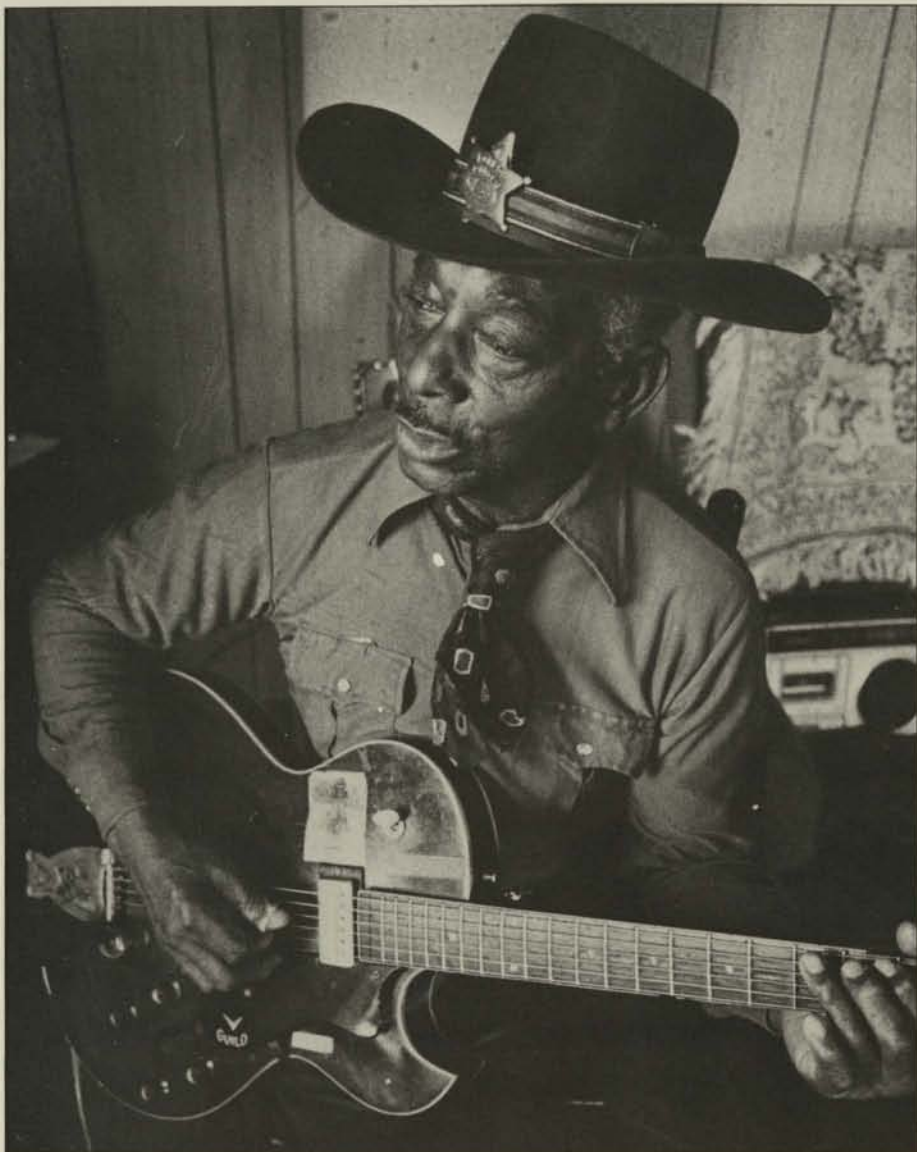


Virginia Traditions



Southwest Virginia Blues



Few areas of the country can boast of more diverse folkways than Virginia, and like material objects, the Commonwealth's performance traditions as found in songs, tunes, and tales reflect a shared heritage involving all classes of people and every generation. Traditions naturally change over time, thus documentation of Virginia folk culture is an ongoing process. The BLUE RIDGE INSTITUTE OF FERRUM COLLEGE strives to record the folkways of the Blue Ridge and of Virginia as a whole and to foster a greater appreciation of our folk heritage through an array of interpretive programs. BRI Records is one such program.

Southwest Virginia Blues explores the blues as performed by folk musicians in the western corner of the state. In the late 1800s and early 1900s southern blacks were drawn to Southwest Virginia by the opportunities for work in the logging, railroad, and coal industries, and the music of such laborers as well as that of commercially-recorded blues artists from elsewhere in the nation dramatically influenced local musical traditions. Embraced in several styles, the blues form became a favorite of both black and white musicians. Today Southwest Virginia's blues heritage continues to be heard in the artistry of regional folk musicians.

A BOOKLET OF FULL DESCRIPTIVE NOTES IS ENCLOSED

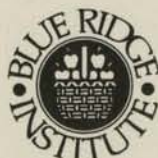
Front Cover—An off-duty work gang for the Clinchfield Railroad, date and location unknown. (Courtesy Kenny Fannon)

Back Cover, Left—"Cowboy" Thurman Burks, 1983. (Courtesy Roanoke Times and World-News)

Back Cover, Right—Byrd Moore (seated) with Jess Johnson, c. 1931. (Courtesy Alma Kilbourne and Kinney Rorrer)

This recording has been produced by the Blue Ridge Institute of Ferrum College with support funding from the National Endowment for the Arts/Folk Arts, Grant #22-5530-130.

BRI



008

BRI Records, Ferrum College, Ferrum, VA 24088

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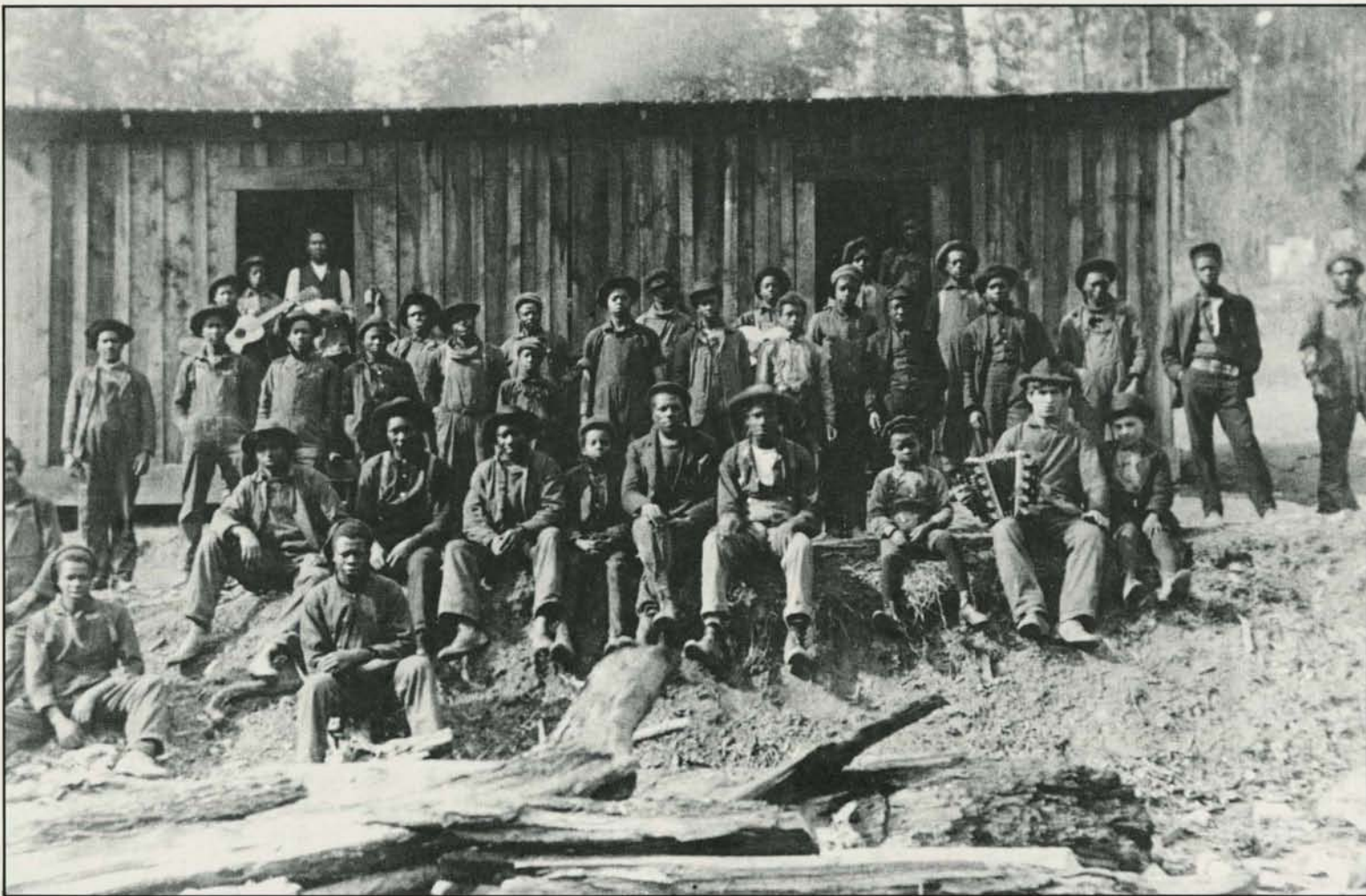
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VIRGINIA TRADITIONS

BRI 008



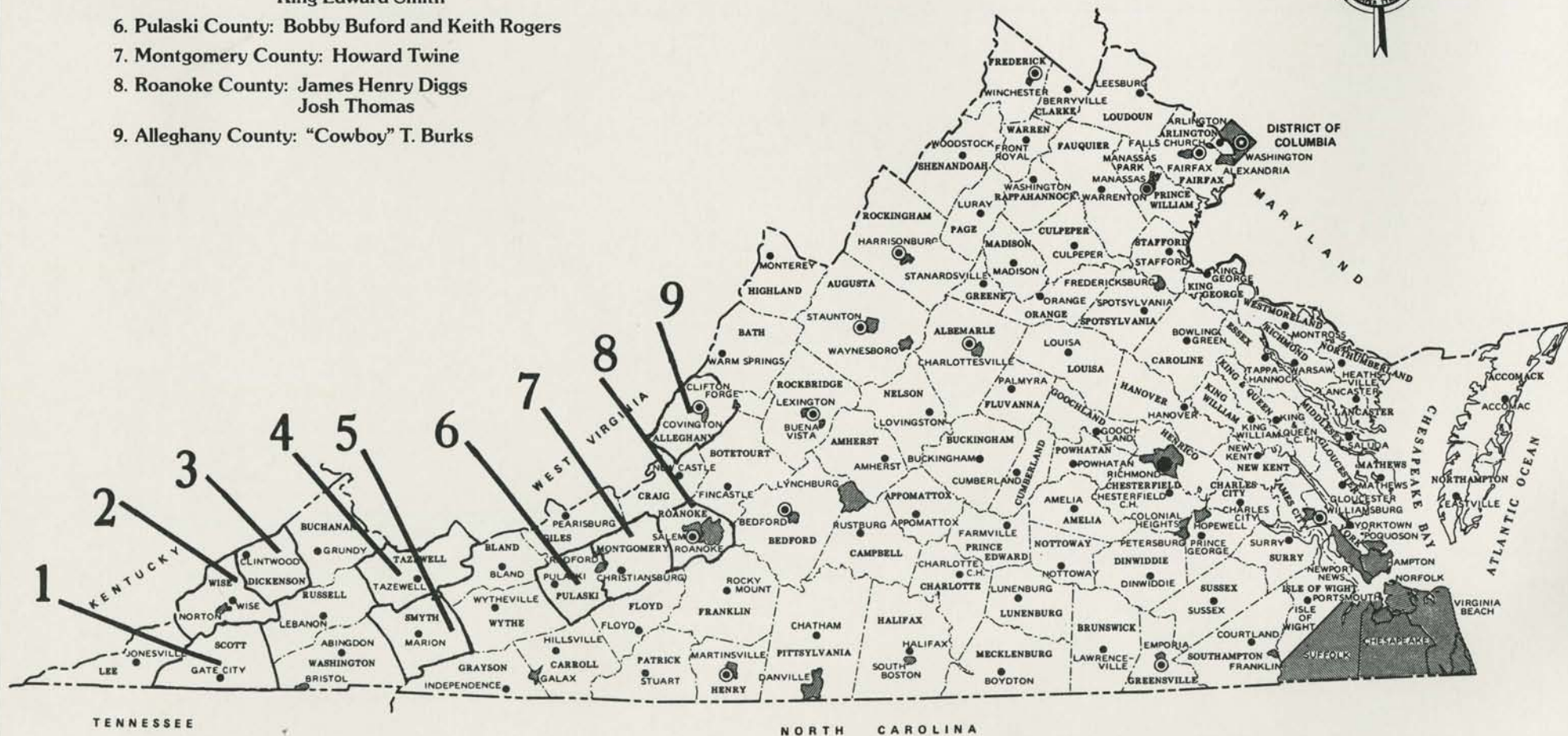
Southwest Virginia Blues

An off-duty work gang for the Clinchfield Railroad includes a guitarist and an accordionist, date unknown. (Courtesy Kenny Fannon)

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

HOME AREAS OF THE MUSICIANS FEATURED ON THIS ALBUM

1. Scott County: Carter Family
Steve Tartar and Harry Gay
2. Wise County: Dock Boggs
Malcolm Johnson
Carl Martin
Byrd Moore
3. Dickenson County: Earl Gilmore
4. Tazewell County: Dave Dickerson
5. Smyth County: Fred Galliher
Spence Moore
King Edward Smith
6. Pulaski County: Bobby Buford and Keith Rogers
7. Montgomery County: Howard Twine
8. Roanoke County: James Henry Diggs
Josh Thomas
9. Alleghany County: "Cowboy" T. Burks



THE BLUES TRADITION OF SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

Contemporary musical traditions in Virginia reflect not only modern influences but also cultural forces dating back centuries. Since the beginning of musical expression, folk music in all cultures has been founded upon unwritten, communally-approved ideas of “acceptable” music. These notions encompass rhythms, harmonies, tunes, lyrics, instruments, and even the social contexts in which music should occur. Of course, these concepts vary from one culture to the next.

Based upon what they had heard in their homelands, the first immigrants to the New World brought with them ideas of what music should be. They, like their parents and offspring, were unknowingly nameless tradition-bearers in the long progression of local performers and listeners who have shaped Virginia’s musical folkways. We all continue to serve in the same capacity today, influencing local musical traditions either through our participation, or equally important, our nonparticipation. Thus the folk music of the state constantly evolves along with the identities of the cultural groups which embrace it.

