writers had done the same. Songs like Jenkins' "Death of Floyd Collins" were fully accepted by the mountain culture and later collected as traditional ballads by folklorists.

The mainstream of the recording industry led toward the rise of the country music superstar and the dominance of Nashville. While southwest Virginia today is a very real participant in the Nashville complex, it has maintained its own regional identity. Like the broadside, the record was quickly appropriated by the local entrepreneur. As early as 1931, Golden P. Harris, a Primitive Baptist elder in Indian Valley, Floyd County, had set up his own small record company.<sup>9</sup> Today, a number of independent record labels such as Bobby Patterson's Heritage Records in Galax, Dave Freeman's County Records in Floyd, and Rod Shively's Outlet Records in Rocky Mount provide a channel for the musicians of the region. Songs firmly rooted in the soil of southwest Virginia are still written and thrive today as they have always done.



## Side 1

### The Allen Tragedy

No event in the history of southwest Virginia has inspired more songs or achieved greater notoriety than the shootout inside the Hillsville Courthouse on March 14, 1912. The facts surrounding the case are almost irretrievably lost in a cloud of contradictory evidence and sensa-

tionalism, but out of the muddle have arisen two fine ballads and a rich body of legend.

The Allen family, responsible for the Hillsville shootout, were residents of long-standing. By the end of the 19th century, they were well-established farmers and merchants in the Hillsville area. Floyd and Sidna Allen, the major figures in the shootout, had five brothers and three sisters. Within the family were prosperous farmers, saw mill owners, a school teacher and a Primitive Baptist minister. Both Floyd and Sidna were farmers and merchants and both were known

# Three Thousand One Hundred Dollars (\$3,100) REWARD (DEAD OR ALIVE)

We will pay the following rewards for the arrest and conviction of Sidna Allen, Claude Allen, Freel Allen, Wesley Edwards, and Sidney Edwards, who stood indicted in the County of Carroll, Virginia, charged with the murder of Judge Thornton L. Massie, Commonwealth's Attorney W. M. Foster, and Sheriff L. S. Webb, who were shot to death at Hillsville, Carroll County, Virginia, March 14th, 1912.

## ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS (\$1000) REWARD.

**SIDNA ALLEN**, age 46 years; height 5 feet 9 or 10 inches, weight 145 to 155 pounds; light brown hair, mixed with gray; blue eyes; long hatchet face; long nose; sallow complexion; smooth shaven; teeth prominent; one upper front tooth crowned with gold; one large gold filling in tooth next to gold crowned one. When laughing and smiling teeth are very prominent; large mouth; thin lips; left handed. Shot through the left arm, also supposed to have a light wound in the left side. Has small feet.

## EIGHT HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$800) REWARD.

**CLAUDE ALLEN**, son of Floyd Allen, age 22 years; weight 190 to 200 pounds; height 6 feet; black hair, ends slightly curly; smooth face; dark complexion; gray bluish eyes; good teeth; long, black eyebrows that connect; large, round face; very prominent cheek bones; rather good looking, but features a little bit rough.

## FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$500) REWARD.

**FREEL ALLEN**, son of Jack Allen, age 18 years; 5 feet 7 or 7½ inches; weight 130 to 135 pounds; slender built; light hair and blue eyes; fair complexion; features rather regular; clean shaven.

## FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$500) REWARD.

**WESLEY EDWARDS**, nephew of Floyd and Sidna Allen, age 20 years, height 5 feet 7 or 8 inches; weight 160 to 170 pounds; stock built; dark hair, slightly curled on ends; gray eyes; features regular; face always flushed; complexion dark; smooth shaven. Bad and dangerous man.

## THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$300) REWARD.

**SIDNEY EDWARDS**, brother of Wesley Edwards, age 20 years; weight 180 to 190 pounds; height 6 feet; dark hair; blue eyes; complexion fair; features regular; smooth shaven; limbs slightly.

These men are all mountaineers and thoroughly familiar with the mountain country along the borders of Virginia and North Carolina. They will likely try to escape through North Carolina, Tennessee, or the Southwestern portion of Virginia. They may try to make their escape by traveling through the country in wagons. All are heavily armed and desperate men.

The reward is offered by us upon authority of His Excellency William Hodges Mann, Governor of Virginia, and Attorney General Samuel W. Williams.

There is absolutely no question about the conviction of these men if arrested, as the murders were committed in broad open day-light in the presence of fifty witnesses.

Wire all information to

**BALDWIN-FELTS DETECTIVES, Inc.**

Roanoke, Va., or Bluefield, W. Va.

<sup>8</sup> Archie Green, "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol," *Journal of American Folklore* 78, (1965), 219.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on Golden Harris, see article on same in a forthcoming issue of *Old Time Music*.



for their ready tempers. Many of their disputes were politically motivated and they had avowed enemies among the Republicans of Carroll County.

The initial incident which led to the shootout took place in the late summer of 1911. Floyd and Sidna Allen's nephews Wesley and Sidna Edwards had exchanged fighting words with a local boy at a Saturday night dance in Fancy Gap, Virginia. The quarrel came to blows the next day, when a fight broke out on the grounds of the church where Garland Allen was leading a Primitive Baptist service. In a controversial move by Commonwealth Attorney William M. Foster, a political enemy of the Allens, the two brothers were indicted for disturbing public worship. Before their uncle Floyd could post bond, the Edwards escaped custody and fled to Mt. Airy, North Carolina.

There they were arrested by Virginia officers without proper requisition papers. On the trip back to Hillsville, the officers encountered Floyd Allen, near Sidna Allen's home and store in Fancy Gap. It is unclear just what happened next, but whether by threats (as Floyd and his nephews avowed) or by force (as the officers claimed) Floyd managed to remove his nephews from the officers' custody.

The following day, Floyd delivered Wesley and Sidna to authorities in Hillsville, but as a result of his actions, he was indicted for interfering with law officers in the course of their duty. His brother, Sidna Allen, was indicted on the same charge, but never brought to trial. The Edwards brothers were tried, convicted and given moderate sentences.

Floyd Allen's trial was held on March 13, 1912. At the end of that day, the twelve-man jury had reached their verdict, but Judge Thornton L. Massie delayed the reading until the following morning. The Judge apparently feared trouble, for he scheduled the reading an hour before the usual time. The courtroom was crowded with curious spectators. In the audience were a number of Floyd's family, among them his sons Claude and Victor, his brother Sidna, and his nephews Wesley and Sidna Edwards. Around 9:30, the jury pronounced Floyd Allen guilty, and the Judge sentenced him to a year in prison. His attorneys announced their intention to appeal the case and asked that the court release the prisoner on the bond he had paid at the time of the original indictment.

Judge Massey refused the request and ordered the Sheriff to remove the prisoner. At that point, Floyd Allen announced his refusal to comply. In the uproar that followed, someone fired a shot and the courtroom dissolved into

pandemonium as volley after volley of pistol shots rang out. During a period of minutes, more than two hundred shots were fired. When the smoke cleared, five people were dead or dying, including the Judge and Sheriff. Among the wounded were Floyd Allen, Sidna Allen and County Clerk Dexter Goad.

The crucial questions in the trials which followed the shootout were who fired the initial shot and whether there had been a conspiracy on the part of the Allens. Part of the damaging testimony against the Allens came from Floyd Allen's own defense attorney, D. W. Bolen. At Floyd's murder trial on April 30, 1912 he testified:

"(Floyd Allen) opened his coat and begun in a very leisurely manner to unbutton his vest and sweater, and people began to clear out, and it occurred to me that maybe he intended to jump over the railing and run out, but when the people cleared away, I saw out toward the wall or window his son Victor . . . and I had not not more than fixed my eye on him when he raised his pistol and fired. The pistol ranged toward Judge Massie and the smoke settled down between the balustrade and the wall . . . and the dust seemed to rise from the Judge's shoulder."<sup>10</sup>

Floyd Allen, in turn, claimed that he had reached for a subpoena in his vest pocket when Dexter Goad mistook the motion and pulled a gun. Sidna Allen claimed in his memoirs that he was talking to an acquaintance when the first shot was fired. "Looking in that direction, I saw flashing guns in the hands of Dexter Goad, Clerk of the Court, and Lew Webb, the Sheriff. Their weapons, I thought were pointed directly at Floyd Allen and apparently they were attempting to kill him."<sup>11</sup> Judge Walter R. Staples, who presided over Floyd Allen's murder trial, concluded that there was evidence of a conspiracy on the part of the Allens.

In the confusion following the shootout, the members of the Allen family fled the scene. Incapacitated by his back wound, Floyd found shelter at Tom Hall's Hotel in Hillsville with his son Victor. There they were arrested the following day. The rest gave themselves up a week later, except for Claude Allen, Sidna Allen, and Wesley Edwards. The Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency of Roanoke was called in to assist the manhunt and soon captured Claude. Sidna Allen and Wesley Edwards managed to elude them. After a month of hiding in Carroll County, the two escaped to Des Moines, Iowa, where they found work as carpenters. On August 14, Edward's sweetheart led the Baldwin-Felts detectives to his boarding



Photo Courtesy Rufus L. Gardner

Floyd Allen

house in Des Moines where he and Allen were arrested. They were brought back to Carroll County, where Sidna Allen received a thirty-five year sentence.

On May 18, 1912, Floyd Allen was sentenced to death for the murder of William Foster. His son Claude was likewise sentenced to death on July 17 for conspiracy to murder. A series of appeals and petitions for clemency to Governor Mann followed, but the Governor refused to commute the sentences, and set the execution date for March 28, 1913. Despite a last minute attempt to stay the execution by the Allens' attorneys, they were electrocuted early that afternoon.

After serving thirteen years of his sentence, Sidna Allen was pardoned for good behavior in April, 1926, by Governor Harry F. Byrd. After his release he hired a wagon and took the collection of inlaid tables which he had made in prison on tour to state and county fairs. In 1929 he published his *Memoirs* in an attempt to vindicate the Allens' part in the shootout.

Besides the legal drama of the courtroom, quite another drama was played out in the popular press in the wake of the shootout. The incident was sensational enough to make the front page of the New York Times the day after the shootout. With the intensive manhunt for Sidna Allen and Wesley Edwards, a swarm of reporters descended upon Hillsville. Before the two were even captured, there was already a book about the event entitled *The Allen Outlaws* (Baltimore: Phoenix Publishing Co., 1912), much in the style of the instant bestsellers produced today in the wake of any major news story.

These accounts by outsiders grossly distorted the mountain culture of southwest Virginia. The Allens were portrayed as a mountain clan, taking justice into their own hands and then disappearing into the mountain fastness to barricade their

<sup>10</sup>The Trial of Floyd Allen, April 30, 1913, Wytheville, Va., Vol. 1 (Roanoke: Morris and Hart, 1913), pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup>*Memoirs of J. Sidna Allen*, (Mt. Airy: F.H. Lamb, 1929), page 56.



cabins and sit with rifles poised for the assault:

"Down to the quaint old red-brick Court house at Hillsville, the seat of Carroll County, where sentence was being pronounced by one of their numbers, a troop of twenty mud-splashed mountaineers galloped in with rifles from the surrounding hills early this morning and in less time than it takes to tell it, the judge upon the bench, the prosecutor before the bar, and the sheriff at the door lay dead in the courtroom."<sup>12</sup> Even when the reporters arrived on the scene, they continued to portray the Allens as backwoods outlaws stamped in the mold of the Hatfields and McCoys, although the tangible signs of the Allens' prosperous standing were apparent everywhere.