Without question black Virginians have had a major impact upon the musical heritage of the Commonwealth. The early melding of African and white musical styles was but one aspect of the eventual development of an Afro-American culture, for once sold, the new slave faced an unsettling combination of language, beliefs, and traditions distinctly different from those which had defined his former lifestyle. In order to survive he was compelled to learn new patterns of behavior, keeping some African folkways, abandoning many more, and reshaping others to mesh with those of the dominant white population.

Musically the imprint of black culture can be heard in both the secular and religious traditions of Virginia, often in places least expected. The banjo, for instance, has an African background though it is at the core of the bluegrass and string band music currently associated with white musicians; perhaps the first black banjo players in America were reproducing an African style of music, but the instrument was skillfully adapted to play British and American dance tunes. Importantly black musicians, both as slaves and later as freedmen, performed at white social events, and doors were open to them which were closed to their non-musical relatives. An appreciation of musical talent took some precedence over racial prejudice in such situations, and musical ideas were traded back and forth across the color line.

Though the climate of racial discrimination changed little following the War Between the States, black musical trends of the late 1800s had a growing effect upon the music of Virginia and the nation as a whole. Programs such as the “Hampton Negro and Indian Folk-Lore Concert,” sponsored by Virginia’s



Though on the eastern edge of the region, Roanoke became the principal urban center for much of Southwest Virginia and consequently the home for many of the region’s blacks. Some black residents worked at the Knepp Livery Stable, photo date unknown. (Courtesy Norfolk Southern Corporation)

Hampton Institute (now Hampton University), presented Afro-American folk music in concert halls throughout the country. The Hampton Roads area was becoming a center for black quartet singing, a style which would surface in commercial pop and gospel music. The guitar was rising in preference among secular black musicians. And most notably a form of traditional music known as blues was spreading from the deep South into Virginia.



Blues: A Background

From the outset, blues and the blues artist have been products of a culture, and though social, economic, and technological advances have somewhat altered the cultural pressures under which the blues genre originally developed, the music still holds its emotional currency. The blues tradition began among blacks in the Mississippi Delta toward the end of the nineteenth century. The composer W.C. Handy has been called the father of the blues, but he was obviously working with a musical form borrowed from local performers.¹ Handy’s compositions would ride a blues craze among national audiences, yet his scores were quite removed from the “downhome” music traveling north by foot and rail. In reality no one person is due credit for inventing blues. It is the product of the folk process, developed and primarily maintained by uncounted, uncelebrated musicians.

Just as no single composer was its creator, no

single style of music clearly stands alone as the predecessor of the blues form. Blues shares elements with diverse Afro-American traditions such as field hollers, cadence work songs, and religious preaching and singing. Both the blues singer and musician bend or flatten notes — especially the third and seventh notes of the scales, the *blue notes* — and instrumentals echo and expand upon the vocal melody. Outside of the standardizing influence of the commercial recording industry, the listener also discovers a broad range of metrical improvisations. [See Fred Gallihier’s “Pan American Blues” (Side 1, Band 2) and Josh Thomas’ “Heavy Water Blues” (Side 1, Band 7).]

Musically blues in its simplest form is comprised of a I-IV-V harmonic pattern in an eight- or twelve-bar format. This structure, combined with the characteristics above, create the blues sound. Written descriptions of the blues form, however, are merely generalizations, and they fail to reflect the textures and variations produced within the genre. Freely altering the music to meet their own creative needs, traditional musicians feel no compulsion to work solely within a “standard” blues concept. As with all musical traditions, variations within limits appear with each song, musician, and performance.²

Commercial blues records, which were bought by both blacks and whites alike, helped to standardize the blues into the eight- or twelve-bar format. Lyrically the eight-bar verse is divided into two different but rhyming lines (referred to as an A-B pattern), each four bars in length:

When the moon comes over the mountain, babe,

I'll be on my way. (Instrumental)
I'm gonna roam this highway
*'til the break of day. (Instrumental)*³

The twelve-bar blues also has two different lines, but the first is repeated (thus creating an A-A-B pattern):

Tell me, pretty mama, which way does the river run?
(Instrumental)
Tell me, pretty mama, which way does the river run?
(Instrumental)
Straight from my back door right straight to the rising
*sun. (Instrumental)*⁴

Other variations are frequently heard, such as a sixteen-bar A-A-A-B structure. (See "Cowboy" T. Burks, Side 2, Band 5.) Half bars and odd numbers of bars may be used as well, and the instrumental breaks in the two verses transcribed above take them beyond the eight- and twelve-bar range respectively. Variations of the eight-bar and especially the twelve-bar formats dominate the blues tradition.

Harmonically blues compositions tend to center around a tonic, subdominant, and dominant chord structure. In the key of E, this translates into E-major, A-major, and B-major, but each musician chooses the key which best fits his own abilities. Manipulation of the tonic-subdominant-dominant chord pattern, the use of different tempos, innovative singing, and skillful instrumental runs allow the blues

artist to perform many diverse songs within the genre without sounding repetitious.

Vocal and instrumental techniques, of course, are individualistic, and the performers featured here represent the range of stylistic approaches to blues heard in Southwest Virginia. Josh Thomas sings and plays in a coarse, rhythmic manner perhaps not far removed from the early blues of the South (Side 1, Band 7). Steve Tarter and Harry Gay work in a cleaner, lighter style, and their guitar accompaniment shows the influence of the crisp ragtime music popular in the early 1900s (Side 1, Band 1). The style and repertoire of pianist Earl Gilmore draw upon the "classic" blues recordings which featured powerful female vocalists accompanied by pianists or jazz-oriented bands (Side 1, Band 4). The music of Howard Twine reveals exposure to the electrified blues of the 1950s (a major influence on rock-and-roll) developed by southern bluesmen transplanted to the urban centers of the North (Side 2, Band 1). Finally, such artists as the Carter Family give evidence of the assimilation of blues into white culture and the subsequent birth of so-called hillbilly or mountain blues (Side 1, Band 6).

Though blues may be heard in a number of performance styles, the basic lyrical themes remain the same. Rarely do the words tell a chronological

story. More typically each verse is a statement of the singer's emotional condition—often depression—and any description of surrounding activity or landscape only adds to that state of mind:

Take care of my wife and my baby; tell them
I'll be back home someday.
Take care of my wife and baby; tell them
I'll be back home someday.
Man, it was raining, it was storming, boy,
*the day that she walked away.*⁵

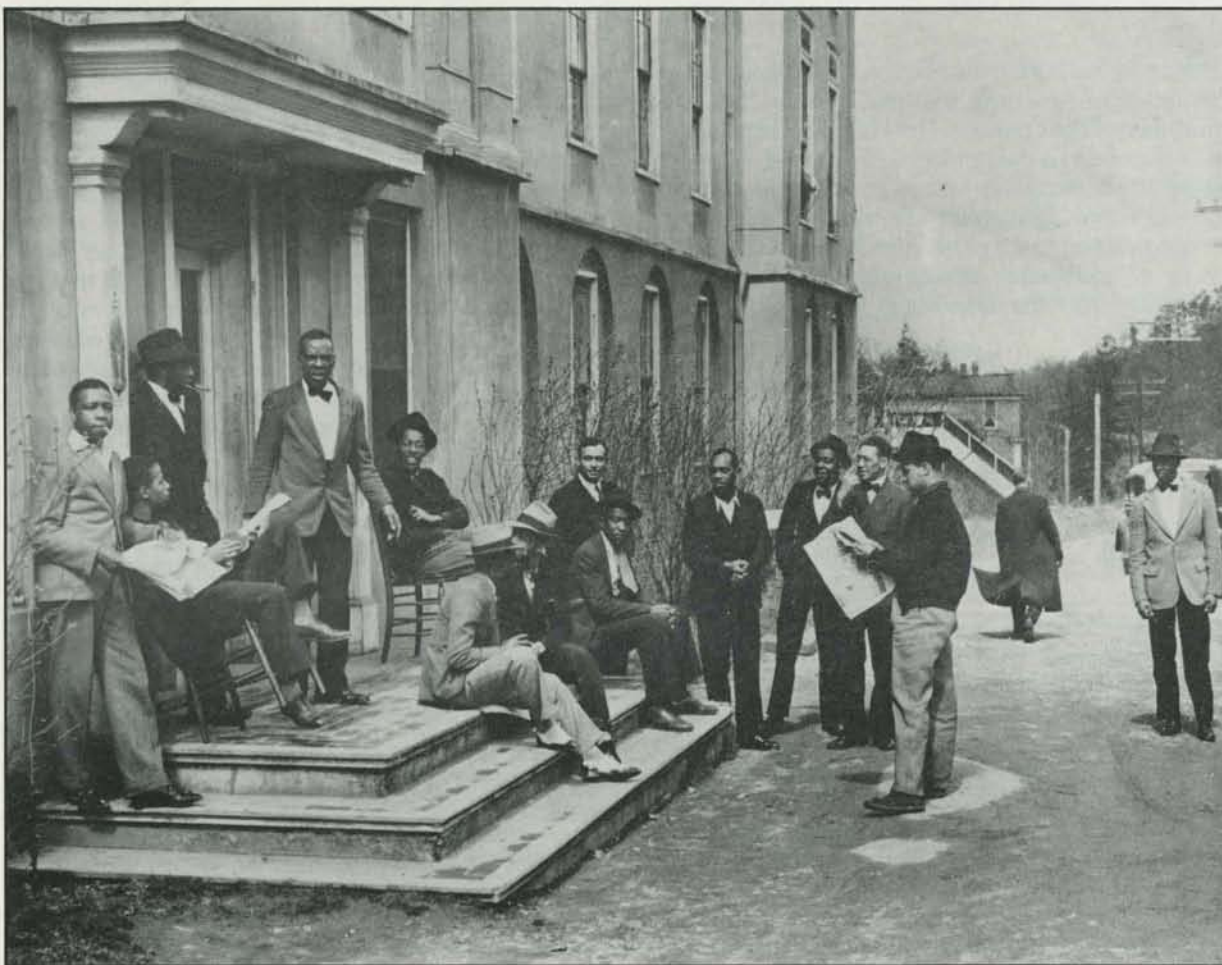
Blues draws much of its emotional power from the starkness of its lyrics, and this twelve-bar verse instills pathos for the singer in a minimum of words. In the opening line the listener is confronted with the pain of family separation though no explanation is given for the breakup. The reference to the weather presents a reflection in nature of the singer's dilemma and reinforces the tone of the verse. The final line hints that it was the performer's wife who originally found reason to sever the relationship.

Subsequent verses in the song continue to develop the same theme. No resolutions are made, no conclusions are reached, no action is taken, and by the end of the piece the singer's predicament is unchanged. We might assume, however, that the songwriter gained some emotional relief by describing the situation.

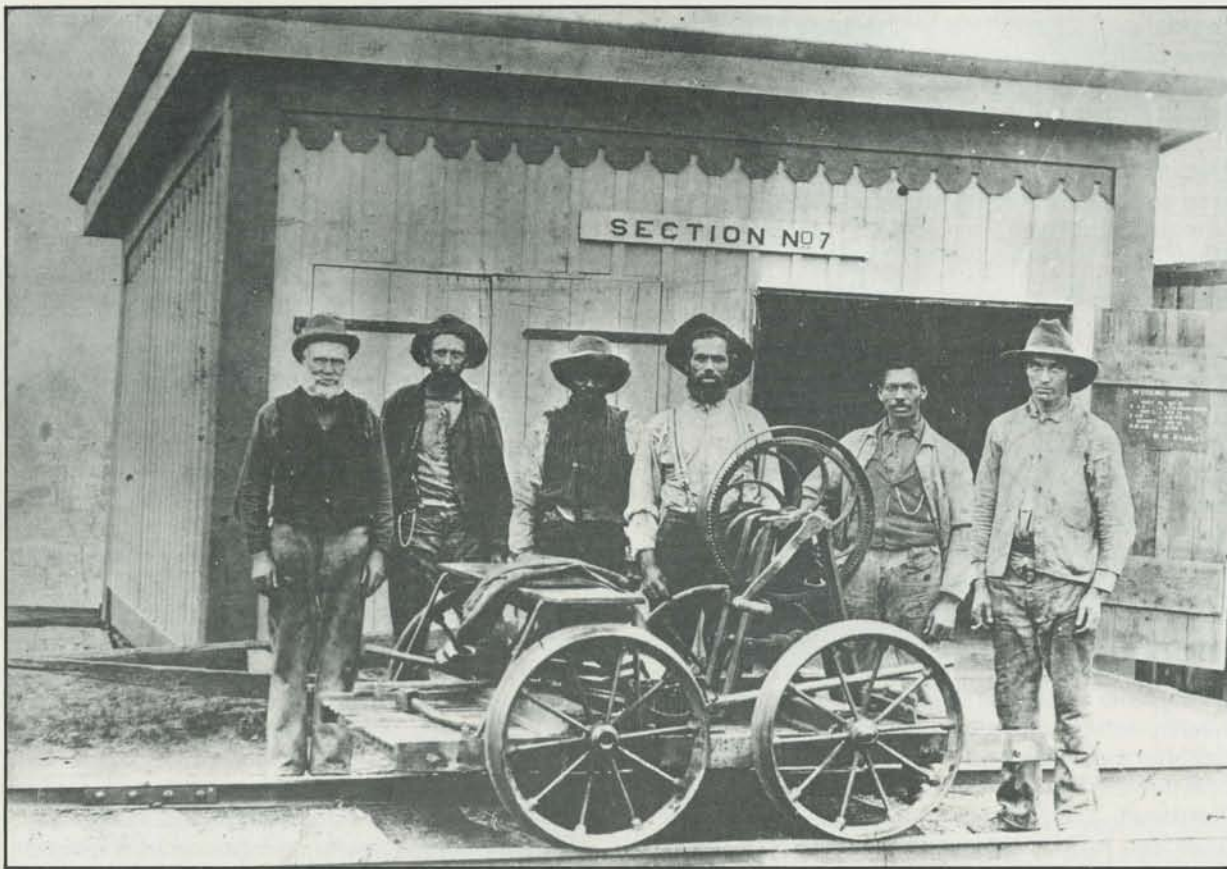
Complementary to the emotional nature of the genre, blues lyrics are most frequently written in the first person (as in the stanza above). Most blues artists are males, and women are often portrayed by the composers as the source of the singers' difficulties. Not surprisingly love—or rather lost love—is the dominant theme. With it comes adultery, betrayal, jealousy, and death. Sexual metaphors range from subtle to blatant, and some artists exclude particular songs from their repertoires because of the thinly-disguised sexual nature of the lyrics. Many musicians feel a conflict between the subject matter of blues and Christianity, and once joining the church, they frequently drop the blues genre entirely.

Though blues was originally and is yet predominantly a product of blacks and the black experience, references to race are rarely used beyond mention of a woman's skin tone. (See "Brownie Blues," Side 1, Band 1; and "Old-Time Blues," Side 1, Band 9). The products of racial inequality, such as poverty and unemployment, are noted in the lyrics, but naming the white population as the cause of those conditions has been avoided. Given the social environment in which the blues form was created, it is not surprising that early black musicians were reluctant to address racial issues in their compositions. Again, in the formula set forth in blues, a faithful, loving mate is most often the answer to life's problems; conversely the absence of such a person is the cause.

Certainly most traditional blues artists are not prolific songwriters. Rather, the typical bluesman in folk tradition relies heavily—if not exclusively—upon songs learned from outside sources: recordings, local musicians, etc. This process allows for a given piece to change both through performer error and intention, and blues musicians commonly tie fragments of one song to another. These "floating



A ukulele provides musical entertainment for waiters relaxing outside of their quarters at the Homestead in Hot Springs, Virginia, c. 1936. (Courtesy Library of Congress, Wittemann Collection)



An integrated railroad section crew stands with its handcar on the Norfolk and Western Railroad, date unknown. The music of black railroad workers both on and off the job is still remembered by many Southwest Virginia residents. (Courtesy Norfolk Southern Corporation)

verses” surface in a myriad of compositions, yet performers find no artistic infringement in their use. Floating verses (or oral formulas), like a great number of complete songs, are anonymous in origin and considered to be in the public domain.

Blues as performed in Southwest Virginia bears evidence of each of the generalized features mentioned above. The black artists in particular share a repertoire with Afro-American bluesmen across the state, and nothing in their vocal and instrumental styles can be readily labeled as distinctive to this geographical region. On the other hand, the Afro-American influence upon the repertoires of traditional white musicians is far-reaching and significant for an area with such a limited black population today. As one might expect, the current stereotypes of Southwest Virginia belie its ethnic heritage.

Southwest Virginia: A Background

The term *Appalachia* carries with it a host of connotations both positive and negative, but the overriding image is one of mountains. Beyond that, depending upon a person's tastes in books, television, and films, one might be inclined to think of coal mines, conservative religion, anachronistic



Though logging has long been one of the region's important industries, scenes of log rafting, such as this one on the Clinch or Powell Rivers, c. 1920, were rare in most parts of Southwest Virginia. The region's extensive logging industry relied primarily on rail transportation. (Courtesy Powell Valley Electric Cooperative)

crafts, and abject poverty. Certainly all of these can be found in Southwest Virginia, most of which lies within the Appalachian Mountains, but these overplayed, stereotypical symbols hardly serve as accurate cornerstones upon which to build an understanding of Southwest Virginia folklife. Obviously hand skills, poverty, and strong religious beliefs exist throughout the nation, and none of the afore-

mentioned features — other than mountains — truthfully speaks of the entire region.

Misconceptions about this area of the Commonwealth have often created problems in a state whose identity is built largely around historic personalities and events in eastern and northern localities. By the mid-1800s many citizens of western Virginia felt an identity of their own, and a number of counties expressed their discontent with Richmond by withdrawing to form a separate government (eventually to become West Virginia) at the onset of the War Between the States. The region now known as Southwest Virginia remained in the Commonwealth, but its character even today is undeniably distinct.

In general, Southwest Virginia is that portion of the state west of the city of Roanoke and north of the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It is split diagonally by Interstate 81 and vertically by Interstate 77. The mountains, which tend to angle through much of the region in extended northeasterly ridges, dominate the landscape, and the valleys between them have channeled travelers and commerce through Virginia into Kentucky and Tennessee for over two centuries. Initial settlement was made in the 1700s by the same English, Scotch, Irish, and German stock evident elsewhere in Virginia. On the rolling terrain between the mountains, these people cleared land for farms and harvested the surrounding stands of timber.

Despite their distance from the larger trade centers of the day, the early “backcountry” residents were not as isolated as one might assume. Major routes of transportation such as the Great Road (through Wytheville, Abingdon, and the Cumberland Gap) gave the people of Southwest Virginia access to the same products and luxuries enjoyed by eastern citizens. Skilled craftspeople rapidly followed the developing markets and set up businesses to meet the demands of the expanding settlements. Potters, furniture makers, and gunsmiths manufactured an abundance of quality items, some of which were popular well beyond local markets. Wythe County was home to an active iron industry, and Saltville was a steady exporter of the commodity for which it was named. Thus the spartan-living, log-cabin pioneer, if not somewhat fictitious, soon was at the least uncharacteristic of much of Southwest Virginia society.

Virginia railroads, too, saw potential profits from expanding into and through the area. In 1839 the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad incorporated to construct a line from Lynchburg to the Tennessee border.⁶ In 1856 the system was complete to Saltville, and by the fall of that year rail service was available from Norfolk to Bristol. With the immense Appalachian coal deposits lying undiscovered, timber was the dominant natural resource, but cattle and horses were the largest Southwest Virginia export on the Virginia and Tennessee line in the early 1850s.⁷ The railroad's presence in Southwest Virginia had both cultural and economic impact. Along with material goods the steam locomotives towed a cargo of outside news, ideas, and trends, and those areas without railroad service were apt to modernize more

slowly.

With regard to the blues tradition in Southwest Virginia, a noteworthy aspect of railroad expansion was the use of black workers to build and maintain the rail system. Prior to the War Between the States, many of these men were slaves. During the war the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad tried to keep at least three hundred slaves at all times as laborers and woodcutters.⁸ Later as free men, blacks continued in the employ of the railroad companies; by 1890, 7,648 blacks were on the rail payrolls statewide.⁹ As an early visitor to Pocahontas, Virginia, recalled,

Attracted by the building of the railroad and the opening of the mines, men were here from pretty much all over...Negroes from Virginia and the Carolinas were most in evidence and did most of the work on the railroad grading and were working as miners, too. They were paid a dollar and a dime for ten hours time on grade work, and they chanted it.¹⁰

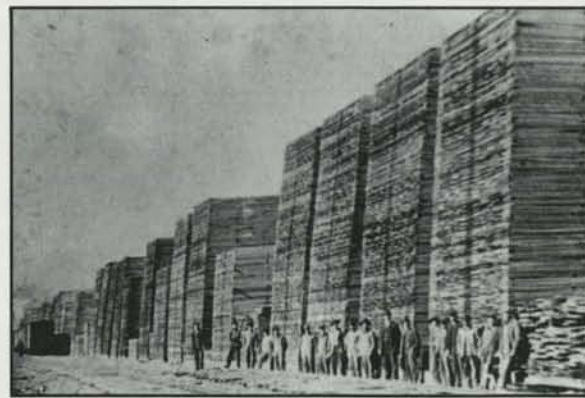
This work force provided many whites with exposure to Afro-American musical traditions, particularly work songs, blues, and dance tunes; the memories of music performed by black railroad workers are still vivid in the minds of several performers featured on this album.

Railroad laborers were not the only Afro-Americans in the region in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1860, Appalachian Virginia, which included the future West Virginia, was home for nearly seventy thousand blacks, 12.6 percent of the total regional

population.¹¹ Though the land was not suitable for large plantation systems like those to the east and south, slavery was nonetheless a significant institution in Appalachian society until the War Between the States. Only 11.6 percent of the seventy thousand blacks listed above were free, a figure which lends little support to the idea that racial discrimination was not practiced by the citizens of Southwest Virginia.¹²

The highlands might have undergone limited demographic change for years had it not been for the sudden growth of the coal industry. In May of 1881, the future president of the Norfolk and Western Railway traveled on horseback to examine reported coal outcroppings in Southwest Virginia. At a site near Bluefield, Virginia, he picked coal from an open, twelve-foot seam and upon burning it observed, "This may be a very important day in our lives." No statement has proven to be more correct. In the span of one year the Pocahontas vein was surrounded by a hotel, seven stores, and a town of one thousand people.¹³

As fuel for the Industrial Revolution, high-quality coal was a profitable commodity, especially for wealthy outsiders who were able to purchase mineral rights to mountain land at low prices. Appalachian coal powered industries throughout the North and Northeast. The railroads which delivered that coal were also major consumers, and with coal rather than wood in locomotive fireboxes, railroad use



The lumber yard of the McCorkle Lumber Company in Stonega, Virginia, in the 1930s reflects Southwest Virginia's early timber resources. (Courtesy Kenny Fannon)

accounted for twenty percent of coal consumption through World War Two.¹⁴

In its rapid expansion the coal industry quickly exhausted the labor pool of native Southwest Virginians. Thirty-three workers were needed to mine one hundred tons of coal per day at the turn of the century. (Five miners could match that production rate by the late 1960s.)¹⁵ Men of all occupations became miners, and even boys were placed in less strenuous, but no less hazardous jobs underground. Farmers from non-coal counties such as Grayson and Carroll went north to the coal mines to earn winter wages; some chose never to return to their agrarian lifestyle.

Nevertheless companies were compelled to look outside of the region for a substantial work force. Trains rolling into the coal fields were soon carrying numbers of recent European immigrants drawn from northeast urban centers by promise of employment. More important to the blues tradition, company recruiters traveled south where former slaves and their children remained trapped in poverty by the sharecropper system.

Riley Murphy was one such recruiter; his grandson, Sam, now living in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, recalls Riley's accounts of his work. Mine recruiters understandably were not popular among southern landowners, and the elder Murphy would wait until nightfall to slip onto Alabama farms to meet with sharecroppers. After describing the opportunities to be found in the coal fields, he would arrange a time and place for the potential miners to meet his train. According to his grandson, Riley Murphy was responsible for bringing entire trainloads of blacks into the coal regions of Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky between 1890 and 1920.¹⁶

Coal companies frequently segregated their ethnic employees into separate camps, thus creating somewhat familiar surroundings for the newcomers and reducing friction between races and nationalities. Generally the camps were clusters of company-owned houses and a company store all wedged into a hollow near a mine entrance. Black camps sometimes included separate schools as well. Since the miner looked to his employer for food, shelter,



A tremendous amount of manual labor was needed to build roads and railroad beds through the mountains. This crew worked in the Wise County area, date unknown. (Courtesy Susie Baker)

clothing, and medical care, the camp system was open to abuse by mine owners and operators, and eventually many coal communities became scenes of violent conflicts between labor and management.

(To the credit of the segregated camps—at least from a folkloristic point of view—the occupying group was more apt to maintain its ethnic identity in such an environment. We might assume that musical traditions, be they blues or eastern European folk-songs, remained vital as long as the group which brought them held together. At the same time local whites were exposed to music never before heard in the mountains.)

Demand for coal and the subsequent railroad activity provided new jobs for Southwest Virginia, and though the coal industry was far from stable, word of possible employment continued to attract outsiders. Even so, the number of blacks in the bituminous mines between the turn of the century and the Depression remained only relatively constant while the number of white miners increased substantially. In 1900 the 2,651 black miners in Virginia comprised almost thirty-six percent of the industry's labor in the state, but by 1930 that percentage had decreased to twelve.¹⁷ The thirties and forties saw a steady emigration of blacks from throughout the South to northern cities; by 1970 all the non-white miners in Virginia made up only 4.6 percent of state miners.¹⁸ In leaving Southwest Virginia the black miner sought a better life for himself and his family. The same quest had led him (or his parents) to the region in the first place.

The forces which drew the black population out of the coal fields were both social and economic. Racial discrimination was still normal behavior for the era, and regional oral history includes accounts of signs posted outside of some Southwest Virginia communities warning blacks to be gone by nightfall.¹⁹ Carl Martin and Howard Armstrong, two black musicians who played extensively throughout the Appalachian coal range, spoke of an incident in which they unwittingly entered an "all-white" town; a dangerous confrontation was avoided only when the white hecklers who had gathered to handle the "no-tail bears" noticed the performers' banjo-mandolins and allowed the pair to play.²⁰

In the mines the relationship between the two races seems to have been somewhat different. Depending upon the attitude of the supervisors, blacks in some mines were given less-desirable duties, such as working seams of coal in areas too low for a man to stand. Nevertheless miners looked to their co-workers for their own safety, and this fact no doubt created a degree of mutual respect underground. Oral history maintains that the first mining disaster in Wise County involved a pair of miners, one black and one white; eventually the victims were found dead, locked in an embrace.²¹

Race relations, at least in the coal counties, were not improved by the manipulation of black laborers during struggles between union organizers and the mine operators and owners. The presence of blacks in the mines was viewed by management as a tool for promoting disunity among workers, and Afro-



A black miner separates slate from coal in an unidentified mine. (Courtesy Grubb Photo)

American miners were hired to replace union members on strike. The policy of the United Mine Workers, however, was non-discriminatory.²² Blacks and whites walked the picket lines together in some cases, yet the Afro-American migration north was underway before the union finally achieved a stable footing in the region.

Though outsiders of both races came in to Southwest Virginia as a direct result of the coal deposits, it should be kept in mind that coal production was and is basically limited to a corner of the region. Only Dickenson, Russell, Tazewell, Wise, and Lee Counties enjoy major shares in the coal industry. In other communities manufacturers of such goods as textiles and furniture have offered hourly-wage opportunities, and, of course, the railroad has long been a presence in most Southwest Virginia counties.

Still, the dominant nature of Southwest Virginia has been and continues to be agricultural. Many farm owners also hold blue or white collar jobs (as do their counterparts throughout the nation), but the realignment of the labor force from farmers to factory workers has had relatively mild impact on the landscape. Perhaps the most visible indication of the shift away from agricultural employment is the swarm of half-acre, roadside plots dotted with ranchstyle houses or mobile homes.