The ballads of "Claude Allen" and "Sidna Allen" give some picture of how the legal controversy and the popular press affected the region itself. Both songs have been found throughout the South. G. Malcolm Laws found sufficient evidence of their presence in oral tradition to include both in his *Native American Balladry*. "Claude Allen" is undoubtedly the older of the two songs. Ralph and Richard Rinzler recorded a version from Tom Ashley of Shouns, Tennessee who remembered learning the song before his marriage in 1914, so it must have been written almost immediately after Claude's execution. Although the song is completely sympathetic with Claude Allen, there is no trace of the maudlin romanticism found in the newspaper accounts. Of the two songs it is also the more factual, though it



Left to right, top row: Victor Allen, Byrd Marion and Sidna Edwards; below: Claude Allen and Friel Allen.

has less of a narrative. It probably originated in the Hillsville area. "Sidney Allen," on the other hand, is hopelessly inaccurate in regard to the shootout. The details of the capture and trial, however, are fairly reliable. The song is written in good 'Come-all ye' form and Sidna Allen is portrayed as a reckless outlaw, as in the newspaper accounts. It was probably written somewhere in southern Appalachia, from information received from the newspaper and by word-of-mouth. Both songs were popular throughout southwest Virginia, except in Hillsville itself, where the shootout remains controversial to this day. In his study of the two songs, Peter Aceves points out that no singer has been found who sings both songs. He concludes that the songs each present a point of view acceptable to a segment of the people of southwest Virginia, but are in conflict with each other.<sup>13</sup>

The power of the Allen shootout can be measured in the long memories of area residents and in the songs it inspired. A third song, "The Pardon of Sidna Allen" has been collected from printed sources, but did not enter oral tradition. It was recorded by Vernon Dalhart in 1926 (Okeh 40657). As recently as this decade, the incident has inspired country singer Bobby Atkins and his brother, Kemp Atkins, to write a song called, "Sidna, Poor Boy."

# **1. CLAUDE ALLEN — (Laws E 6)—Hobart Smith, guitar and vocal. Recorded in Saltville, (Smyth County), Virginia, August 28, 1942 by Alan Lomax, 3:28.**

Hobart Smith's version of "Claude Allen" has a clear line of descent from the earliest form of the song. Tom Ashley, who learned the song shortly after the execution, taught it to Smith sometime around 1918.

Hobart Smith was born in Smyth County in 1897. His artistry on the guitar, banjo, and fiddle was matched only by his sister, Texas Gladden, a noted ballad singer. He first began to play at home, learning the banjo from his father. When he turned to the guitar, he was inspired by the playing of black musicians in his area. Such an interchange between black and white musicians has been increasingly acknowledged as a major factor in the development of Southern instrumental styles.

This singing of "Claude Allen" was recorded by Alan Lomax in 1942. It clearly shows the influence of the blues tradition on Hobart Smith. The tune is variant of "Wayfaring Pilgrim," heightening the poignancy of the words. Alan Lomax recorded another rendition of the song from Smith in 1959. In the later playing, the blues

element is even more pronounced. When the two renditions are compared with Tom Ashley's original version (available on "Old Time Music at Clarence Ashley's," Folkways, FA 2355), they provide a dramatic example of one traditional musician's individual development.

*Claude Allen and his dear old father,  
Have met their fatal doom at last,  
Their friends are glad the trouble's ended,  
And they hope their souls is now at rest.*

*Claude Allen was that tall and handsome,  
He still had hopes until the end,  
That he in some way or other,  
Escape his death from the Richmond Pen.*

*The Governor being so hard-hearted,  
Not caring what his friends might say,  
He finally took his sweet life from him,  
In the cold, cold ground his body lay.*

*Claude Allen had a pretty sweetheart,  
She moans aloud for the one she loved,  
She hopes to meet beyond the river,  
That fair young face in heaven above.*

*Claude's mother's tears were gently flowing,  
All for the one she loved so dear,  
It seemed no one could tell her troubles,  
It seemed no one could tell but her.*

*How sad, how sad, to think of killing,  
A man all in his youthful years,  
A leaving his old mother weeping,  
And all his friends in bitter tears.*

*Look up on yonders lonely mountain,  
Claude Allen sleeps beneath the clay,  
No more you'll hear his words of mercy,  
Or see his face till Judgement Day.*

*Come all young boys, you may take warning,  
Be careful how you go astray,  
Or you might be like poor Claude Allen,  
And have his awful debt to pay.*



Hobart Smith (right)

Photo Courtesy of Chris Gladden

<sup>12</sup>New York Times, March 15, 1912, p.1., col.1

<sup>13</sup>Peter C. Aceves, "The Hillsville Tragedy in Court Record, Mass Media, and Folk Balladry: A Problem in Historical Documentation," *Keystone Folklore Quarterly* 16:1 (1971): 1-38.



**2. SIDNEY ALLEN (Laws E 5) — Spence Moore, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Chilhowie (Smyth County), Virginia, February 8, 1980, by Doug DeNatale , 1:53.**

“Sidney Allen” is usually sung to the tune of “Casey Jones,” which certainly must have been the model for the song. A version sung by the Bogtrotters Band of Galax, Virginia emphasized the relationship with additional verses constructed along the lines of the “Casey Jones” refrain. While Spence Moore’s melody is related to that tune, it is significantly altered. Probably a particular singer was dissatisfied with the “Casey Jones” tune and played around until he came up with one more to his liking. Interestingly, the first line of Spence’s version, a clear reference to “Casey Jones,” is found in only a few other versions.

*Come all you rounders if you want to hear,  
A story about a brave mountaineer,  
Sidney Allen was the villain’s name,  
And he shot up the courthouse while he run his game.*

*The Judge called the jury ‘bout a half past nine,  
Sidney Allen was the prisoner and he was on time,  
He mounted to the bar with a pistol in his hand,  
And he sent that Judge to the promised land.*

*Just a moment later, the place was in a roar,  
The dead and the dying, they were lying on the floor,  
With a thirty-eight special and a thirty-eight ball,  
Sidney backed the sheriff up against the wall.*

*The Sheriff saw that he was in a mighty bad place,  
The mountaineer was staring him right in the face,  
Sidney turned to the window and then he said,  
Just a moment more and we’ll all be dead.*

*Sidney mounted to his pony and away he did ride,  
His friends and nephews they were riding by his side,  
They all shook hands and swore they would hang,  
Before they’d give in to the ball and chain.*

*Sidney Allen wandered and he traveled all around,  
Until he was captured in a western town,  
He was taken to the station with a ball and chain,  
So they put poor Sidney on that eastbound train.*

*Sidney arrived back home about eleven-forty-one,  
Sidney met his wife and daughter and his two little sons,  
They all shook hands and begin in to pray,  
And said, “Oh Lord, don’t take our papa away.”*

*But the people they all gathered from far and near,  
Just to see poor Sidney sentenced to the electric chair,  
And to their surprise the Judge he said,  
“He’s going to the penitentiary instead.”*

**SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY**

“Sidney Allen” (Composed by Carson Robison, 1925) Henry Whitter, Apr.-May 1924, NYC, OK 40109.



J. Sidna Allen

Photo Courtesy of Rufus L. Gardner

**3. POOR GOINS — James Taylor Adams, vocal, Finley Adams, vocal. Recorded in Dunham, Kentucky, March 27, 1939, by Herbert Halpert, 3:52**

Alexander Goins was a horse trader who made regular trips between Lawrence County, Kentucky and South Carolina. In October, 1844 he was ambushed and murdered in Wise County, Virginia, about four miles north of Appalachia. The murderers were never caught and their deed remained cloaked in mystery.

According to Emory L. Hamilton, who contributed a version of the song to the Federal Writers’ Project, there were two traditions concerning the murder. The first, as represented by the ballad, portrayed Goins as a respectable horse dealer who was ambushed on Callahan Creek while carrying \$9,000 in cash. He was able to escape down the creek to the home of Ely Boggs, where he had stayed on other trips. Unknown to Goins, however, Boggs had been a member of the frustrated ambush party. Boggs offered to show the unwitting Goins another trail over the Nine Mile Spur of Black Mountain, a shortcut to the main trail. Alerted by Boggs, the accomplices lay hidden at the junction of the trails, where they shot Goins. In a panic, his horse carried him down the mountain, and he fell dead near the mouth of Mud Lick Creek.

The second version of the murder holds that Goins was actually a horse thief. One variant of this story claims that he was murdered by a hired man who discovered his shady dealings. Another lays the blame once again on Ely Boggs and his neighbors, who were driven to impromptu justice by the theft of their horses.

The song was composed by Gabriel Church, a contemporary of Goins and a resident of the community where the murder occurred. Originally from North Carolina, Church moved with his parents to Wise County around 1825. According to James Taylor Adams, his great-nephew, he composed over a hundred songs. Emory Hamilton called Church, “the pioneer poet of the Cumberlands.” However, “Poor Goins” seems to have been the only one of his songs to have circulated widely outside his immediate community. It has been collected on both sides of the Kentucky-Virginia border.

James Taylor Adams was one of the most industrious collectors of folk songs in southwest Virginia. Born and raised in Letcher County, Kentucky, he later made his home in Big Laurel, Wise County, Virginia. He contributed largely to the Virginia Folklore Society and was later a fieldworker for the Federal Writers’ Project. His extensive collection of song and traditional beliefs is housed both at Clinch Valley College and at the Blue Ridge Institute Archives.

Adams learned “Poor Goins” from his father and from his grandfather Spencer Adams. He sings it here with his first cousin Finley Adams. The two had sung the song together since childhood. Such unison singing is highly unusual for ballad-singing in America, but is found more often in Ireland.

*Come all you young people,  
That live far and near,  
And I’ll tell you of some murder.  
That was done on the Nine Mile Spur.*

*They surrounded poor Goins,  
But Goins got away,  
He went to Ely Boggs’  
He went there to stay.*

*Ely Boggs he foreknew him,  
His life he did betray,  
Saying, ‘Come and go with me,  
And I’ll show you a nigh way.’*

*They started up the Nine Mile Spur, boys,  
They made no delay,  
Till they came to the crossroads,  
Where Goins they did slay.*

*When they got in hearing  
They were lying mighty still,  
‘Your money’s what we’re after,  
And Goins we will kill,’*

*When they got in gunshot,  
They did bid him for to stand,  
‘Your money’s what we’re after,  
Your life is in our hands,’*

*‘Sweet heaven, sweet heaven!’  
How loud he did cry,  
‘To think of my companion,  
And now I have to die,’*



*When the gun did fire,  
It caused his horse to run,  
The bullet failed to kill him,  
George struck him with the gun,*

*After they had killed him,  
With him they would not stay,  
They drank up all his whiskey,  
And then they rode away.*

*His wife, she was sent for,  
She made no delay,  
She found his grave dug,  
Along by the way.*

*Go kill a man for riches,  
Or any such a thing,  
I pray the Lord have mercy  
Till Judgement kills the stings.'*

*'Sweet heaven, sweet heaven,'  
We heard her poor mourns,  
'Here lies his poor body,  
Where is his poor soul?*

#### **4. THE VANCE SONG (Laws F 1/) — Uncle Branch W. Higgins, vocal. Recorded in Salyersville, Kentucky, October 28, 1937, by Alan and Elizabeth Lomax, 2:10.**

Abner Vance was a Baptist preacher who lived on the Clinch River in what is now Russell County. Vance family traditions has it that a wealthy neighbor named Lewis Horton seduced Vance's daughter and refused to marry her. In a violent quarrel between the two men, Vance shot and mortally wounded Horton.