In all phases of folklife, the traditions of Southwest Virginia show signs of the growth, change, attention, and manipulation which the region has experienced over the years. Those traditions work to shape the identity and pride of local citizens, and through an examination of that heritage we arrive at an improved understanding and appreciation of the region as a whole. In this study the blues tradition serves as guide.

Southwest Virginia Blues: Black-White Interchange

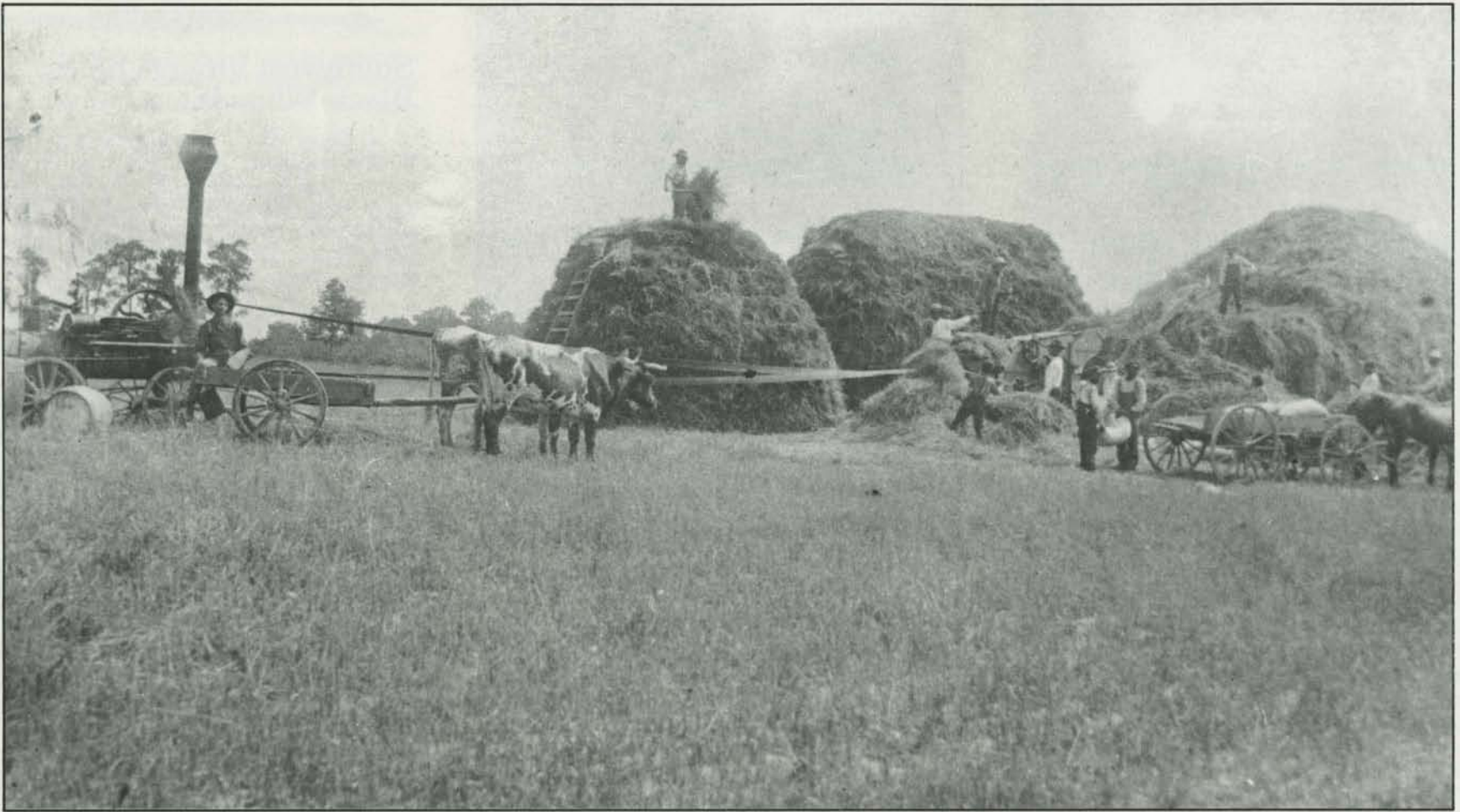
The large influx of southern blacks into Southwest Virginia coincided with an era in which the blues tradition was spreading to all parts of the country. In spite of the atmosphere of racial segregation, the opportunities for non-blacks to hear a blues artist in some communities were surprisingly numerous, particularly for aspiring musicians who actively pursued such performers. Disinterested listeners as well had occasion to experience blues performances under several circumstances. As mentioned earlier, music opened doors for the Afro-American entertainer that were otherwise closed to his race, and in distinct social settings he found his audience to contain a greater proportion of whites than blacks.

One typical context for blues in Southwest Virginia was the house party, a function enjoyed by both blacks and whites. As the name implies, house parties were held in homes. Furniture was pushed back or removed to create a small dance floor, and the revelry was commonly strengthened with legal or illegal alcohol. Musicians, normally local residents, were valued guests. Their payment, if any, was meager, but performers were kept well supplied with refreshments. As might be expected, house parties were not usually integrated functions, yet black musicians played at them in white neighborhoods.

House parties were important to the social and musical development of many Appalachian bluesmen. As a youngster, Nat Reese, a noted West Virginia blues guitarist who has performed throughout much of Southwest Virginia, would sit outside of houses where parties were underway and observe the musicians through the windows. He recalls that the music was predominantly blues and love songs.²³ Bluesman Howard Twine often followed his father to house parties in the Elliston (Montgomery County) community, where such social events were held nearly every week. The elder Twine and his brother were popular local musicians at functions for both races, and house party appearances provided a necessary income when work was scarce.²⁴ Singer/guitarist Dave Dickerson of Tazewell County headed a black string band on the dance and house party circuit in Gary, West Virginia.

The house party setting, like many other events centering around live music, was destined to change with the expansion of the record industry. The jukebox would ultimately limit performance opportunities for local musicians and to a degree would alter listeners' perceptions of quality entertainment. Thus the house party atmosphere in Clinchco (Dickenson County) recounted by pianist Earl Gilmore often made use of a phonograph and recordings of such famous, non-local artists as Etta James, Bessie Smith, Lill Green, and Dinah Washington.²⁵

A more visible (and rare today) breed of blues artist was the itinerant musician. Heard in a number of contexts, many of these were simply laborers who happened to also play music as they worked or



A farm crew of the Christiansburg Industrial Institute uses a steam-powered threshing machine. Despite its reputation for coal deposits, most of Southwest Virginia's earlier economy rested upon an agricultural foundation. (Courtesy McConnell Library Archives, Radford University)

searched for employment with the railroad or in the coal mines. Others treated their talents as professions and traveled specifically to seek out and be paid by new audiences. In either case the traveling musician maintained a strong presence in Southwest Virginia for a number of years, and his influence upon the regional blues tradition is noteworthy.

The itinerant bluesman performed anywhere from house parties to street corners. One of the earliest written references to blues in Appalachia describes Jack Spicer, an itinerant white guitarist, singing in a bar in Pikeville, Kentucky (approximately fifteen miles from the Virginia state line). Spicer's style was referred to as a "coon shout," and his songs were in a three-line, twelve-measure format with A-A-B and A-B-B lyric structure. The term *blues* is not specifically used in the reference, but the purpose of Spicer's music is perceived to be "the idea of getting over dejection."²⁶ There is little doubt that Jack Spicer was singing blues. If he preferred to play in drinking establishments, the wild "gold-rush" atmosphere of the booming coal towns surely provided him with ample opportunity; an early visitor to Pocahontas (Tazewell County) observed, "Almost every other building was a saloon."²⁷

The lifestyle of the itinerant musician was certainly a challenge. "Cowboy" T. Burks, a Lowmoor

(Alleghany County) guitarist who began performing on city streets around 1934, speaks of encounters with local policemen and of the ruthlessness of railroad detectives towards men hopping freight trains. Burks eventually limited his street singing to Clifton Forge and would perform from the bed of his truck in grocery store parking lots.²⁸ Josh Thomas of Hollins (Roanoke County) traveled through Southwest Virginia and Kentucky as a young railroad laborer and coal miner. In one instance he was hired to do nothing but eat, sleep, and play his banjo, but when he decided to return to Virginia, his employers would not allow it. After eight months he created a false request to come home from his dying mother and was released.²⁹

Those itinerant musicians who chose performing as their profession knew by necessity where and when to find an audience. Such skill was evident in the touring of Carl Martin and Howard Armstrong (noted earlier for their confrontation in a segregated town). Martin and Armstrong followed the wage schedules of the mining companies; arriving in a community on payday, they increased their chances of earning cash for their performances.³⁰ Similarly, Peg Leg Sam, a well-known bluesman from North Carolina, regularly played on the flea market circuit through his home state and up to Ramsey (Wise

County) and Tazewell (Tazewell County) into the late 1960s. Flea markets provided a ready-made audience with money in hand.

Another popular setting for blues as well as other genres of music in Southwest Virginia was the medicine show. Featuring music, comedy, and an enthusiastic sales pitch for some therapeutic wonder, medicine shows traveled throughout the country until the 1940s. Though the medicine was of dubious value, the shows were welcomed by communities as free entertainment. Typically the production would take place in the evening and culminate with the hard-sell presentation of a bottled tonic by the maker himself, a doctor by name. Often the show would be repeated for several nights before moving on to another community.

The memories of medicine shows are still vivid to a number of Southwest Virginia residents, but the influence of musicians who performed in the name of health is untold. Of the artists featured on this album, three are known to have played on medicine show stages: Spence Moore, "Cowboy" T. Burks, and Carl Martin. Moore and his brother joined a show for six months in 1938 and rode with it through Pennsylvania, New York, and Delaware.³¹ Burks sang for an outfit operated by an Indian while it was playing in the Botetourt County community of

Buchanan in the early 1930s.³²

If nothing else, the medicine show musician presented songs and instrumental techniques to an audience which might not otherwise have witnessed such musical styles in actual performance. This is not to say, however, that some members of the audience had not previously heard such music. By the time the medicine show began to disappear, the phonograph had long been sitting in houses large and small throughout the mountains.

With the development of the recording industry in the first part of this century, the forces acting upon the musical traditions of Southwest Virginia became more complex and diverse. Prior to the mass-marketing of the phonograph, people were dependent upon live performances for musical entertainment; though sheet music and ballad books provided non-regional material, certainly most of the music heard by highland residents at that time was the unadulterated product of the regional folk heritage. In the 1920s, burgeoning record companies began exploring the market among blacks and rural whites for music of their respective cultures. String bands and blues singers were called into the studios, and hillbilly and race records (terms applied by the companies themselves) were created. The popularity of these 78's (named for the designated revolutions per minute) sent sales skyward until the Depression froze the nation's economy.

The early efforts of the recording industry must be viewed from two sides. These first 78's stand as valuable documentation of traditional songs, tunes, and techniques popular in the era prior to the advent (and influence) of electronic media. At the same time, however, they represent the end of that era. Suddenly a single performance could be enjoyed and imitated by thousands of listeners, and the persuasions of company executives could alter the shape of material brought in by folk musicians—thus the standardization of the blues form.

Still, were it not for records, the blues tradition would be much less varied among Appalachian artists. Blacks and whites alike share a debt to blues recordings heard on jukeboxes and home phonographs, and the performers on this album are typical in learning much from recorded sources. The electrified, urban bluesmen of the North and urban South, the "classic" female singers, and the white hillbilly bands all spread a blues sound in the Virginia highlands. Most far-reaching were male, solo recording artists such as Blind Lemon Jefferson and Blind Boy Fuller. (Jefferson supposedly spent a month with railroad laborers in Smyth County years before he cut his first record, but this has never been proved.³³)

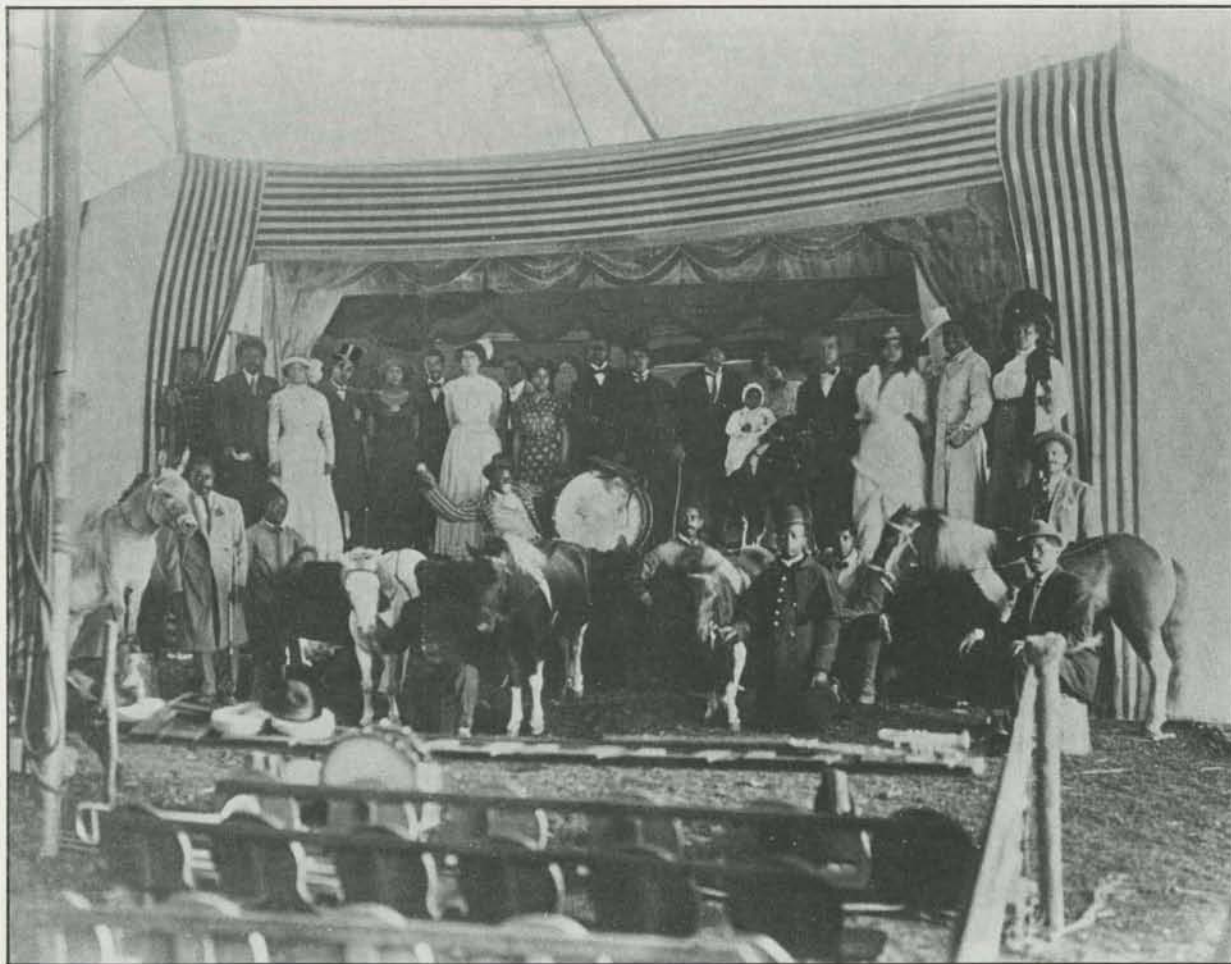
Unfortunately Southwest Virginia blacks made little contribution to the pre-World War Two blues record catalogs. Steve Tarter and Harry Gay of Scott County recorded two sides issued by Victor in 1928, one of which is featured here (Side 1, Band 1), but sales were not highly successful. Carl Martin, originally from Big Stone Gap (Wise County), entered the studios in the mid-1930s, and fourteen sides were issued under various labels. (See Side 1,

Band 9.) Yet for the most part Southwest Virginia bluesmen either were not given or did not seek the opportunity to make recordings.

The same is not true, however, of the white musicians in the region. Southwest Virginia string-bands were a leading force in the nascent hillbilly record market, and the list of area fiddlers, banjoists, and guitarists who were called into the studio is significant. Most maintained only a brief relationship with the record companies before slipping back into the relative obscurity of their native community, but a few groups—most notably the Carter Family—achieved a substantial degree of notoriety. The material played by these bands and individuals covered the spectrum of musical traditions active in the Virginia highlands. Included were ballads, love songs, parlor ballads, sentimental songs, dance tunes, religious songs, and, of course, hillbilly blues. Yet even though the titles of many of these latter numbers contain the word *blues*, the music and lyrics are in most cases quite removed from blues as performed by Afro-American artists. This interpretation of the blues genre by whites is an important facet of Southwest Virginia's musical heritage.

As shown above, opportunities for white Appalachians to hear black bluesmen came under a

variety of circumstances. But in assimilating what was heard into his own repertoire, the white musician normally altered the blues style to make it compatible with the traditions of his own background. Naturally the extent of change was determined by the individual, and the white performances on this album exhibit a broad range of adaptations. Songsters Malcolm Johnson, who learned "Matchbox Blues" on the porch of a black guitarist's home in Kingsport, Tennessee, and Spence Moore, who taught himself "Black Snake Moan" (Side 2, Band 7) from the recording by Blind Lemon Jefferson, both give renditions reasonably similar to Afro-American styles, but the black influence upon their treatment of songs from white tradition is minimal. The banjo playing of Dock Boggs goes a step further; Boggs was strongly attracted to black music, and he made a determined effort to learn the finger-picking banjo style he witnessed in use by two Afro-American banjo players around Dorchester (Wise County), a predominantly black community. While most whites were still frailing or clawhammering the banjo, Boggs applied his black-derived technique to many of the songs known to him through white tradition as well as to pieces borrowed from black artists and recordings.³⁴



Traveling stage and medicine shows, such as this unidentified black troupe complete with animals and a clown, presented both traditional and popular music to eager Southwest Virginia audiences. (Courtesy Kip Lornell)

The Carter Family, the best known hillbilly recording stars from Southwest Virginia, was another group which adapted black material to their own style. The efforts of A.P. Carter to find new songs in the region crossed racial boundaries. Carter made numerous trips throughout the mountains for the specific purpose of locating fresh material. On one such journey to Kingsport, Tennessee, he met black bluesman Lesley Riddle and invited Riddle to his home in Scott County. Riddle stayed with the Carters on and off for five years, acting as A.P.'s chauffeur on song-hunting excursions in Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky.³⁵ Riddle also was given the task of learning the tunes to new songs while A.P. wrote down the lyrics.³⁶

The relationship between Riddle and the Carters provided an unusual opportunity for the exchange of songs and techniques, yet according to Riddle, he and the group never actually played music together even in an informal setting. When Riddle performed, the Carters listened, and vice versa. This arrangement apparently was not racially founded; obviously the Carters felt an appreciation of black musical talent. On one occasion Riddle brought his girlfriend to the Carters' home, and between two and four hundred people turned out to hear the pair perform.

The Carter Family eventually recorded a number of adaptations of songs borrowed from Riddle, including sacred material; "Bear Creek Blues" (Side 1, Band 6) is one such piece.³⁷ Riddle's guitar work was also an influence upon the instrumental technique of Maybelle Carter.³⁸

Over the years numerous songs were recorded with the word *blues* in the title by the Carter Family and other white artists, but again most of these have little in common with the Afro-American blues format. Rather the frequent titling of hillbilly songs as blues was indicative of the popularity of the term. Songs which described lonely, difficult, or sad circumstances were readily named after the genre. Thus when asked to play blues today, the traditional white musicians of the region are likely to perform something musically and lyrically different from the Afro-American blues form. Both kinds of music are acceptable parts of the white blues tradition. Black artists, on the other hand, rarely play hillbilly blues.

Certainly no source of white mountain blues (and other music as well) in Southwest Virginia is more interesting than songwriter William Evert Myer (1884-1964). Born in Tyler County, West Virginia, Myer taught school, studied law, and kept books for a major coal company before settling in Richlands



Lesley Riddle (right), bluesman and one-time chauffeur and song recorder for A. P. Carter, with Brownie McGhee, c. 1937. (Courtesy Lesley Riddle)



The guitar has been the preferred instrument of Southwest Virginia bluesmen, but harp-guitars such as the one photographed here at the car shop of the Peerless Coal and Coke Company just over the West Virginia border, circa 1930s, were most unusual. (Courtesy Roland Luther Collection, Eastern Regional Coal Archives)

(Tazewell County) in 1923. Through the Myer's Cash Variety Store he began selling records, and healthy profits inspired him to set up an all-record store in War, West Virginia, possibly the first such enterprise in the entire region. In addition salesmen were commissioned by Myer to sell records door-to-door. Myer's son, Clarence, recalls that most race records sold well in the mountains, the exception being "classic" blues recordings by female artists.

More importantly Myer directed his creative talents toward songwriting and penned a host of lyrics, at least fifteen of which had the word *blues* in the title. Myer did not compose melodies to accompany his lyrics but rather suggested well-known tunes to which the words might be sung. He then promoted his works by sending them to established performers and even by selling printed copies in broadside form. His songs were recorded by Dock Boggs, Emry Arthur, and the nationally-known bluesman Mississippi John Hurt among others. In his record affairs Myer exhibited a great deal of foresight for the era; he understood the value of copyright laws and was one of the first songwriters to seek a royalty contract from a major record company.

Aware of the potential of the recording industry, Myer formed his own company under the Lonesome Ace label immediately prior to the Depression. The promotional literature stressed, "Every song has a moral,...and all subjects are covered without the use of any 'near decent' [his quotation marks] language which is so prevalent among many of the modern records." Unfortunately the downturn of the economy

drove the budding firm out of business after the release of only three 78's—two by Dock Boggs and one by Emry Arthur. Yet despite the failure of the venture, Myer must be considered a broadminded pioneer both for his business efforts and for his understanding and appreciation of the traditional musical styles of the region.³⁹

While the phonograph has been and continues to be an important medium for blues in Southwest Virginia, the key to the survival and perpetuation of the tradition remains the live performance. Unfortunately most of the social contexts for such performances have disappeared. Bars and house parties in their contemporary forms rely upon stereo equipment for entertainment. Community dances feature the talents of Nashville-oriented bands. Street singing is discouraged through legal channels. The majority of live performances in the region take place in religious environments hardly conducive and sometimes hostile to the singing of blues. Yet the blues tradition continues.

The typical blues artist in Southwest Virginia today is more accurately labeled a songster rather than a bluesman. Black or white, the songster possesses a repertoire of numerous songs and song types, and he learns any piece of music he finds intriguing. But developing a broad repertoire goes beyond personal satisfaction; Howard Twine, who watched his father perform in country stores and at house parties, observes, "A guy walked by,...and said, (he'd) 'Give you a dollar,' and said, 'You play this! You'd better know how to play it else you done lost a dollar.'⁴⁰ The advantage of maintaining a large and diverse stock of material is obvious for the public



Plowing teams pose at the Christiansburg Industrial Institute, a turn of the century training facility for blacks in Montgomery County. (Courtesy McConnell Library Archives, Radford University)

musician. Many of the artists on this album have worked in the contexts described above, and nearly all can be rightly classified as songsters.

Along with a varied repertoire, a number of performers expand their musical talents to include several instruments. In Southwest Virginia the blues tradition takes in both string and wind instruments, but unquestionably the favored choice is the guitar. The extension of the guitar from a ladies parlor instrument to a blues instrument occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the early-twentieth-century coal fields Dock Boggs observed that the guitar was strictly a black instrument.⁴¹ It would, however, be quickly accepted by white string bands and songsters.

In recent years blues musicians such as Howard Twine and "Cowboy" T. Burks have replaced their acoustic guitars with electrically-amplified models. Other instruments which have been used to accompany blues in the area include the piano, banjo, harmonica, and even the kazoo. (Southwest Virginia musicians also played bones and jugs well into this century, but there is no record of such instruments being associated with the performance of blues in the region.)

Traditions change, particularly in modernized cultures, and the blues traditions of Southwest Virginia are in a continuous state of flux. Unfortunately most aspiring musicians overlook local tradition-bearers in favor of mass-media stars. It is significant to note that the young musicians seeking to learn blues from Nat Reese are white;⁴² half a century ago Steve Tarter was conducting guitar lessons for a number of white boys in the Gate City area.⁴³ In the process of this research, Lanny Twine,

nephew of Howard Twine, was the only black youth actually observed playing blues with a local tradition-bearer.

Even so, blues is still widely appreciated by both races of Southwest Virginia despite the fact it is infrequently heard. Many of the people interviewed for this project voiced their beliefs in an innate Afro-American musical talent, often referred to as "a gift of God." For those informants blues is considered one aspect of that gift (though the lyrical message may conflict with religious convictions). For others it is a telling facet of the regional heritage.



William E. Myer, songwriter and founder of the Lonesome Ace record label, c. 1920s. (Courtesy Clarence Myer Family and Dr. Charles Wolfe)



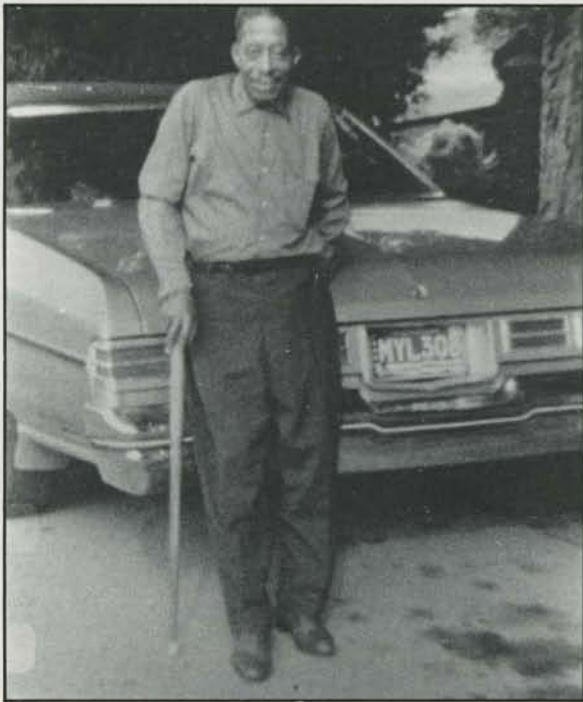
William Myer's Lonesome Ace record label. (Courtesy Dave Freeman)

SIDE ONE

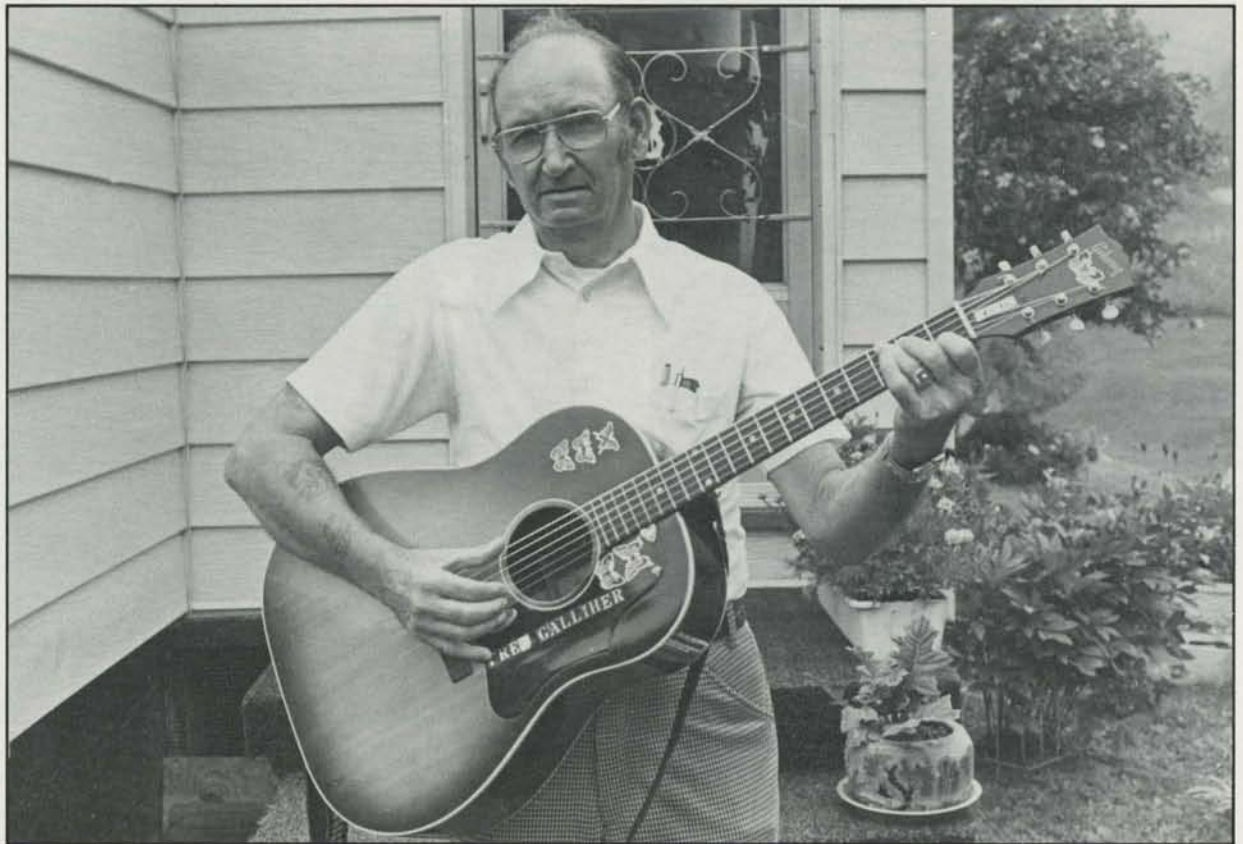
1. BROWNIE BLUES—Steve Tarter, vocal and lead guitar; and Harry Gay, guitar. Recorded in Bristol, Tennessee, November 2, 1928, for release on the Victor label (V38017). 2:57.