Vance and his wife Susannah were summoned before a grand jury on October 16, 1817. After lengthy consideration, with many witnesses called, Abner Vance was finally indicted in April, 1818. Susannah was released. A speedy trial followed and Vance was found guilty on April 14, 1818. An appeal followed and the trial was moved to Washington County. In May 1819, Vance was again found guilty and a second appeal was denied.

In the long imprisonment while he was being tried, Vance is said to have written this song. He had a time-honored precedent in the many broadside ballads supposedly written by criminals shortly before their executions. These "Goodnight Ballads" were usually written by professional broadside poets, who often made the mistake of carrying the story beyond the execution. In Vance's case, he may have been the actual author. Elihu Sutherland reports "he sang it often through the prison bars," in the course of his trial (*Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 4 (1940), 251-254).

The vivid imagery of the song certainly helped its spread outside Virginia. It was also distributed on broadsides. John Harrington Cox

collected one of these printed copies dated 1897 from Vance's great-grandson, D.K. Vance. Uncle Branch Higgins' version of the song has moved far from the printed one. The narrative element is so subdued that it can hardly be called a ballad any longer. Such a tendency for ballads to become more lyrical over time is common in American folk music, particularly when the original song is full of obscure allusions that only an insider could understand.

Though eighty-five years old at the time of this recording, Uncle Branch Higgins gives the beautiful pentatonic tune an appropriately powerful and defiant rendering.

*Bright shines the sun on Clinch's Hill,  
So soft the west wind blows,  
The valleys are lined with the flowers gay,  
Perfumed with the wild rose.*

*Green are the woods through which Sandy flows,  
Peace dwells in the land,  
The bear doth live in the laurel green,  
The red buck roves the hills.*

*But Vance no more on Sandy behold,  
Nor drink its crystal waves,  
The partial judge announced his doom,  
The hunter's found his grave.*

*There's Daniel, Bill, and Lewis,  
A lie against me swore,  
In order to take my life away  
That I may be no more.*

*But I and them shall meet again,  
When Immanuel's trumpet shall blow,  
Perhaps I'll be wrapped in Abraham's bosom,  
When they roll in the gulf below.*

*My body it will be laid in the tomb,  
My flesh it will decay,  
But the blood that was shed on Calvary  
Has washed my sins away.*

*Farewell, farewell, my old sweetheart,  
Your face I'll see no more.  
I'll meet you in the world above,  
Where parting is no more.*

#### **5. THE FATE OF DEWEY LEE — Spence Moore, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Chilhowie (Smyth County), Virginia, February 8, 1980 by Doug DeNatale, 2:53.**

On the last day of January, 1931, a Wise County man was mortally wounded at a party. Dewey Lee, a resident of the Hawthorne Coal Camp near Norton, was struck by gunfire in the home of O.M. McCoy of Ramsey. When he died two days later in the Norton Hospital, his assailant, Joe Jenkins, was charged with murder.

The accounts of the shooting and subsequent trial reported in the *Norton Coalfield Progress* were brief. Memories of the incident are contradictory. All agree on only one point: that Lee

was shot in a fight which suddenly erupted in the McCoy home. According to the newspaper, Lee and another man were in the middle of an argument when Lee drew his gun. Jenkins entered the fray and tried to grab the gun away. In the struggle, Lee was struck with a bullet fired from his own gun. As several residents of Norton remember it, the incident took place differently. In one account, the fight broke out during a drunken argument over a poker hand. In another, both Lee and Jenkins were rivals for the same woman. The party was set up by Jenkins' friends as a trap for Lee, who came armed for protection but gave his gun to a companion as he entered the home. When the fight broke out, Lee borrowed a pistol which was defective and failed to return Jenkins' fire.

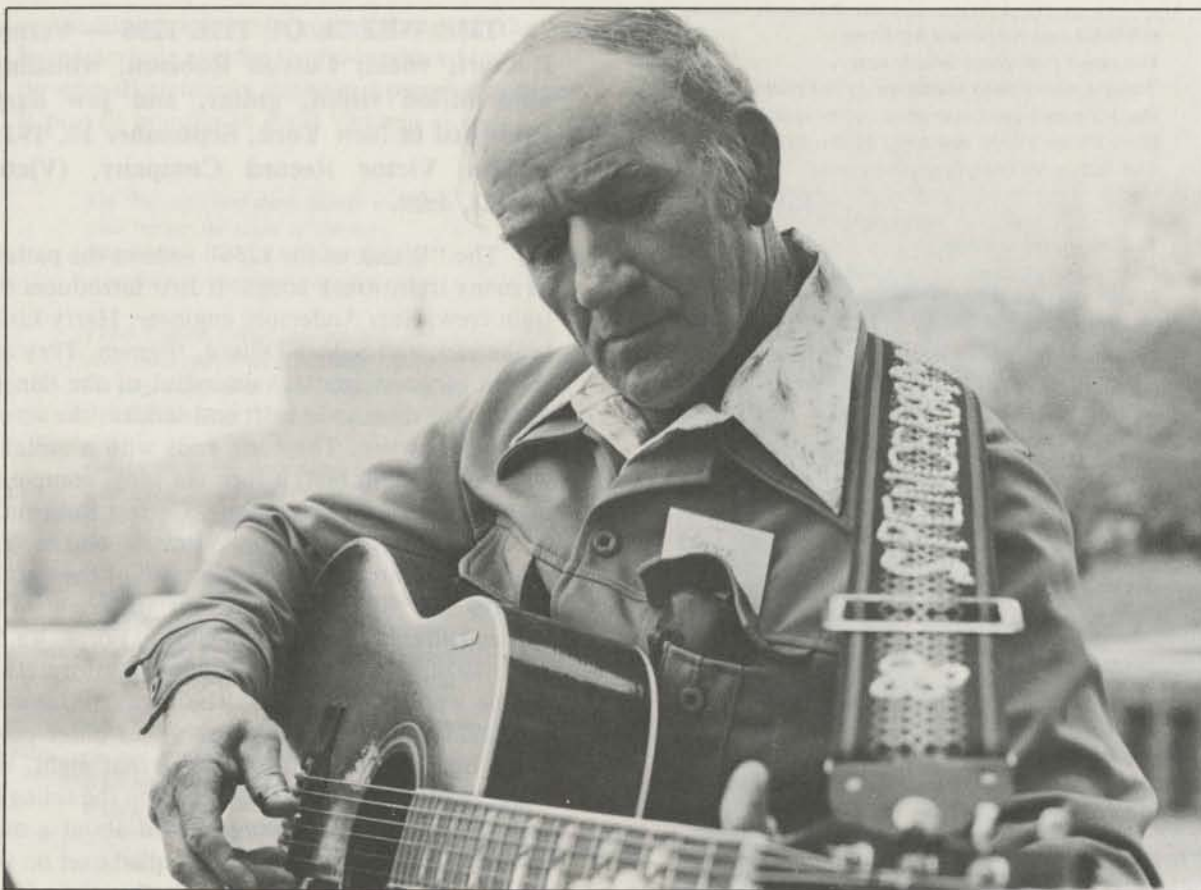
Controversy seems to have surrounded the subsequent trial. Although the original arrest charged Oro McCoy and Lonnie Brickley as accessories to the killing, the final indictment charged Jenkins and Sam Belcher. During the lengthy trial which followed, Jenkins pleaded in self-defense that he had fired only after Lee had beaten him over the head with a pistol. The prosecutors claimed that Belcher, in turn, had beaten Lee after the fatal shooting. In the jury trial which was not completed until the following November 18th, Belcher was acquitted and Jenkins was sentenced to five years in prison.

As a piece of lurid news, the shooting caught the eye of the tireless A.P. Carter, who composed "The Fate of Dewey Lee." Although the Lee family attempted to stop them, the Carter Family recorded the song in 1935. Spence Moore remembers learning the song from his older brother, Donald, but it is also possible that the Moore brothers learned "Dewey Lee" from the Carters themselves, for the brothers played with the Carters a number of times during the 1930's.

*It was on one Saturday evening,  
About the hour of ten,  
In a little mining town,  
Where trouble it began.  
Everybody there was drinking,  
There was liquor everywhere,  
Dewey Lee he got to thinking  
He had no business there.*

*He was so tall and handsome,  
His heart was true and brave.  
Joe Jenkins pulled a pistol,  
He sent him to his grave.  
He took the life of Dewey,  
His life had just began,  
Poor Dewey went to heaven,  
Poor Joe went to the pen.*





BRI Photo

*Spence Moore at the Blue Ridge Folklife Festival in Ferrum, Virginia in October, 1977.*

*He took the life of Dewey,  
Because he would not tell,  
We know he murdered Dewey,  
For Dewey's pistol fell.  
His mother she is weeping,  
She weeps and mourns all day,  
She prays to meet her boy  
In a better world some day.*

*The judge says, 'Stand up, boy,  
And listen to your crime,  
Gonna send you up to Richmond  
To serve out your time,  
There's many that got riches,  
And many beneath the sod,  
But money won't hire you a lawyer,  
When you stand before your God.'*

*Now come all you young men,  
Learn this, we must not kill,  
Don't take the life of anyone,  
For life you cannot give,  
There's many they've got riches,  
And many beneath the sod,  
But money won't hire you a lawyer,  
When you stand before your God,*

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Carter Family, "The Fate of Dewey Lee,"  
Oriole A.R.C. 17503-1, recorded May 8, 1935.

#### 6. THE FATE OF TALMADGE OSBORNE — Ernest V. Stoneman, vocal, guitar, and harmonica. Recorded in New York City, NY, January 29, 1927 by Okeh Records, (Ok 45084), 2:59.

While a local ballad may be eagerly accepted by many singers and preserved in tradition, it is the fate of some to fall into obscurity. "The Fate of Talmadge Osborne" is a good example of the complexities of the process. Although written and recorded by one of the most popular and influential musicians of southwest Virginia, the song appears to have been almost completely forgotten.

By the time "Pop" Stoneman recorded "Talmadge Osborne", he was already an established recording artist. Born outside of Galax in 1893, he had gone through a succession of jobs by the time he was working in Bluefield, West Virginia as a carpenter. There he heard Henry Whitter's recording of the "Wreck of the Old 97." Stoneman had known Whitter in the textile mills and, like a good many others, thought he could do better. He contacted Okeh Records, and made his first recording trip to New York in September, 1924. Three years later he recorded "Talmadge Osborne" during his tenth recording

session. He recorded the song a second time for the Edison Company on May 10, 1927 and once again on May 19th for Victor. This last recording attributed the song to Stoneman himself. The recording included on this album is Stoneman's first.

For all of Stoneman's popularity and the song's availability on three different record labels, it never really sold well. It is not too difficult to speculate why this was so. In the first place, the song's local nature was compounded by its vague references. This in itself would not necessarily hinder its acceptance by singers, for other songs with equally local references have been kept alive in tradition. More importantly, the song did not have a strong enough story line to maintain interest. While it fits the general pattern of the 'come-all ye,' it simply does not work as a piece of news. With the passage of years, we are left to speculate on the incident which inspired Stoneman's condemnation of the railroad.