Steve Tarter and Harry Gay were two of the few black musicians from Southwest Virginia to record during the early days of the race record industry. Tarter was born in the mid-1890s and died in the mid-1930s; Gay, born in 1904, died in the late 1970s. At the time of their recording, both men were living in the Gate City (Scott Co.) area, and Tarter was locally recognized for his musical talents on several instruments. He influenced a number of aspiring guitarists, including white musicians, and he taught Gay his instrumental style. They performed as a duo at functions on both sides of the Virginia-Tennessee line, but Gay rarely played publicly after his partner's death. No known photographs exist of Tarter.

"Brownie Blues" (Victor 38017) is one side of Tarter and Gay's only record, a venture which failed to bring them widespread fame or wealth. (Lesley Riddle, aforementioned song collector with A.P. Carter and an acquaintance of Tarter and Gay, points to this as one reason why he did not pursue a recording contract for himself at that time.) The record did sell well locally, however. "Brownie Blues" wonderfully demonstrates the inclusion of ragtime instrumental techniques in the blues tradition, and



Harry Gay, c. 1970. Photographs of Steve Tarter are not known to exist. (Courtesy Mrs. Ollie Gillespie)



Fred Galliher, 1983. (Blue Ridge Heritage Archive)

the delicate instrumentation of the piece differs greatly from coarser material on this album. The lyrics (in the A-A-B format) offer an interesting commentary upon attitudes toward skin color.

*Now let's run here, Brownie, sit down on my knee;
Now let's run here, Brownie, and sit down on my knee;
Just pray to the world, babe, how you mistreated me.*

*Want no jet black woman burn no bread for me;
Want no jet black woman burn no bread for me;
Jet black is evil, and she sure might poison me.*

*Jet black is evil and so is yellow, too;
Jet black is evil, so is yellow, too;
I'm so glad I'm brown-skinned don't know what to do.*

*My mama's dead, oh, so is my papa, too;
My mama's dead, oh, so is my papa, too;
I'm so glad I'm brown-skinned don't know what to do.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Tarter and Gay, "Unknown Blues," Victor V38017, 1928. Reissued on Yazoo L-1013.

A few of the many early recordings expressing lyrical attention to skin color include:

Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks), "Chocolate to the Bone," Columbia 14331-D, 1928.

Ishman Bracey, "Brown Mama Blues," Victor LVA 3032, 1928, Roots RL330, Historical HLP32.

Bo Chatman, "Brown-Skin Woman," Bluebird B7952, 1938.

Clifford Gibson, "Tired of Being Mistreated," Paramount 12866, 1929.

Norfolk Jazz Quartet, "Suntan Baby Brown (Suntan Lady)," Decca 7443, 1937.

2. PAN AMERICAN BLUES—Fred Galliher, vocal and harmonica. Recorded in Chilhowie (Smyth County), Virginia, August 18, 1983, by Vaughan Webb. 2:36.

Born in 1914, Fred Galliher was raised in the community of Henrytown near Saltville. The fifteen member Galliher family included many musicians, and Fred was influenced by a number of relatives, most notably Hobart Smith, his first cousin and a nationally-recognized performer. Galliher's mother played the harmonica (mostly dance tunes); Fred picked up the instrument on his own around the age of six. A few years later he heard a De Ford Bailey recording of "Pan-American Blues" and added it and other Bailey pieces to his repertoire. Along with the mail-order listing of Bailey's recordings, Galliher recalled receiving a written description of the performer as a large-headed man, four feet in height; no mention was made of Bailey's race.

Fred Galliher continued to develop his musical skills, mastering the guitar, fiddle, and banjo. He played these and the harmonica in local string bands. With the exception of the Bailey pieces learned from early recordings, Galliher's repertoire was typical of those of other traditional white musicians in the region with its wide selection of religious, string band, and country and western numbers. Galliher passed away in 1984.

The rendition of "Pan American Blues" given

here differs dramatically from Bailey's original 1927 instrumental with the addition of three sung verses. Galliher borrowed the words from a forgotten source and found they fit comfortably with the general tone of the piece. The free-form nature of this version makes it a vivid representation of non-standardized blues, allowing improvisation both in verse structure, meter, and melody.

*Down on my knees a-begging,
Please don't leave me here alone.*

*I'm going away someday;
I won't be back here soon.*

*Down on my knees a-begging,
Please don't leave me here alone.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

De Ford Bailey, "Pan-American Blues," Brunswick 146, Vocalion 5180, 1927. Reissued on Matchbox MSE218.



3. POOR BOY LONG WAY FROM HOME— James Henry Diggs, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Roanoke (Roanoke County), Virginia, November 22, 1962, by Ken Davidson and Bill Hale. 2:55.

Like the cuts of Josh Thomas (Side 1, Band 7) and Dave Dickerson (Side 2, Band 4), James "Crip" Diggs' presence on this album is a tribute not only to the artist himself but also to the many nonacademic music collectors who have made invaluable and timely recordings of local, uncelebrated musicians. Diggs was one of the several known bluesmen singing in the Roanoke area during the 1960s, all of whom have now died or have become untraceable. Recordings of only three of those artists have surfaced, and these were made not by local historians or folklorists but by students who pursued traditional music as a hobby.

Little is known of James Henry Diggs. Police records indicate that Diggs was born in 1917 in Lynchburg, and according to family history he was crippled by polio, thus acquiring his nickname, "Crip." He reportedly left Roanoke for New York City with his sister in the 1960s. It is not known if he is alive today.

An article in the *Roanoke Times and World News* of February 16, 1955, reports that Diggs was charged with robbery during that month and at the time of his arrest he sang "Hearts of Stone" to the investigating officers; when acquitted one week later, Diggs again met with detectives and performed "Let Me Go, Lover" with guitar accompaniment. The field recordings from which "Poor Boy Long Way From Home" was taken reveal Diggs to have been proficient on the harmonica as well as the guitar, and



James Henry "Crip" Diggs sings "Let Me Go, Lover" to Roanoke detectives after being acquitted of burglary, 1955. (Courtesy Roanoke Times and World-News)

he may have been "discovered" by fieldworkers nearly thirty years prior to the recording session which produced the performance here. A state prison farm inmate named James Henry Diggs sang "Freight Train Blues" on field recordings for the Library of Congress in 1935. Absolute proof that this performance was by the "Crip" Diggs featured on this album has not surfaced, but prison records show that Roanoker James Henry Diggs was sentenced to twelve years in the state penitentiary for a third housebreaking conviction in 1940. It is possible that Diggs served time for his previous two crimes in the 1930s, and the circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that "Crip" Diggs was indeed the 1935 singer.

Diggs' source for "Poor Boy Long Way From Home" is unknown, but versions of the song have been in oral tradition since the early years of this century. The song was released as a 78 recording for Paramount (12571) by Gus Cannon in 1927. Diggs delivers the piece in a straightforward, sixteen-bar format, yet the general lyrical theme of the song is interrupted by his addition of the second verse, which speaks of leaving a mate rather than trying to find one. Not surprisingly this "floating" verse is found in other songs as well.

*Poor boy long way from home,
Oh, lord, I'm a poor child way from home;
Lord, I'm a poor child long way from home;
I've no place to stay, no place to roam.*

*I'm going, I'm going, crying won't make me stay;
Oh, lord, I'm a-going, I'm going, crying won't make me stay;
I'm going, I'm going, your crying won't make me stay;
For the more you cry, further you drive me away.*

*I say, take me, baby, try me one more time;
Oh, lord, take me, mama, try me one more time;
I say, take me, baby, try me one more time;
And if don't suit you, bust my backbone trying.*

*I got a ship on the ocean going 'round and 'round;
Lord, I got a ship on the ocean going 'round and 'round;
I got a ship on the ocean going 'round and 'round;
Before that gal of mine leave me, I'd jump overboard and drown.*

*I said, take me, baby, put me in your big brass bed;
Oh, lord, take me, mama, put me in your big brass bed;
I said, take me, baby, put me in your big brass bed;
Let me lay there, baby, till my face turns cherry red.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Gus Cannon, "Poor Boy, Long Ways From Home," Paramount 12571, Broadway 5054, 1927. Reissued on Yazoo 1002.

John Dudley, "Po Boy Blues," New World 252, 1977.

Rochelle French and Gabriel Brown, "Po' Boy, Long Ways From Home," L.C. AFS 454B, 1935. Released on Flyright-Matchbox SDM257.

Carl Hodges, "Poor Boy Blues," BRI 006, 1982.

4. I WENT DOWN IN VIRGINIA—Earl Gilmore, vocal and piano. Recorded in Roanoke (Roanoke County), Virginia, September 9, 1984, by Fred Fox, WDBJ Television. 1:59.

The music of Earl Gilmore is a powerful reminder that male guitarists playing alone or in pairs have not been the only artists to shape the blues tradition in Southwest Virginia. Gilmore was born in 1924 in North Carolina; two years later his father brought the family to Dickenson County in pursuit of railroad employment. As a child, Gilmore was primarily exposed to gospel singing. While his first performance experiences were associated with the church, other forms of music were also inviting, particularly the “classic” blues as recorded by such female singers as Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Etta James, and Dinah Washington. The boisterous parties around Clinchco made ample use of phonographs and jukeboxes, and Gilmore also developed an appreciation for the rhythm and blues sound. He traveled to hear the “name” groups that sometimes toured into the mountains, and having taught himself the piano, he began to adapt their music to his own style.

With other local musicians Gilmore formed small bands and eventually cut two 45 r.p.m. blues recordings. Though he worked in the coal mines for several years, playing music became his primary vocation. By the 1950s he was performing for white audiences. Folk revivalists Guy Carawan and the Morris Brothers worked with Gilmore on the West Coast and in New England, but he eventually returned both to Dickenson County and to gospel music. Today Earl Gilmore performs primarily for church audi-

ences.

By Gilmore’s recollection “I Went Down in Virginia” was adapted from the music of Buddy Johnson. Johnson and his band played dates in eastern Tennessee, where Gilmore first heard the group. His strong attraction to the “classic” and big band artists makes Gilmore a significant participant in the regional blues tradition today.

*I went down in Virginia, honey, where the green grass grows;
I went down in Virginia, honey, where the green grass grows;
I tried to tell myself I ain't gonna do that no more.*

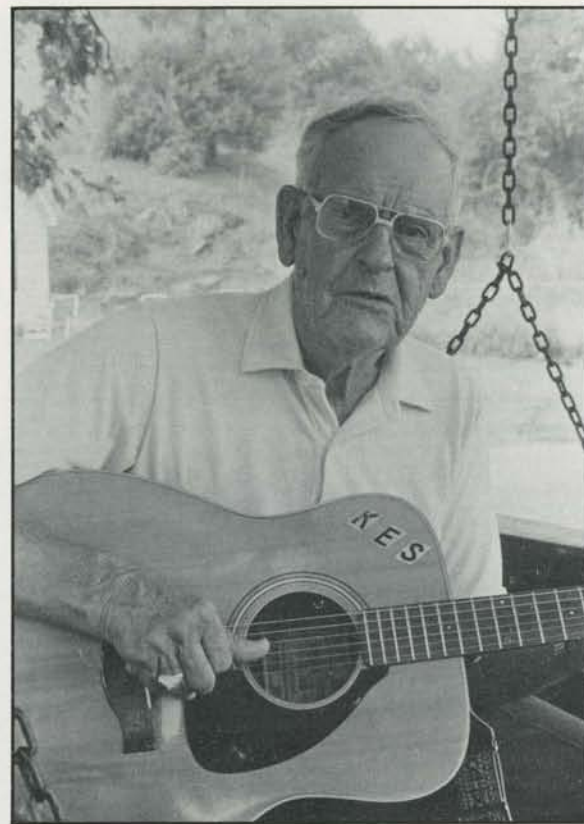
*Well, my baby told me, she said, “Honey, stop doing me wrong.”
Oh, she told me, “Honey, stop doing me wrong.”
But there was too much temptation, oh, one man to live alone.*

*When I went down in Virginia, I knew I was gonna do her wrong;
Oh, when I went way down in Virginia, I knew I was gonna do my
baby wrong;
So many pretty little girls, how could a poor man keep from going
wrong?*



5. KING EDWARD'S BLUES—King Edward Smith, guitar. Recorded in Saltville (Smyth County), Virginia, March 28, 1977, by Kip Lornell. 1:45.

The Smith family has been a dominant force in the musical environment in the Saltville community. King Edward Smith’s first cousins, Hobart Smith and



King Edward Smith, 1983. (Blue Ridge Heritage Archive)

Texas Gladden, were two of Virginia’s earliest recorded tradition-bearers, and Hobart had some success on the folk revival circuit in the 1960s. Fred Galliher (Side 1, Band 2) is another of King Edward’s cousins.

King Edward Smith was born in 1906 in Saltville. He recalls only a handful of blacks living in the community as he was growing up, but the memory of black railroad crews singing work songs remains strong. Smith had been playing guitar for six years before he first saw a black guitarist sometime in the mid-1920s. Yet the lack of black musicians in the Saltville area did not dampen his appreciation for Afro-American music. Smith bought and listened to race records; he learned a great deal from his cousin Hobart, who shared a love for black musical styles; he imitated techniques he observed in use by street musicians in Bristol; and he borrowed material from Shad Campbell, a local, white guitarist who played mostly blues. Smith’s talents have taken him to regional music contests and festivals, and he participated in the highly-publicized White Top Mountain Interstate Folk Music Festival attended by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1933. In the songster tradition Smith’s repertoire is a broad collection of religious, string band, and country and western numbers.

“King Edward’s Blues” illustrates the fingerpicking style popular among musicians in the Smith family. Lacking lyrics to set the emotional tone, the piece is an example of the label blues used by whites to denote instrumental numbers with bent (or blue) notes.



Earl Gilmore, 1983. (Blue Ridge Heritage Archive)



The Carter Family (Maybelle, A. P., and Sara), c. 1929. (Courtesy Kip Lornell)

6. BEAR CREEK BLUES—The Carter Family (Sara Carter, vocal and autoharp; Maybelle Carter, guitar). Recorded in Chicago, Illinois, October 4, 1940, for release on the Conqueror label (9574). 2:46.

The original Carter Family (A.P., his wife Sara, and his sister-in-law Maybelle) first recorded in Bristol, Tennessee/Virginia, in 1927. By the end of their last session in 1941, they had not only achieved immense popularity but also had recorded numerous songs collected in the mountains of Southwest Virginia and neighboring states. As noted earlier, A.P. was an avid song hunter, and rather than crediting his sources, he followed the advice of a record company representative and copyrighted many of his findings under his own name. Hence the Carter Family recordings stand as the musical product of the entire region as well as the work of a single group.

According to Lesley Riddle, the black singer/guitarist who helped A.P. collect new material, “Bear Creek Blues” is an adaptation of Riddle’s own material.⁴⁴ The melody was composed by Maybelle and Sara, and the group used it for their recording of “Coal Miner’s Blues.”⁴⁵ “Bear Creek Blues” combines the white instrumental rhythm made famous by the Carter Family with the A-A-B lyric form derived from the Afro-American blues tradition. The reference to Bear Creek is the only element tying the verses together thematically. As a whole, “Bear Creek Blues” is atypical of the Carter repertoire, but it is a clear example of the adaptive nature of the mountain musical traditions.

*Way up on Bear Creek watching the sun go down;
Way up on Bear Creek watching the sun go down;
It makes me feel like I’m on my last go round.*

*The water on Bear Creek, it tastes like cherry wine;
The water on Bear Creek, it tastes like cherry wine;
You can take one drink of it, you’re drinking all the time.*

*If you stay on Bear Creek, you’ll get like Jesse James;
If you stay on Bear Creek, you’ll get like Jesse James;
You’ll take two old pistols and hold up that Bear Creek train.*

*I’m going high, high up on some lonesome hill;
I’m going high, high up on some lonesome hill;
Look down on Bear Creek where my good gal used to live.*



7. MISSISSIPPI HEAVY WATER BLUES — Josh Thomas, vocal and banjo. Recorded in Hollins (Roanoke County), Virginia, Spring, 1970, by Clifford Endres. 3:33.

The details of the life of Joshua Latina Robert Thomas are unclear. The son of a slave, Thomas picked up the banjo at a young age and continued with it all of his life. Two cousins also played the instrument—or rather Thomas thought they could play until he himself learned. As a teenager, Thomas worked for both the railroad and the coal industry. At some point in life he was permanently blinded in a boxing match. Eventually Thomas returned to the Roanoke area where he lived for the remainder of his years. In the late 1960s Thomas, who at the time was in his eighties, was “discovered” by local, white teenagers and college students. They frequently visited his home to drink beer and listen to Thomas perform and tell stories. Thomas died in the 1970s.

The style of this bluesman is quite removed from the clean instrumental techniques and smooth singing frequently heard from Virginia songsters. The banjo is delivered in a forceful, four-finger, clawhammer manner, and the vocals are frequently unintelligible (as shown in the transcription below). Thomas’ songs whether blues or non-blues are subject to extensive improvisation both in lyric and meter. He extends several pieces far beyond the standard

three-minute length to which record listeners have become accustomed.

“Mississippi Heavy Water Blues” was first recorded in 1927 by Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks) for Columbia (Columbia 14222-D), but Thomas’ source is unknown. His use of the banjo as a blues instrument is also significant.

*(Inaudible) with my head hanging low,
I heard some city boy (inaudible) no more;
That’s why I’m crying, say, at the heavy water blues;
That’s why I’m crying, say, at the heavy water blues;*

*I’m sitting right in my shoes;
Gal in Louisiana got the high water blues;
That’s why I’m crying, say, at the heavy water blues;
That’s why I’m crying, say, at the heavy water blues;
That’s why I’m crying, say, at the heavy water blues.*

*Don’t need no water, need no coal;
I need some sweet mama to give me the jelly roll;
I’m crying, say, it’s the heavy water blues.*

*Say look here, Miss, (inaudible);
When high water hit, women wash away;
Why I’m crying, say, it’s the heavy water blues;
That why I’m crying.*

*Look here (inaudible);
High water hit, women got washed away;
I’m crying, say, at the heavy water blues;
Now I’m crying, say, at the heavy water blues;
I’m crying.*

*I’m sitting right here looking at all of this mud;
My gal got washed away in a Mississippi flood;
That’s why I’m crying, say, at the heavy water blues;
Oh, I’m crying, say, at the heavy water blues.*

*Don’t need no water, I need no coal;
I need some sweet mama to give me jelly roll;*



Josh Thomas, 1970. (Courtesy Clifford Endres)

*I'm crying, say, at the heavy water blues;
I'm crying at the heavy water.*

*There's muddy water as far as I can see;
Won't you come on, come shake it with me;
I'm crying say at the heavy water blues;
Why I'm crying.*

*I'm standing right here mud all in my shoes;
Gal done ran off with those high water blues;
I'm crying with the heavy water blues;
Why I'm crying, say, the heavy water blues.*

*I'm going down (inaudible);
(Inaudible) my gal said;
Why I'm crying, say, the heavy water blues.*

*I lay by my window by my back door;
(Inaudible) man can't use you no more;
That why I'm crying, say, at the heavy water blues.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

A Mississippi flood in the mid-1920s was inspiration for a number of recorded blues including the song by Barbecue Bob which is likely the source of Josh Thomas' version:

Barbecue Bob (Robert Hicks), "Mississippi Heavy Water Blues," Columbia 14222-D, 1927.

Lonnie Johnson, "South Bound Water," Okeh 8466, 1927.

Charley Patton, "High Water Everywhere—Parts I and II," Paramount 12909, 1929.

Bessie Smith, "Black-Water Blues," Columbia 14195-D, 1927.

Bessie Mae Smith, "High Water Blues," Okeh 8483, 1927.

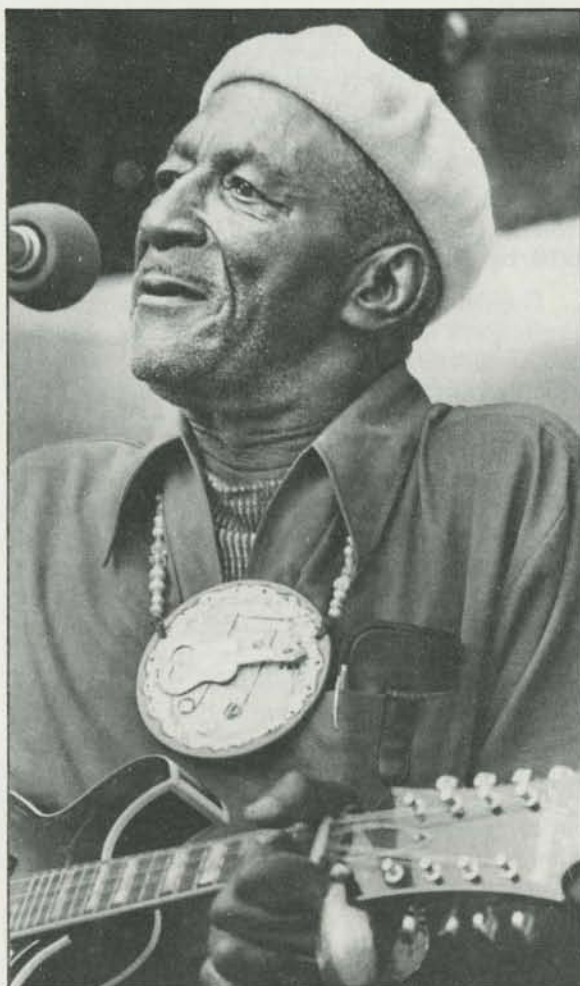
8. OLD TIME BLUES—Carl Martin, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Chicago, Illinois, July 27, 1935, for release on the Bluebird label (B6139). 2:38.

Carl Martin was born in 1906 in Big Stone Gap (Wise Co.). In the early years of a musical career spanning over five decades, he performed throughout the mountains of Virginia and neighboring states. As a member of a black string band, Martin played for numerous house parties and dances as well as for street and medicine show audiences in the region. Along with Roland Martin (his half-brother) and Howard Armstrong, he formed the Tennessee Chocolate Drops and recorded with that group on the Vocalion label in Knoxville in 1930. Martin soon moved to Chicago, where he recorded several cuts for various labels in the 1930s. For the next thirty years he continued to play part-time in clubs. By the 1960s he and his musical partner, Ted Bogan, were popular artists on the folk festival circuit, and he performed frequently in the 1970s as a member of Martin, Bogan, and Armstrong. Carl Martin died in 1979.

"Old Time Blues" is an eight-bar blues with an A-B lyric pattern. Typically the eighth bar of each verse is simply an instrumental turn without lyrics. The song features precise fingerpicking similar to that on "Brownie Blues" (Band 1, above); though we do not know that Martin ever met Tarter and Gay, the three bluesmen obviously shared common musical influences.

*You promised me that you would treat me right;
Now you won't do nothing, honey, but fuss and fight.*

*My mama she told me when I left my home,
"Son, be a good boy and leave bad women alone."*



Carl Martin, c. 1970s. (Courtesy National Council for the Traditional Arts)

*Now my mama she's dead; papa won't allow me home;
I ain't got nobody teach me right from wrong.*

*I was young and foolish, I was easy led;
I've been mistreated ever since mama she's been dead.*

*Sometime it seems like the whole world is down on me;
If I've been a bad boy, I did not intend to be.*

*Tell me, pretty mama, who can your good man be?
You ain't got nobody; honey, won't you please take me?*

*I've got three women: yellow, black, and brown;
When I go to see one, tell the other two I'm out of town.*

*I want all you women to strictly understand
Every man you meet sure ain't no monkey man.*

*When I had money, friends for miles around,
I done lost all my money, friends can't even be found.*

*I'm gonna leave here walking, coming back 'til fall;
My luck don't change, I won't be back at all.*

*Tell me, pretty mama, who can your good man be?
You ain't got nobody; honey, won't you please take me?*

*I'm going to Florida where I can have my fun,
Sit down in the green grass and look up at the sun.*

*I'm weary now, but I won't be weary long;
Takes a weary man to sing this weary song.*

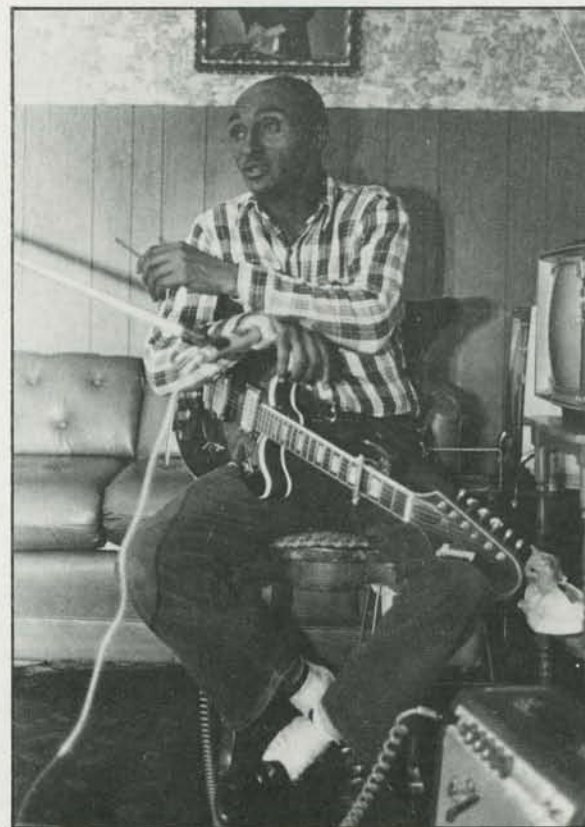
SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Carl Martin, "Crow Jane," Bluebird B6139, 1935.

SIDE TWO

1. TAKE CARE MY WIFE AND MY BABY—Howard Twine, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Elliston (Montgomery County), Virginia, January 8, 1978, by Kip Lornell. 2:24

In the first half of this century the Elliston community was home to a number of active black musicians who supplemented their railroad wages by playing frequent house parties in the homes of both blacks and whites. Howard Twine was born into this environment in 1933. His father was a popular house party singer/guitarist, and as a child, Howard often accompanied him to neighborhood functions. At age twelve he began practicing the guitar, picking with his fingers in the family style rather than using a flatpick. To his repertoire of local material Twine eventually added songs and techniques from recordings by Chuck Berry, B.B. King, John Lee Hooker, Lightnin' Hopkins, Jimmy Reed, and Bo Diddly. At the same time he worked for the railroad and took part in the work song tradition as a member of a track lining crew. In the army he played with service club bands. Twine continues to work for the railroad industry in Roanoke and plays music in his home. His teenage nephew, who is primarily a



James Howard Twine, 1983. (Blue Ridge Heritage Archive)

gospel singer, is learning some of the older blues techniques from him.

"Take Care My Wife and Baby" is Howard Twine's own composition. The guitar accompaniment is clearly outside of the ragtime fingerpicking style popular in the Virginia blues tradition, and it speaks of the influence of the commercial artists mentioned above. The lyric format is the standard A-A-B.