The identity of Talmadge Osborne remains unclear. In a letter written by Ernest Stoneman to Alfred Frankenstein, he identifies Osborne as a young man from Grayson County who went to work in the coal mines of West Virginia in order to make the payments on a plot of land he had bought. According to Stoneman, Osborne would often bum rides on the railroad while he was drunk. On one such occasion, Osborne met his fate somewhere around Williamson, West Virginia. Although this is all the information which Stoneman supplies and although sources in Grayson County and West Virginia have been unable to identify Osborne, it is still possible to make a few conjectures about his death.

West Virginia law at the time carefully spelled out a railroad company's liability in the case of an accident. Furthermore, it gave railroad conductors the right to act as constables on the train, to carry guns and to eject any passengers who were considered disorderly. By definition, any trespasser was considered a disorderly person. (West Virginia Code, 1923, Ch. 145, Sec. 31.) Osborne was apparently killed while trying to enter a train and the railroad company was not held responsible for his death. It is unclear why Stoneman referred to the law as the "Johnson Law," but it is possible that the case of E.E. Johnson was cited as a precedent. Johnson, an employee of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, had his hand amputated while trying to uncouple a railroad car. In this instance as well, the railroad was not held responsible. Stoneman may have heard this case referred to and called the law involved the "Johnson" law as a result. The unusual repetition of the line, "Many a man's been murdered by the railroad," possibly borrowed from another song, underscores Stoneman's anger.



Would you please to listen  
To a story I'll confess,  
Of a young man Talmadge Osborne  
Who seemed to have no dread,  
The people all took notice  
Of the screams heard once or twice,  
They believed that he had a warning  
Of a calling of his life.

He was born in Grayson County,  
And paying for some land.  
Now he's in eternity,  
In judgement he will stand.  
He saw the engine coming,  
A-moving down the road,  
Some boys said, 'look out, Osborne,'  
But upon it he did load.

The engine it was backing up,  
When Osborne crossed the right.  
He got off with his hands cut off,  
And he lost his life besides.  
They stopped the engine quickly,  
For the signal it was given.  
I know not who was the enginner,  
But his engine was 497.

They took him back to Grayson  
In an unexpected way,

When his casket reached his home  
You could hear those people say:  
'Many a man's been murdered by the railroad,  
Many a man's been murdered by the railroad,  
Many a man's been murdered by the railroad,  
And laid in his cold, lonesome grave.'

You may think it's jolly,  
But it's real good advice,  
If you're having lots of fun,  
And living mighty nice,  
Be careful how you're walking  
On the company's right-of-way,  
The Johnson law will get you,  
And your doom you'll have to pay.

For they've got a kind of a law out there,  
It's a mighty secret thing,  
You'll get all that's coming  
If you're not in the ring.  
With a pistol in your pocket  
And riding on a train,  
Six months upon the county road  
Will be your finished doom.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

"The Fate of Talmadge Osborne" Ernest  
Stoneman, New York City, May 19, 1927 by Okeh  
45084.



Ernest Stoneman and his Dixie Mountaineers.

#### 7. THE WRECK OF THE 1256 — Vernon Dalhart, vocal; Carson Robison, whistling; unidentified violin, guitar, and jaw harp. Recorded in New York, September 10, 1925, by the Victor Record Company, (Victor 19812), 4:09.

The "Wreck of the 1256" follows the pattern of many train wreck songs. It first introduces the train crew: Sam Anderson, engineer; Harry Lisle, brakeman; and Sidney Dillard, fireman. They are shown in good spirits, unmindful of the danger ahead. The disaster is swift and sudden, the actual cause is obscure. The song ends with a suitable warning. It is, in fact, a formula song, composed by a master of that technique, Carson Robison.

Paul Shue of Staunton, Virginia, who has extensively researched the background of the wreck, reports the following: "In an interview with Sidney Dillard at his home in Clifton Forge, Va. in July, 1970, I gathered the following information on the wreck of the 1256. The night of January 3rd, 1925, as the song suggested was bitter cold. Snow had fallen in Clifton Forge that night, the train, as the song indicates, waited on the siding in Iron Gate, Iron Gate being located about a mile east of Clifton Forge. The train pulled over on the siding until Number Nine, a passenger train from Richmond, had passed by. Then, again, back on the main line, headed toward Gladstone and Richmond. The track at the scene of the wreck of the 1256 was on virtually level grade and as the train rolled along with the tracks along the James River that night, a slide consisting of dirt, shale, and rock had covered the rails. The slide was around the corner as 1256 approached and there was not at the time any automatic signalling device on the James River run. So there was no warning to the crew. By the time the headlights had picked up the slide, it was too late. The 1256 had turned over into the James River. Harry Lisle, the brakeman, was killed in the wreck. The engineer, Sam Anderson, escaped unhurt."

Vernon Dalhart was already a well-known recording star at the time of this recording. Born Marion Try Slaughter in Jefferson, Texas, he moved to New York City and became a light opera singer. By 1924, his career was faltering, until he convinced Victor to let him make a hillbilly record. The success of "The Prisoner's Song" (with "The Wreck of the Old 97" on the flip side) launched him on a new career. Dalhart's hybrid status as an opera singer and county musician is obvious in his singing. His vocal style proved immensely popular, bridging the gap between the country and city markets.

This recording of "1256" was Dalhart's fourth. The previous recordings must have sold well, because all stops were pulled in this version. Carson Robison's virtuoso whistling, the



astonishing harmonica embellishments, the jaw harp interlude and the studio-produced train whistle were all gimmicks aimed at a popular audience. It proved popular in rural Virginia as well.

*On that cold and dark cloudy evening,  
Just before the close of the day,  
There came Harry Lisle and Dillard,  
And with Anderson they rolled away.*

*From Clifton Forge they started,  
And their spirits were running high,  
As they stopped at Iron Gate and waited  
Till Old Number Nine went by.*

*On the main line once more they started  
Down the James River so dark and drear,  
And they gave no thought to the danger,  
Or the death that was waiting so near.*

*They were gay and they joked with each other,  
As they sped on their way side by side,  
And the old engine rocked as she traveled  
Through the night on that last fatal ride.*

*In an instant the story was ended,  
On her side in that cold river bed,  
With poor Harry Lisle in the Cabin,  
With a deep fatal wound in his head.*

*Railroad men you should all take warning  
From the fate that befell this young man.  
Don't forget that the step is a short one  
From this earth to the sweet Promised Land.*

## 8. THE WRECK OF THE OLD 97<sup>14</sup> — Kelly Harrell, vocal; Henry Whitter, guitar. Recorded in Asheville, North Carolina, August 26, 1925, by the General Phonograph Corp. Okeh Records OK 7010, 3:40.

If the Allen shootout is the most notorious event in southwest Virginia, the most famous is the wreck of fast mail train #97 in Danville, Va. on September 27, 1903. Its fame is entirely out of proportion to its size, for there were many wrecks more serious than the one that killed eleven people in Danville. Few were as spectacular, however, and the five photographs which Danville photographer Leon N. Taylor took of the jumbled mass of wood and steel were published in newspapers all over the country. Even this does not explain its fame. Left at this, the event would have quickly been forgotten without the impact of the song composed shortly after the wreck.

Pat Fox of Danville spent many years reconstructing a factual picture of the event behind the song and the following account is based on his research (*The Wreck of Old 97*, Danville: Fox Publications, 1969). The term "Old" 97 was purely affectionate, for the train had started service only ten months before the wreck.



*Wreck of the "Old 97." (Photo by Leon N. Taylor)*

The Southern Railway Company had been contracted to provide daily mail delivery between Washington and Atlanta. To ensure speed, 97 was given top priority on the run. All other trains were required to pull into sidings to let it pass.

On September 27, 1903, several connecting mail trains arrived late in Washington, delaying 97's departure. The Washington-Atlanta run was divided into sections. When the first crew brought the train into Monroe, Virginia, they had managed to make up some time, but were still 47 minutes late. The second leg of the journey to Southern's main shops in Spencer, North Carolina was rugged, but engineer Joseph A. Broady was told to make up time as best he could. He resorted to a technique called "whittling," running at full throttle on the straight grades, then braking hard on the curves. This maneuver had the dangerous side effect of lowering the overall level of air pressure used to power the brakes.

Any time made up by this method was thwarted by Fireman Albion G. Clapp's announcement that the reserve of water needed for the steam engine was too low. A frustrated Broady was forced to stop at Franklin Junction in Pittsylvania County to take on more water and coal. South of the Junction, the tracks passed over

White Oak Mountain, down a four-mile grade to Fall Creek Station, a level stretch to Lima and then down a three-mile grade to the Still House Creek trestle at Danville. The trestle made a sharp curve in front of the Riverside and Dan River Cotton Mills, where the line continued for a half-mile downriver before crossing the railroad bridge over the Dan River into Danville. It was on the stretch from Lima to the Still House trestle that Broady discovered the air pressure was too low to slow the train in time for the curve. In a desperate last minute maneuver, he locked the train's wheels by reversing the engine, but it was too late. Horrified onlookers in the mill village below the trestle watched the train leap from the trestle and hurl its eighty tons into the creek bed below.

In the aftermath of the wreck, a rescue crew sifted through the incredible twisted mass of wreckage to extricate the bodies. The two firemen's battered bodies were scalded beyond recognition. Joseph Broady's body was thrown from the engine and lay in creek bed, his watch stopped at 2:18. Eleven of the eighteen crew were dead.

Among the curious who came to gape at the wreckage was the telegraph operator at Franklin Junction, David Graves George. It was either

<sup>14</sup>This version of the song is also known as "The Wreck of the Southern Old 97."



George or a pair of Fries, Virginia textile workers named Charles Weston Noell and Fred Jackson Lowey who took a song called "The Ship That Never Returned" and reworked it into "The Wreck of the Old 97." The dispute between the two parties was to be the first major copyright battle in American recording history. The route from the wreck to the courtroom is a story of its own.

Long before it was first recorded, the song was widely known in southern Virginia and North Carolina. Sometime around 1914, a loom fixer in Fries named Henry Whitter learned the song from a fellow mill worker named Frank Burnett, who, in turn, had learned "Old 97" from Noell and Lowey. Whitter had ambitions of becoming a professional musician and in 1923 he made his way to New York to audition for the General Phonograph Company. The record industry was not quite ready for country music, but after Fiddlin' John Carson's success in Atlanta later that year, the company called Whitter back. On December 12, 1923, he made the first recording of "The Wreck of the Southern Old 97," twenty years after the event.

It was released early in 1924 and caught the attention of Vernon Dalhart. In August, 1924, he recorded it for the Victor Talking Machine Company. That record is said to have been the first million-selling country music record. Victor bought the rights to the song from Noell, Lowey and Whitter.

When David Graves George learned of Dalhart's success, he sued Victor over the rights to the song. The ensuing trial from 1930 to 1933 involved hundreds of witnesses. Danville and Fries residents testified to the length of time the song had been sung in their respective communities. Robert W. Gordon, the first director of the Archive of Folk Song in the Library of Congress acted as an expert witness concerning the song's distribution in oral tradition. In the first trial, George was awarded \$62,295, but a subsequent appeal reversed that decision in favor of Victor.

The recording of "Old 97" on this album has a significant place in the story of that controversy. Kelly Harrell was another Fries millhand and a friend of Henry Whitter. Whitter tried to get Harrell to record with him, but he was reluctant until he heard Whitter's recording. Convinced he could do no worse, he auditioned for Victor. In August, 1925, Harrell and Whitter went to Asheville, North Carolina to record for Okeh. Harrell was specifically asked to record "Old 97" because his singing was far clearer than Whitter's. The 12-inch record released was unusual for its length and obviously meant as a challenge to the Dalhart recording. Harrell was later called as a witness in the copyright trial.

Harrell's version is typical of the intriguing mix of fact and inaccuracy in most versions of the

song. Some of these might be explained as the effect of oral tradition. "And the lie was a three-mile grade," for example, originated as: "And at Lima there's a three-mile grade." Verses two and eight in Harrell's version are uncommon, and may have been a collaboration by Harrell and Whitter. Joseph Broady, the engineer of 97 usually identified as "Steve Brady" in the song, was nicknamed Steve by his fellow railroadmen after a New Yorker who won brief fame by surviving a fall from the Brooklyn Bridge.

*On one cloudless morning I stood on the mountain,  
Just watching the smoke from below,  
It was coming from a tall, slim smokestack  
Way down on the Southern railroad.*

*It was 97, the fastest train  
Ever ran on the Southern line,  
All the freight trains and passengers take the side for 97,  
For she's bound to be at stations on time.*

*They gave him his orders at Monroe, Virginia,  
Saying 'Stevie, you're way behind time.  
This is not 38, but it's old 97,  
You must put her into Spencer on time.'*

*He looked round and said to his black, greasy fireman,  
'Just shovel in a little more coal,  
And when I cross that old White Oak Mountain  
You can just watch old 97 roll.'*

*It's a mighty rough road from Lynchburg to Danville,  
And the lie was a three-mile grade,  
It was on that grade that he lost his air brakes,  
And you see what a jump that she made.*

*He was going down that grade making ninety miles an hour,  
When his whistle began to scream,  
He was found in that wreck with his hand on the throttle,  
He was scalded to death with the steam.*

*Did she ever pull in? No, she never pulled in,  
And at 1:45 he was due,  
For hours and hours has the switchman been waiting  
For that fast mail that never pulled through.*

*Did she ever pull in? No she never pulled in,  
And that poor boy he must be dead,  
Oh yonder he lays on that railroad track  
With the cart wheels over his head.*

*97 she was the fastest train  
That the south had ever seen,  
But she run so fast on that Sunday morning  
That the death score was numbered fourteen.*

*Now ladies, you must take warning,  
From this time now and on,  
Never speak harsh words to your true loving husband,  
He may leave you and never return.*

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

"The Wreck of the Old 97" - Ernest Stoneman Trio, New York City, February 27, 1927, Okeh unissued.

"Wreck of the Old Southern 97" - Henry Whitter, 1923, Okeh 40015.

#### Side 2



Ted Prillaman (left) and Willie Gregory at the Blue Ridge Folklife Festival, October, 1977.

#### 1. THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CHARLIE POOLE — Ted B. Prillaman, 5-string banjo and vocal; Billy Foley, fiddle; Sherman Hale, guitar; Pete Williams, bass. Recorded in Martinsville, VA, 1974, MART Records, 2:19.

Charlie Poole was born in the small mill village of Haw River, Alamance County, North Carolina, in 1892. More than any other, his career epitomized the changes which the music of southwest Virginia and its neighboring states underwent early in this century. Poole himself came from a musical family which played and sang in the older musical tradition. Apparently as the result of a childhood accident which damaged the fingers of his right hand, however, Poole developed a new banjo-picking style. This may well have been the seed of a revolution in the string band sound, as the banjo gained new prominence as a melody instrument.

An inveterate rambler, Poole traveled to Beckley, West Virginia sometime around 1917, where he teamed up with a fiddle player named Posey Rorer. These two formed the nucleus of the influential North Carolina Ramblers. Among the well-known musicians associated with the group at one time or another in their careers were Roy



Harvey, Norman Woodlief, Kelly Harrell and Lonnie Austin.

The Ramblers began their career without the benefit of the record industry. By the time they made their first record in 1925, they were already well-known throughout southwest Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina. Although they achieved professional status as musicians, they remained a rural string band. Ramblers in deed as well as name, most of their performances were casual affairs. They would arrive unannounced in a town, word would quickly spread and soon there was a crowd of listeners at a local store or neighbor's house. Most of their rambling was done in southwest Virginia, particularly in Franklin County.

When Poole died from a heart attack on May 21, 1931, there were a number of musician friends present at his bedside. Among them was Walter "Kid" Smith, who wrote the song which celebrates Poole's life and mourns his death. Smith was born in Carroll County, Virginia in 1895, and became associated with Charlie Poole's circle. Like Poole, Smith was a song writer and interpreter of traditional song. He excelled at the local ballad, authoring the well-known songs, "The Murder of the Lawson Family," and "Otto Wood The Bandit." While Smith departed from the broadside ballad form in "The Life and Death of Charlie Poole," he maintained its style and diction.

Oddly enough, the song was not recorded for more than forty years after its creation. According to Poole's nephew, Kinney Rorrer, the song was probably considered too limited in appeal by the record companies. If its appeal was limited to Charlie Poole's home state, however, it had no trouble surviving there — even without the aid of recordings.

When Ted Prillaman recorded the song for the first and only time in 1974, he sang a version he had learned from street singers in Martinsville, Virginia during the Depression. Even at that late date, the broadside played an important role in tradition, for Prillaman learned the words from a printed card sold by the singers.

Fittingly enough, Mr. Prillaman's own musical career was shaped by Charlie Poole. Born on a farm five miles outside of Martinsville, he remembers Charlie Poole's many visits to a neighbor's house, where Mr. Prillaman would sometimes play banjo while Poole danced.

*If you will listen, a story I will tell,  
Of a North Carolina rambler, a man we all knew,  
He went to see his sister, down by the Flinchum school,  
All that night just playing, his name was Charlie Poole.*

*He left his wife a-weeping, no parting words were said,  
His nephew went into the room, and there he found him dead,  
When the news was spread abroad it made his buddies sad,  
At the thought of poor old Charlie, and the good times they had had.*

*If any of his buddies ever had the blues,  
They'd get a crowd together and send for Charlie Poole.  
He'd bring along his banjo and he'd sing a song or two,  
Then they all were happy cause he'd drive away the blues.*

*Out in Beckley, West Virginia where the rambler used to play,  
They'd sit all night and listen until the break of day.  
No more they hear him singing, how sad it makes them feel,  
No more they'll hear him sing and play the tune they call the Deal.*

*You've often heard his records played on your phonograph.  
Some will make you sad, and some will make you laugh.  
No more you'll hear him singing, no more you'll hear him play,  
Cause now they've laid him down to rest, the music's gone away.*

**2. THE STORY OF FREEDA BOLT —  
Floyd County Ramblers: Sam Mc Niel, banjo;  
John Willie Boone, guitar and tenor; Walter  
L. Boone, harmonica and lead; Banks  
Mc Niel, fiddle. Recorded in New York,  
August 29, 1930 by the Victor Record Com-  
pany (Victor 40307), 3:35.**

Bent Mountain lies just over the Roanoke County line from Floyd County. On December 12, 1929, it was the scene of the brutal murder of 17 year old Freeda Bolt. Bolt was a Floyd County native boarding in Willis, where she attended high school. She and her sweetheart, Buren Harmon, also of Floyd, had planned to elope. While motor-ing over Bent Mountain, she told Harmon that she was pregnant. Enraged, he strangled her, tied her body and covered it with rocks and brush. When he returned the following day, he found that she was not yet dead, so he strangled her once more and piled on more rocks. The second attempt was successful.

Harmon was caught through a set of odd circumstances. The first clue in the search for missing Freeda Bolt came from Hargrave Muncey, a bus driver whose route regularly took him over the mountain. On December 13th, he had heard a sound like a woman's scream and directed police to the spot. There they found Freeda Bolt's body, trussed and buried. An unusual bowline knot was found in the rope used to tie her. Buren Harmon, who had been held on suspicion, was tricked into tying a similar knot. Confronted with the evidence, he broke down and confessed.

The lurid details of the murder and the unusual capture carried far beyond the borders of Floyd County. Versions of the story have been collected from Wise, Carroll and Franklin Coun-ties. In 1936, one of the Floyd County Sheriffs

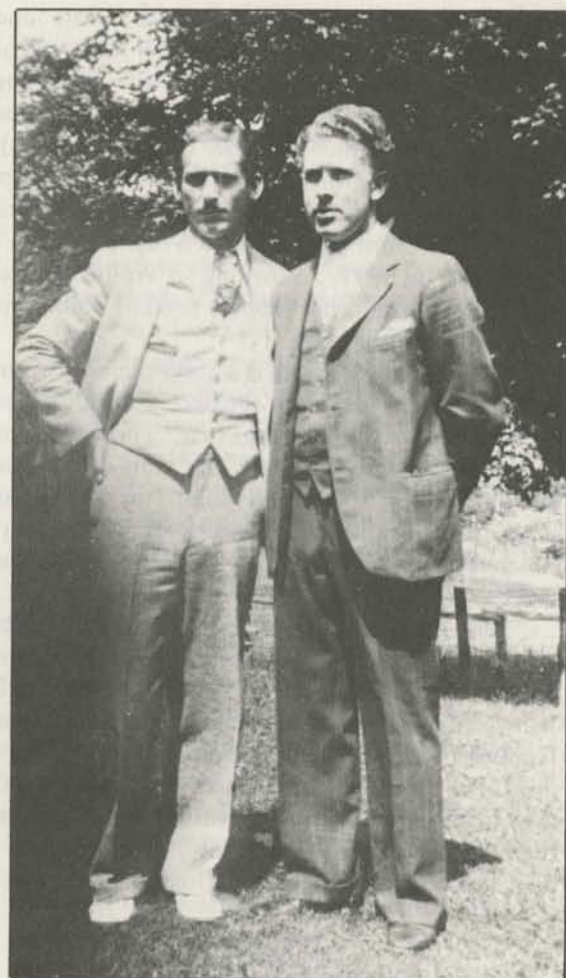


Photo Courtesy Walter L. Boone

Walter L. Boone (left) and his cousin, John Willie Boone (right).

even wrote an account for *Startling Detective Adventures*, published in Louisville, Kentucky.

The members of the Floyd County Ramblers thought they recognized the possibility for a ballad in the sensational story. According to Sam Mc Niel and Walter Boone, the surviving members of the band, they approached a neighbor, D.M. "Doc" Shank, who was known in the area as a hymn writer. Shank wrote the song to order and the band performed it over the radio, where it was heard by a record company talent scout.

The scout came to Roanoke and tried to secure the rights to the song. When the band re-fused, he invited them to come to New York at their own expense and record the song. The band drove north but before they could record, Banks Mc Niel fractured his pelvis in a car wreck.

After ten days in the hospital, while the band's funds dwindled away, Banks finally con-vinced the doctors to release him long enough to visit the recording studio. The band arranged themselves around the single microphone on August 29, 1930, and recorded "Freeda Bolt" and five other songs.



It apparently hit too close to home and became better known elsewhere. Jim Marshall of Carroll County reports that it was often sung around Hillsville. The Carter Family recorded "Young Freda Bolt" in 1938 (Decca 64105-A). Emory L. Hamilton collected a version from Nellie Hamilton of Wise in 1938 and Kip Lornell recorded it from Mrs. Nana Wray of Green's Creek, Va. in 1977. According to Walter Boone, the band made only about fifteen dollars in royalties from the song.

"Doc" Shank's song is a good example of the way in which the event behind a local ballad becomes blurred and forgotten. There was no need for Shank to tell the entire story which was all too familiar to the inhabitants of Floyd. Instead, he concentrated on the part of the story which worked most strongly on the imagination: Freda Bolt's solitary agony.

Shank's hymn-writing experience can also be seen in this song. Several of his hymns were later published in *New Songs of Inspiration*, John T. Benson, ed. (Franklin Springs, GA: Pentecostal Holiness Church, 1935). Walter Boone reports that the Floyd County Ramblers had trouble learning the tune because it was more like a hymn than a string band tune. It also seems to owe a debt to nineteenth-century parlor songs.

*Amid the Blue Ridge Mountains,  
there lived a maiden fair;  
Her life was pure as heaven,  
her heart was free from care;  
She dreamed of love and romance,  
with heart so glad and free;  
No gloom within the future,  
young Freda Bolt could see.*

*Nearby lived Buren Harmon,  
a boy she loved so well;  
And of these two young lovers,  
a story I will tell;  
Was late one Thursday evening,  
the stars were shining dim;  
When Buren called his sweetheart  
to come and go with him.*

*He told her on the morrow,  
that they would surely wed;  
But little was she thinking,  
he'd take her life instead;  
They motored to Bent Mountain,  
a place so dark and lone;  
And there her form so helpless,  
he placed beneath a stone.*

*Away from home and mother,  
and all she loved so well;  
The bitter pain and anguish,  
no mortal tongue can tell;  
Through tears she plead for mercy,  
but heeding not her cry;  
Young Harmon left his sweetheart  
in agony to die.*

*Me thinks the God in Heaven,  
in mercy heard her cry;  
And sent a band of Angels,  
to linger very nigh,  
And bear her spirit over  
to yonder happy shore;  
Where dying comes no never,  
and parting is no more.*

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

"Young Freda Bolt" - Carter Family, June 8, 1938, Decca 64105.

### 3. THE BALLAD OF CATY SAGE — J.C. Pierce, vocal; Willard Gayheart, guitar. Recorded in Galax (Carroll County), Virginia, by Bobby Patterson, Heritage Records, 3:35.

Five year-old Caty Sage was abducted from her home in Elk Creek Valley, Grayson County, Virginia on July 6, 1792. The song about her was written in 1940. The 150 year chain between the event and the song provides an extreme example of the collaborations which may occur in ballad-writing.

James and Lovis Sage had settled near Comers Rock in Elk Creek Valley in the 1780's. Twelve years later, their growing family was prosperous. Their only difficulty was from horse thieves, whose attempts on James' herds had so far been foiled. It may have been a thief bent on revenge who rode up to the Sage cabin and hoisted Caty up alongside him. When her absence was discovered, her anxious parents organized a search that stretched into days and weeks. Nothing could be found of their daughter except a prophecy by a soothsayer named Granny Moses that she would one day be found alive.

When James Sage died in 1820, his twelve surviving children drifted in separate directions. His sons Charles and Samuel joined the westward migration and settled in Missouri. In 1848, Charles Sage stopped at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where a Wyandotte half-breed told him of his resemblance to a white woman living with the Wyandotte tribe. Charles had been too young at the time of her abduction to remember Caty, but he recognized a family resemblance upon visiting the woman. She had been given to the Wyandottes as a present from the Cherokees before the Wyandottes had been forced westward from their home in Ohio. Known only as "Sally," she had married three times in the tribe.

Charles sent for his older brother Samuel, who recognized his sister. When the two sent the news home to Elk Creek Valley, their mother begged Charles to bring Caty home. However, Caty spoke no English and was reluctant to leave her way of life. Charles continued to visit her until her

death by pneumonia on January 21, 1853.

The story of Caty Sage was kept alive as a family legend. Betsy Delph, the youngest sister of Caty, lived until the first years of this century and preserved Charles Sage's letters from Missouri. Lucy Delph McCormick became a local teacher and told the story to her history classes. One of her students was intrigued by the story and in the late 1930's, Eva Boyer composed a poem while she was in the seventh grade. Now Mrs. Muncie Cox of Independence, she still has the original poem in her copy book.

The poem was published in the *Grayson Gazette* and caught the eye of J.C. Pierce of Galax, who set the poem to music. At the 1940 Galax Fiddlers Convention the song won him a blue ribbon. Alan and Elizabeth Lomax recorded "Caty Sage" at the 1941 Convention from Mary Ruth and Wanda Pierce. Local interest in the song remained strong enough for Pierce to record it in 1968 for MKB Records for Tobaccoville, North Carolina and to publish words and music.

"The Ballad of Caty Sage" represents an important part of local music difficult to account for by romantic notions of folk music. The outside influences are apparent. The words were written as a school exercise and do not draw upon traditional forms. The tune is reminiscent of Victorian parlor music. These have an appropriate and respected place in the music of southwest Virginia, as the approval the song won at the Fiddlers Convention shows.

*Way down in Grayson County,  
In the valley of Elk Creek,  
In the year of seventeen-ninety-two,  
The birds sang so sweet,  
'Twas on an April morning,  
The sun was shining bright,  
Poor little Caty was stolen,  
And taken off in fright.*

*Her mother was out washing,  
While Caty was at play,  
When she looked for Caty,  
She was stolen and taken away.  
The mother called for father,  
Father came to search.  
The calls rang out for neighbors,  
With sad and aching hearts.*

*They roamed the mountains over,  
And the valleys, too,  
But they did not rescue Caty,  
Whose heart was aching too.  
While out in father's wandering  
On the mountain side,  
Was found an old, old lady,  
Who told him that she was alive.*



The years they did pass onward,  
And the father died,  
With a longing heart  
To find his stolen child.  
The family was all scattered,  
Even far and wide,  
With dim memories of Caty,  
Poor Caty and her smile.

Way out on an Indian reservation,  
In Kansas far away,  
Was found an old, old lady,  
And her name was Caty Sage.  
When her brother recognized her,  
To Virginia they planned to go.  
She was taken sick with a fever,  
And her heart was filled with woe.

Poor Caty could live no longer,  
Her life was taken away.  
She was buried on an Indian reservation,  
And is sleeping silent today.  
She went to meet her father  
Where all is good and blessed,  
With her Savior in Heaven,  
With an everlasting rest.

**4. THE CYCLONE OF RYE COVE — The Carter Family (Sara Dougherty, vocal and autoharp; Maybelle Addington Carter, vocal and guitar; Alvin Pleasant Carter, vocal). Recorded in Del Rio, Texas, probably 1938, for radio station XERA, Villa Acuna, Mexico, copied from *The Carter Family on Border Radio* by John Edwards Memorial Foundation, JEMF 101, 1:57.**

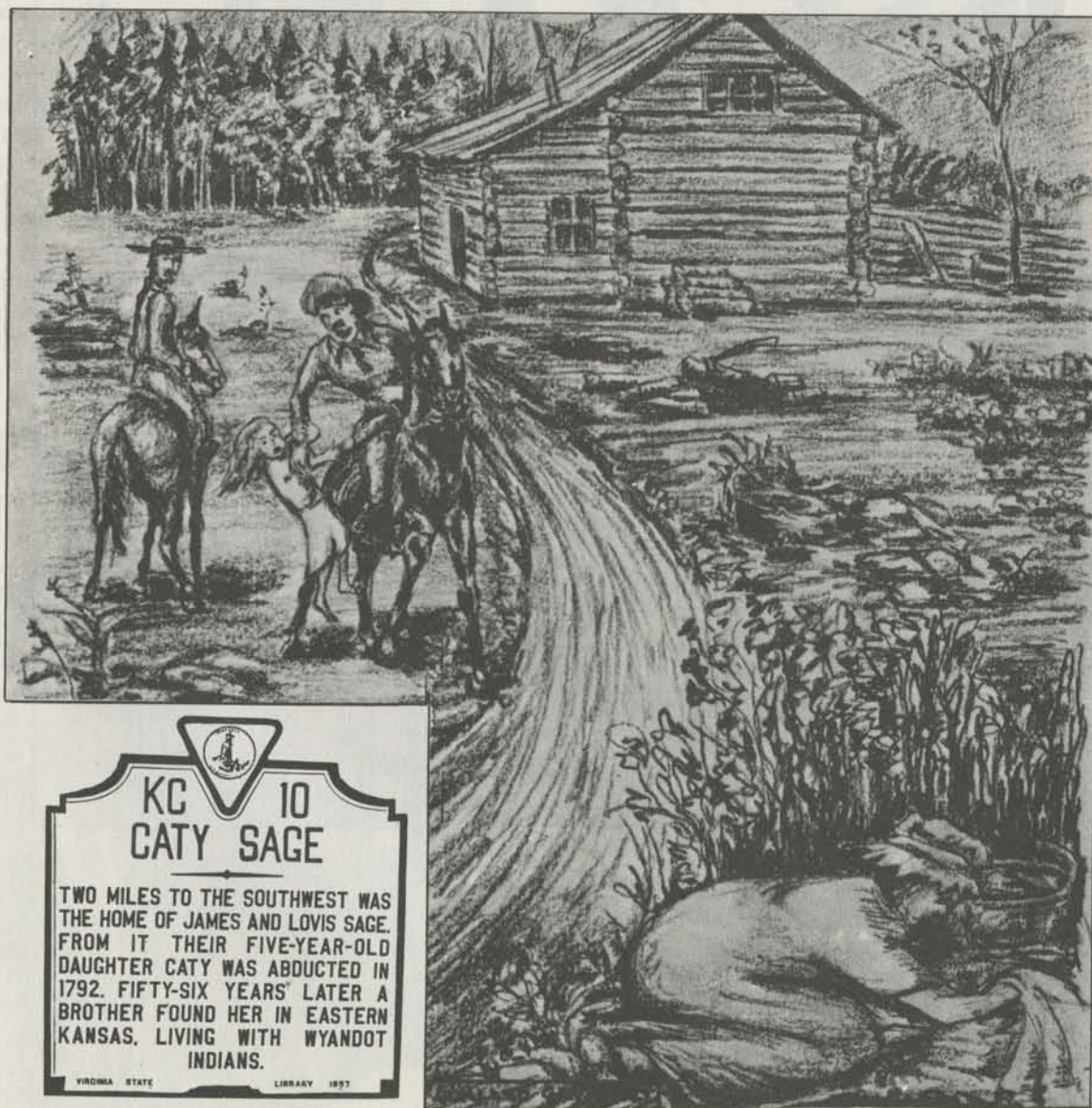


Photo Courtesy of J.C. Pierce.

On May 2, 1929, a violent storm in Scott County sent a tornado howling through the Rye Cove Valley. Directly in its path was a large, two-story, wooden schoolhouse containing 155 children and 8 teachers. Without warning, the funnel smashed into the school, shearing off its roof and demolishing the rest into a pile of rubble. No sooner had the whirlwind subsided than a fire broke out in the debris, touched off by an overturned stove. The dazed survivors and the shocked neighbors who rushed to the scene had to form a bucket brigade to extinguish the blaze before they could turn to those trapped in the wreckage.

The scope of the tragedy had a devastating impact on the small community. As the word spread, grieving parents hurried in from the outlying areas to search for their children. A special train had to be rushed to Clinchport, six miles from Rye Cove, before the injured children could be taken to the closest hospital in Bristol, Tennessee. When the rescue effort ceased, fifty-four children had been treated for serious injuries. Thirteen children were dead. The disaster left a legacy of emotional scars which still remain.

One of the observers of the storm was Alvin Pleasant Carter, of the well-known Carter Family. He was arranging a concert booking in an adjacent valley when the tornado struck. As soon as news of the children's plight reached him, he hurried to the scene to assist the rescue operation. With memories of what he had witnessed, he returned home to Mace Springs and composed "The Cyclone of Rye Cove."

The Carter Family was a unique collaboration of three exceptionally talented individuals. Sara Carter's powerful vocal style caught the attention of Ralph Peer when he auditioned the group in 1927 and launched their professional career. (The same audition was responsible for the discovery of Jimmie Rodgers.) Maybelle Carter's instrumental talent transformed the way the guitar was used to accompany singing in the southern mountains. Her method of playing the melody line on the bass strings, while maintaining a rhythm on treble strings became known as the "Carter Style." A.P. Carter's contribution was less apparent, but of particular importance to a consideration of native American balladry. A song collector as well as writer, he combined the two in refashioning the songs he collected on his travels.

In southwest Virginia, the Carter's Family's influence was immediate and overwhelming. Their success as recording artists did not remove the hard necessity of touring. They played on innumerable occasions throughout southwest Virginia in the 1930's. (One result of this touring was A.P. Carter's participation in the Rye Cove disaster). Many area musicians, such as Spence Moore of Chilhowie, remember playing with and being musically influenced by the Carters. Many

The album cover of "The Ballad of Caty Sage" by J.C. Pierce. Drawing by Willard Gayheart.



of A.P. Carter's songs were accepted by the singers of the region and entered oral tradition. Among these was "The Cyclone of Rye Cove." At least twelve versions of the song have been collected in North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia.

The Carters first recorded the song in 1929 for RCA Victor (V-40207 B). The recording on this album was made for radio station XERA in Villa Acuna, Mexico. The earlier Victor recording contains a final verse not present in this version:

*Oh give us a home far beyond the blue sky,  
Where storms and cyclones are unknown,  
And there by life's strand, we'll clasp with glad hands  
God's children in a heavenly home.*

*Oh listen today in a story I tell  
In sadness and tear dimmed eye,  
Of a dreadful cyclone that came this way,  
And blew our schoolhouse away.*

*Chorus:  
Rye Cove, (Rye Cove), Rye Cove (Rye Cove),  
The place of my childhood and home;  
Where in life's early morn, I once loved to roam,  
But now it's so silent and lone.*

*When the cyclone appeared, it darkened the air,  
And the lightning flashed over the sky;  
And the children all cried, 'Don't take us away,  
And spare us to go back home.'*

*There were mothers so dear, and fathers the same,  
That came to this horrible scene;  
Searching and crying each found her own child,  
Dying on a pillow of stone.*

*Announcer: "A.P., come up here just a minute  
and tell these folks about that number you just  
sang, will you?"*

*A.P. Carter: "Thank you, Brother Bill. That was  
a tragedy song that I composed about a cyclone  
that came through Scott County, Virginia, and  
killed probably twenty, twenty-five little  
schoolchildren, wounded several others."*

*Announcer: "Yessir, a true story put to song."*

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Atlanta, Georgia, November 22, 1929, Victor  
40207.

*Ryecove Cyclone* (11571) - Asa Martin & James  
Roberts - March 25, 1932, NYC OR 8163, RO  
5163, BA 32554, PER 12839, CQ 8068



*The original Carter Family.*



**5. THE STORY OF THE FLOOD — The Stanley Brothers and the Clinch Mountain Boys: Carter Stanley, lead vocal and guitar; Ralph Stanley, tenor vocal and banjo; other members probably Chubby Anthony, fiddle; Curley Lambert, mandolin; Lindy Clear, bass. Recorded at the Silver Creek Ranch near Manassas (Prince William County), Virginia, August 8, 1957, by Mike Seeger, 3:06.**

Ralph and Carter Stanley were born and raised in Dickenson County, in the heart of the Clinch Mountains. Most of their traditional repertoire was received at first-hand, particularly from their mother's singing. Their first band, started in Norton, Virginia after their return from service in World War II, maintained the older string band sound. Influenced by the Monroe Brothers, Ralph switched his banjo-style from the older, clawhammer style to the finger-picking style. The brothers modeled their exceptional vocal style on the smooth bluegrass sound.

Although the Stanley Brothers were quick to adopt the new style, they maintained the older song repertoire. Carter Stanley was a song-writer and collector in the mold of A.P. Carter, who reworked traditional material in the new idiom. "The Story of the Flood" is an example of an original song built upon traditional lines. Though written in 1957, when the Stanley Brothers were performing a range of material that even extended to honky-tonk and rock-and-roll, the song is squarely in the broadside tradition.

The flood which inspired Carter Stanley's song swept through the southern Appalachians in February, 1957, killing 12 people and leaving



Ralph (left) and Carter Stanley.

BRI Photo

thousands homeless. President Eisenhower designated 28 counties in Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia as disaster areas. Eight counties in southwest Virginia, including the Stanley's own Dickenson County, were among the hardest hit. Governor Stanley reported 2,000 people left homeless and over a million dollars in road damage alone. The National Guard had to be mobilized to assist in the clean up. This live performance of "The Flood" was recorded only a few months later.

*Come listen good people, wherever you are,  
And hear the sad story you've been waiting for,  
About the flood of '57, as it happened to be,  
In Kentucky, old Virginia, and East Tennessee.*

*How the rain came down, as we often had seen,  
To swell the broad river, or some little stream,  
But this one was different, and we soon realized  
That the floods were raging, and we fought for our lives.*

*Many were afraid, as never before,  
As the high, muddy waters came into their door.  
Some were left homeless, their life savings gone,  
But their lives had been spared, and the cold rains came on.*

*Little babies were crying, and others were sad,  
For in all our lives, we'd seen nothing so bad.  
But the brave and the strong were there by the score,  
To help the sick and needy to safety on the shore.*

*How we all escaped it, I never will know,  
It must have been God's will, it was not time to go,  
And by his heavenly mercy, some managed to smile,  
And face the disaster while the waters run wild.*

**6. THE PINNACLE MOUNTAIN SILVER MINE — Helen Cockram, vocal; Willard Gayheart, guitar; Jimmie Zeh, guitar; Marvin Cockram, bass. Recorded in Galax (Carroll County), Virginia, at the Heritage Records Studio, 1980, by Bobby Patterson, 2:03.**

The changing culture of southwest Virginia has produced a number of songs which embrace new styles and forms, but also rely on a sense of the past. Mrs. Helen Cockram's song about the Pinnacle Silver Mine, written in 1979, could take its place in the mainstream of popular music, but the story on which it is based has been told in the Meadows-of-Dan area for many years.

According to Mrs. Cockram: "Mr. Levi Rakes and his 14-year-old daughter were visiting here from West Virginia and were sightseeing over at the Pinnacles (of Dan). Some say his daughter was with him and some say not when he found the mine. Anyway, the sun was shining and he could see down in a cave, so he explored further and found the mine. Mr. Rakes took silver out of the mine and started making counterfeit money. The law found out about the money and were getting close to him, so he took his daughter and went



Photo Courtesy Helen Cockram

(Front Row) Helen Cockram and her husband, Marvin Cockram; (Back Row) Jimmy Zeh on banjo, Bobby Patterson on mandolin and Willard Gayheart on guitar.

back to West Virginia. A few years later he became sick and died, without telling anyone where the mine was. After his daughter grew up, she come back and searched for the mine, but she never could find it."

"Some years after this, Mr. Jim Vipperman was grazing his herd of sheep near the Pinnacles when a terrific thunder storm came up. The sheep, spooked by the storm, ran from the path and he finally herded them into a place in the mountain — a cave. Mr. Vipperman went back in the cave to get out of the storm and when the lightning flashed he could see the silver in the walls of the cave and realized he was in the silver mine. After the storm was over, he drove his sheep home, thinking he knew where he was and could return to the mine the next day. He went back at day break the next morning, but he could not find the mine, and for weeks after he searched, just letting his crops ruin, but he never did find it again."

Similar legends are told throughout the U.S. The best known of these is the legend of the Lost Dutchman Mine, on which the movie "The Treasure of Sierra Madre" is based. Mrs. Cockram first heard this legend from her father. In this recording, Mrs. Cockram is accompanied by her husband's band, the Highlanders, a Galax group which plays bluegrass and "new-grass."

*They say there's silver in the Pinnacle Mountain,  
Nuggets found in the river below,  
From a cave back up in the mountain,  
One man had the fortune to know.*

*Though many have searched this mountain,  
Its secret is hidden in the ground.  
Lives were risked and crops were abandoned,  
But the silver hasn't yet been found.*



*It's a rocky old mountain I'm a climbing,  
There's a raging river below,  
Through the valleys so beautiful and winding,  
And its secret I may never know,  
And its secret I may never know.*

*In the legend, one man took shelter  
From the storm with his sheep in a cave,  
Veins of silver in the walls were gleaming,  
As the streaks of lightning danced and played.*

*Upon returning his sheep to the pasture,  
Back to the cave he thought he would go,  
But for weeks he searched for this treasure  
Rests hidden in the ground below.*

*It's a rocky old mountain I'm a climbing,  
There's a raging river below,  
Through the valleys so beautiful and winding,  
And its secret I may never know,  
And its secret I may never know.*

**7. THE NEW RIVER SONG — Jim Marshall, vocal and banjo; Artie Marshall, guitar; Carson Gardner, fiddle. Recorded in Galax (Carroll County), Virginia by Bobby Patterson at the Heritage Record Studio, 1976, 2:51.**

The image of an archaic mountain culture in the southern Appalachians has proved an ambivalent one. At its best, it has fostered a sense of regional identity and a pride in mountain history removed from romanticism. At its worst it has encouraged outsiders to treat the region with condescension as if it were a colony to be plundered by the rest of the country. In Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia, countless residents have seen their lands taken from them to serve needs they did not share. Coal companies bought the mineral rights for a few dollars from unwitting owners, then offered them poor pay and hazardous conditions to work the mines. With its accessibility and natural beauty, the region became a recreation area for the seaboard cities. In the 1930's, thousands of residents were relocated for the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway. All of this has left a legacy of distrust and active opposition among the dispossessed.

In the early 1960's, the Appalachian Power Company, a subsidiary of the American Electric Power Company announced plans for two hydroelectric dams along the New River. The proposed project would cost \$430 million to the rate payers and flood 40,000 acres in Grayson County, Virginia and Ashe and Alleghany Counties, North Carolina. In Grayson County alone it would displace 4,500 residents. The electric power produced would not benefit area residents, but be fed north into the American Electric Power grid. The realization that they would pay the cost without receiving the benefits incited a long and heated

struggle for those in the path of the dam.

Ten years later, the fight was still going on. Opponents sought to have the New River set aside for its natural beauty. The State of North Carolina finally appealed to Interior Secretary Thomas Kleppe to include 26.5 miles along the river in the National Wild and Scenic River System, thus barring construction of the dams. On August 31, 1976 the Senate passed a bill accepting the New River into the system and President Ford signed it into law on September 12. The New River was saved.

Jim Marshall, a Hillsville musician, had already seen his family moved by the Blue Ridge Parkway. His travels as a truck driver had given him an opportunity to compare his home with the rest of the country. "New River" is his declaration of choice. Written in 1976, in the midst of the struggle, it is filled with a sense of pride. Like the best protest songs of Appalachia, it is built on the past. The melody is a variant of "I Was Born in Old Virginia," one of the best-known love songs in the region.

After the New River Project was defeated, the American Electric Power Company began plans for a similar project along the Clinch River in Wise County. The new project has spurred a new fight, led by residents of Brumley Gap, threatened with flooding. Local music continues to aid the fight and as recently as 1979, songs such as "The Ballad of Brumley Gap," by Doris Beach have been written.

*I was born on the old New River  
Where the mountains meet the sky,  
I've never ventured far from my home,  
Guess that place is where I'll die.*

*This old world's got lots of trouble,  
But I'll just let them pass me by,  
You can have your life in your big city,  
Just leave me alone on the mountain side.*

*Gonna take our mountains and our rivers,  
Turn them into some rich playground,  
Take our homes to build your dam,  
So in luxury you can abound.*



*Jim and Artie Marshall at the Blue Ridge Folklife Festival, Ferrum, Virginia.*



*You bought our law men with your money,  
So they'll vote for what you say,  
Why don't you stay in your big city,  
And save our land for another day.*

*Where are you gonna take your children,  
Show them nature at its best?  
If you dam up the last New River,  
You might as well take all the rest.*

*Spoken:  
One day, I saw a driver,  
Carried from an awful wreck,  
Now they say his hip and back was broke,  
But you know, it could have been his neck.  
Now I wonder if he'll ever drive again,  
And if he goes through old Fancy Gap,*

*Sung:  
Will the Lord be there beside him,  
Or the Devil on his lap?  
Or the Devil on his lap?*

*Will the Lord be there beside him,  
Or the Devil on his lap?*

**8. HIGHWAY 52 — Little "Doc" Raymond and the Coleman Partners: Raymond Burcham, vocal and guitar; Bobby Patterson, banjo; Talmadge Smith, fiddle; Warren Brown, bass. Recorded in Tobaccoville, North Carolina at the MKB Record Studio, 1968, Coleman Records MKB-126, 2:47.**

By the time the first railroad ballad was recorded in the early 1920's it already belonged to a past era. The steam engine was giving way to the automobile and the truck wreck soon took the place of the train wreck in the popular imagination. It was not long before songs about highway crashes began to appear, modeled on the train songs which had preceded them.

Raymond Burcham of Galax was born just as the first of these songs was appearing. His "Highway 52" continues the tradition in a country and western vein. Mr. Burcham got his start as a semi-professional musician at fifteen, playing over radio station WBOB on the Saturday Night Jamboree as Little "Doc" Raymond. A truck driver himself, he was inspired to write the song in 1967, after he watched a rescue crew in Fancy Gap cut a driver from an overturned cab with a blowtorch. He recorded it the following year on his own label.

"Highway 52" is in the best country and western tradition with its moral stance and spoken interlude. Its image of God and Devil struggling for the driver's destiny is as powerful a traditional image as any.

*There's a highway through Virginia,  
They call old 52,  
It's been the cause of many orphans,  
And widows sad and blue.*

*Now truckers take this warning,  
If you go through Fancy Gap,  
And you don't slow that big rig down,  
The Devil's on your lap.  
The Devil's on your lap.*

*As you cross the Blue Ridge Mountains,  
There's a big sign overhead,  
So many take no heed to it,  
Now some of them are dead.*

*That big sign reads, 'Long Grade Ahead,  
Trucks Use Lower Gear.'  
If you will only heed that sign,  
You'll save so many tears,  
So many bitter tears.*



*Little "Doc" Raymond and Buford Kegley.*

*Photo Courtesy Little "Doc" Raymond*



**9. THE BALLAD OF FANCY GAP — Jim Marshall, vocal and banjo; Artie Marshall, vocal and guitar; Carson Gardner, fiddle. Recorded in Galax (Carroll County), Virginia at the Heritage Records Studio, 1977, by Bob- by Patterson, 4:47.**

Dramatic incidents have often inspired several songs based on the same event, so it is not surprising to find more than one song about Fancy Gap. Until Interstate 77 was completed, Highway 52 over the Gap was a major truck route between southwest Virginia and North Carolina. Not constructed with such heavy traffic in mind, it caused more than its share of fatal wrecks.

Jim Marshall wrote this song in 1977. A native of the Fancy Gap area, he became a truck driver in the 1940's. Wearying of the constant travel and wishing to spend more time at home with his music, he and his wife Artie opened an antique shop and country music park in Hillsville. "The Ballad of Fancy Gap" was issued as a 45 rpm record on the Marshalls' own "10-4" label, and sold at truck stops throughout Virginia — a modern form of the broadside, aimed at a particular audience.

"The Ballad of Fancy Gap" shows the decreased emphasis on narrative which has evolved in much of American folk songs. Although inspired by the wrecks in Fancy Gap, it does not focus on any particular incident. Instead, it evokes a powerful sense of place.

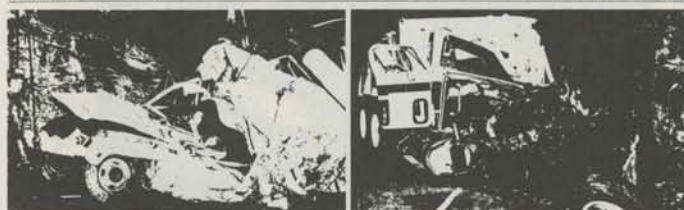
*Down in the Virginia mountains on U.S. 52,  
There is a long old mountain the truckers' blood does sap,  
Four miles from top to bottom, the trailer brakes will burn,  
Many curves ahead, they call it Fancy Gap,*

*(Chorus)  
Fancy Gap, Fancy Gap,  
They named it Killer Mountain,  
That old Fancy Gap,*

William Tells 'Em Letters--Page 4	Obituaries Society--Page 3	Cavaller Football Pictures--Page 10	Labonte Wins At Darlington--Page 11
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## THE CARROLL NEWS

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A HILLSVILLE MAN, Edward Jackson Thomas, was killed when his truck was struck head-on by a motorist. The driver of the rig was killed when it tumbled into the side of the mountain. (Photos by Larry Jernigan)

### Separate Accidents Claim Two Lives On Fancy Gap Mountain

*I was born on the mountain where the windy breezes blow,  
I remember experiences of many years ago,  
I've seen the twisted wreckage, heard of many a widowed wife,  
When old Fancy Gap took another trucker's life.*

*I've traveled that old mountain since I was a lad,  
I've had respect for it; on my map it was bad,  
With I-77 its killing days will wane,  
But in the dreams of truckers they'll remember Fancy Gap.*



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## A LIST OF VIRGINIA SONGS AND BALLADS

**Back in the Hills of Old Virginia** - A Tennessee fellow runs away with the singer's daughter, Nellie. He abandons her and she makes her way home, where she dies. The singer swears revenge and vows to track her unfaithful lover down.

**Bill Dooley** - A prison song collected in Wise County. Collected from Willie McFarland, May 20, 1942. It is about Bill Dooley, a prisoner working on the railroad and his escape from the line gang.

**The Breeding Mill Explosion** - Concerning an explosion which took place in Earl Breeding's grist mill in Cleveland (Russell County), on February 11, 1933.

**Buster Beverly** - Beverly, a black man, dies after drinking bad liquor and eating food. Composed by Charles A. Hudson of Pulaski, VA.

**The Chant Branham Song** - A song made up by Branham, a resident of Wise County, after he was caught for bootlegging.

**Cora Damron** - A lament by Wayne Damron of Wise for the death of his wife.

**The Dave Maggard Song** - Dave Maggard, a Baptist preacher, composed this exhortation to be sung at his funeral.

**The Death of Edmond Connor** - The corpse of a missing boy is found because of a dream he had told his mother before his disappearance.

**The Death of Jerry Damron** - A brakeman on the C & O railroad is killed in a wreck. Recorded by Dock Boggs.

**The Explosion at Derby** - A song lamenting those killed in the explosion in the Derby coal mine.

**The Fate of Lillian Johnson** - A little girl is found frozen to death. Composed by Lonnie L. Hopkins.

**The Fate of the Taylor Family** - The Taylor Family of Rose Hill, VA is killed when a chimney fire destroys their home.

**George Eastman** - A lament for the suicide of George Eastman. Composed by John Milton Newton.

**Henry Clay Beattie** - Henry Clay Beattie was murdered in Richmond in 1911. Composed by Kelly Harrell.

**The Hopson Hangin'** - A song about a man who was hanged for a murder committed while he and two friends were stealing chickens. His friends lied during the trial and Ed Hopson was hanged for a murder he did not commit.

**The Hurricane Poker Crew** - A poker game in Wise County is broken up by the mother of one of the players. Composed by Tebe Lewis.

**The Keen Mountain Explosion** - Concerning the tragic explosion in the Red Jacket Coal Co. mine at Keen Mountain, Buchanan County, Virginia on April 22, 1938. Composed by Minnie Hays of Pound, VA.

**Moore's Lamentation** - James Moore is kidnapped by the Shawnees and his family is murdered.

**The Powellton Labor Train Explosion** - The boiler of a mine train explodes, killing sixteen men. Composed by Charles A. Hudson of Pulaski, VA.

**The Red Jacket Mine Explosion** - Another song concerning the explosion at Keen Mountain in 1938.

**Ruby Hale** - A lament composed by Jean Hale following her mother's death. Printed in the *Lebanon News*, Lebanon, Virginia on March 15, 1940.

**Talt Hall** - The notorious outlaw, Talt Hall, shot policeman Enos Hylton of Norton but was finally captured and sentenced to death. Composed by George N. Collins.

**The Thrilling Ride of Mollie Tynes** - A young girl's ride from Tazewell County to Wytheville, to warn the people of the coming of the Union Army. Written by John Melton Newton, of Bluefield, Virginia, March 31, 1934.

**Wise County Jail I** - A complaint about the conditions in the Wise County Jail. Complains about the officers and mentions them by name.

**Wise County Jail II** - A very similar song, composed by Dock Boggs. Its complaint is more general and doesn't mention any names.

**Wise County Jail's the Place for Me** - Another variant of the song. Singer is arrested for moonshining.

**Wise County Law** - Yet another variant. Singer can't do anything without being confronted by an officer in Wise County. Composed by Sherman Stallard and Alfred Gilliam.

**Woodrow Wilson Lester** - A convict who escaped from prison and returned to southwest Virginia where he was hunted down and killed by three deputy sheriffs.

This list is by no means complete, nor detailed. Anyone who knows any similar songs, is invited to contact the Blue Ridge Institute.