*Take care my wife and my baby; tell 'em I'll be back home
someday;*

*Take care my wife and my baby; tell 'em I'll be back home
someday;*

*Man, it was raining, it was storming, boy, the day she walked
away.*

*Baby, loan me my train fare then don't you loan me another dime;
Baby, loan me my train fare then don't you loan me another dime;
I will mail you back your money when your trouble get like mine.*

*You know the sun's getting hot, and my shoes getting awful thin;
You know the sun's getting hot, and my shoes getting awful thin;
I'm just sitting here wondering will she take me back again.*

*You know I left my little baby when he was only four days old;
You know I left my little baby when he was only four days old;
I hope he don't learn to call no other man daddy; that's what little
worryes me so.*



Malcolm Johnson (right), c. 1950s. (Courtesy Estelle Purkey)

*Well, good evening, don't the sun look good going down?
Said, well, good evening, don't the sun look good going down?
Don't your bed look lonesome when your lover ain't around?*

*Said you got to treat me right day by day;
Get out your little travel kit; I don't agree;
'Cause you're gonna need, you're gonna need my help someday;
Said you're gonna be sorry you've gone and done me this way.*

*Said I've tried everything, baby, to get along with you;
Now let me tell you, honey, what I'm gonna do;
I'm gonna stop trying and leave you alone;
If you don't believe I'm leaving, just count the days I'm gone;
'Cause you're gonna need, you're gonna need my help some
more;
Said you're gonna be wondering, honey, where in this world I'm
gone.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Ida Cox, "Chattanooga Blues," Paramount 12063, 1923.
Clarence Green, "Johnson City Blues," Columbia 15461, 1928.

2. CHATTANOOGA BLUES—Malcolm Johnson, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Big Stone Gap (Wise Co.), Virginia, Fall, 1973, by Roddy Moore, Paul Congo, and George Reynolds. 2:26.

Most of Malcolm Johnson's life was spent in and around the place of his birth, Wise County. Born in 1915, he was exposed to a variety of musical forces as a child. His grandfather was a fiddler, and his grandmother was adept on the banjo. Johnson learned guitar from his father, a jeweler and amateur instrument maker who also played piano and dulcimer. According to family history, an uncle in the family played some blues material, but more importantly Johnson drew techniques and songs directly from blacks living in the region. He also used his ear for music to earn a living as a piano tuner. Malcolm Johnson died in 1978.

"Chattanooga Blues" is an interesting amalgam of lyric forms. Only the second verse follows the common A-A-B structure. By the fourth verse Johnson has turned the song into a diatribe complete with themes from the stock of traditional blues lines. "Chattanooga Blues" also illustrates the singer's technique of maintaining rhythm by sustaining syllables or rapidly compressing several words together. The song was originally recorded by Ida Cox in 1923 (Paramount 12063), but it is not known if Johnson ever heard this recording.

*Went up to Lookout Mountain, far as I could see,
I was looking for the woman made a monkey out of me;
I came down to the depot in time to catch that Cannonball;
Said I got the blues for Chattanooga; I won't be back 'til late next
fall.*

3. FALSE HEARTED LOVER'S BLUES—Dock Boggs, vocal and banjo; and Emry Arthur, guitar. Recorded in Chicago, Illinois, Summer, 1929, for release on the Lonesome Ace label (21403). 3:19.

The career of Dock Boggs has been well documented through the work of Mike Seeger and Barry O'Connell. Boggs, a native of West Norton (Wise Co.), was born in 1898 and died in 1971. He was drawn to the banjo styles of black musicians in communities near West Norton, and he imitated those fingerpicking techniques rather than play in the traditional clawhammer manner. He also absorbed material from recordings by black artists. In the late 1920s Boggs was building a promising

recording career, first under the Brunswick label and then under the Lonesome Ace label, but the Depression thwarted his attempts to get back into the studios. Eventually he gave up the musical career altogether, drawing his livelihood from the coal mines as he had since early childhood. Late in life Boggs finally returned to performing, finding a new and appreciative audience in the folk music revival.

"False Hearted Lover's Blues" is one of four sides Boggs recorded for William Myer's Lonesome Ace label. Myer wrote the lyrics, which do not reflect the Afro-American blues form, and in his typical fashion he suggested a previously written melody, in this case Boggs' own "Country Blues." As Myer advertised of all his songs, "False Hearted Lover's Blues" contains a moral and has no hidden sexual references. On the whole it exemplifies the extremely broad use of the word *blues* by whites in Southwest Virginia to encompass any song depicting an unpleasant situation. The major black-related element in the song is the instrumental accompaniment.

*False hearts have been my downfall;
Pretty women have been my craze;
I'm sure my false hearted lover
Will drive me to my lonesome grave.*

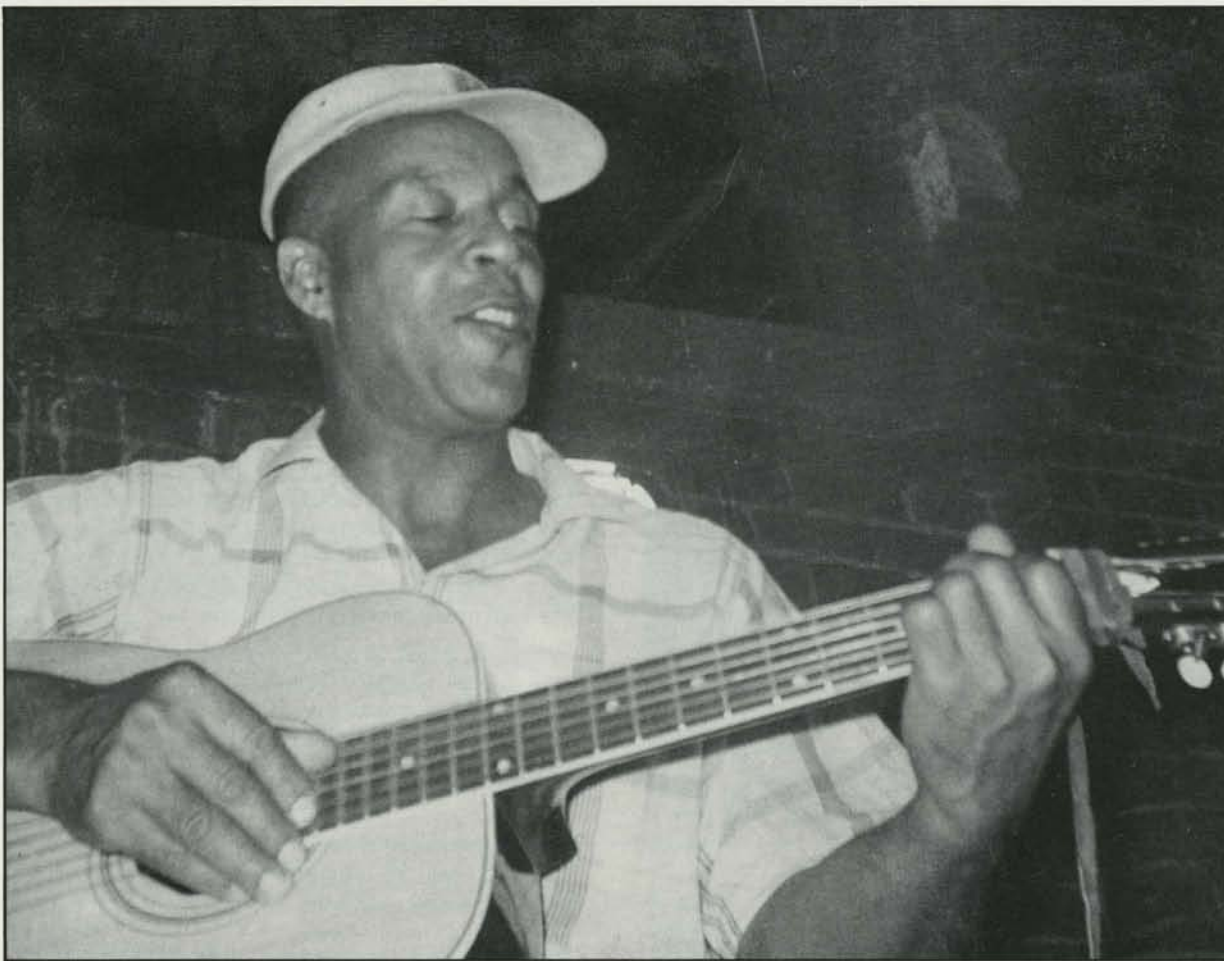
*They'll bite the hand that feeds them,
Spend all the money you can save,
From your heartstrings weave silk garters,
Build their dog house on your grave.*

*When my earthly stay is over,
Sink my dead body in the sea;
Just tell my false hearted lover
That the whales will fuss over me.*

*Ragged clothes dropping from my body,
The wolf howling round my door;
The man who won my darling girl
Feel the bite of my forty-four.*



Dock Boggs, c. 1960s. (Courtesy Ed Ward)



Dave Dickerson, c. 1965. (Courtesy Dick Walters)

*Corn whiskey has wrecked my body;
A false lover is bearing on my mind;
I've roamed the whole world over;
Pleasure on earth I cannot find.*

*When my earthly stay is over,
Sink my dead body in the sea;
Just tell my false hearted lover
That the whales will fuss over me.*

*If I meet my darling girl again,
I'll tell her all about my troubles,
Give her the false hearted lover's blues,
And leave her standing on the pebbles.*

*All men take this timely warning,
Which is for both young and old;
Don't try to buy a woman's love
With the last dollar of your gold.*

*Take warning, you fair young ladies,
If your love and honor you've sold,
The men will have no use for you
When your dark hair turns to gold.*

*When my earthly stay is over,
Sink my dead body in the sea;
Just tell my false-hearted lover
That the whales will fuss over me.*



4. THE WAR IS OVER—Dave Dickerson, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Blacksburg (Montgomery County), Virginia, April, 1965, by the staff of Books, Strings and Things (retail bookstore). 3:41.

Dave Dickerson was born in Tip Top, Virginia (Tazewell County), in 1913. Though he moved around the Southwest Virginia-southern West Virginia area, he chose to remain in Appalachia during an era when large numbers of blacks were migrating to the northern urban centers. At one point he tried his hand at farming, but most of his working life was spent in the employ of the regional coal interests.

By his own account the major musical influence on Dave Dickerson was the 78 r.p.m. record. Rather than buy or order them through a local store, he obtained records through mail-order catalogs, and he recalled anxiously awaiting the mailman's arrival in hopes of receiving new cuts. Blind Lemon Jefferson was his favorite artist. Primarily a bluesman, Dickerson was also a member of a black string band in Gary, West Virginia, for a number of years. In the 1960s he enjoyed a small following among college students in Blacksburg, Virginia, the site of this recording. Dickerson died in the late 1960s.

Performed on a twelve-string guitar, "The War Is

Over" follows the A-A-B lyric pattern so common in blues. The origin of the song is unknown, but the first three verses address the plight of the worker laid off in the depressed economy of the post-war (probably World War Two) period. The town of Welch is located in West Virginia about twenty-five miles from Dickerson's home county. In another performance of "The War Is Over" (*Another Man Done Gone*, Flyright 528), Dickerson refers to Chicago rather than to an Appalachian community and omits the last two verses. These final verses are traditional lyrics which have appeared in many songs. It is likely that Dickerson included them in this performance on the spur of the moment.

*Well, the war is over; I'm going down that sunny road;
Well, the war is over; I'm going down that sunny road;
Well, there ain't nothing in Welch but your room and board.*

*Well, when I had plenty of money, you treated me like a king;
Well, when I had plenty of money, you treated me just like a king;
Now I don't have a war-time job, and my love don't mean a thing.*

*Well, I tell you, baby, I done all that I could;
Well, I tell you, baby, I done all that I could;
Well, I'm leaving tomorrow, I'm going down that sunny road.*

*I'm going away, babe, and the time ain't long;
Well, I'm leaving you, babe, and the time ain't long;
Well, if you don't believe I'm leaving, I want you to count the days
I'm gone.*

*Cause I'd rather drink muddy water, sleep in a hollow tree,
I'd rather drink muddy water, sleep in a hollow tree,
Than to stay around here, do like you do for me.*



5. GOING DOWN THAT ROAD FEELING BAD—"Cowboy" T. Burks, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Lowmoor (Alleghany Co.), Virginia, April 20, 1977, by Kip Lornell. 3:51.

Thurman Burks was born in Botetourt County in 1901. He was given the nickname "Cowboy" because of his intense interests in firearms and horses. Music, too, had been a lifelong avocation. Burks carried his guitar as he hopped freight trains throughout Southwest Virginia, and in the mid-1930s he and his brother began performing on the streets of Clifton Forge and Buchanan. They also played for house parties, minstrel shows, and one medicine show in the region. By the 1950s the police in Clifton Forge had taken an unfavorable attitude toward street musicians, but the large parking lots of stores and malls outside of downtown areas would soon provide Burks with a new stage. He performed in warm weather from the bed of his truck with a guitar amplifier wired to the truck's battery. Burks died in 1987.

Burks' style was unusually jazzy for a traditional mountain guitarist, but he maintained that he and his brother developed their technique long before they heard such playing on radio and recordings. "Going Down That Road Feeling Bad" is a popular song which has been widely recorded. In Burks' version the lyrics generally follow an A-A-A-B pattern, but the artist frequently and skillfully substitutes guitar

licks for words.

Say, going down that road feeling bad, lord,
Down the road,
Going down that road feeling bad,
Ain't gonna be treated.

Say, down in jail on my knees, lord,
Down in jail on my knees,
Down in jail on my knees,
Feed me on corn bread and peas.

Good girl, you know I don't like being treated this way;
Oh, good girl, you know I don't like being treated this way;
Good girl, I don't like being treated this way;
Ain't a thing I can do.

Take me down that road a-feeling bad,
A-going.

Darling, I wish I'd listened to what you told poor me;
Wish I'd listened at what you told poor me;
Wish I had listened to what you told poor me;
Maybe I wouldn't have been treated this way.

Going down that road feeling bad,
Going down that road feeling,
Don't feel like being treated this way.

Down in jail for a long, long time,
Down here for a long, long time,
I'm down here for a long, long time.

Feed me, feed me on corn bread and peas;
They always feed me on corn bread and peas;
Feed me on corn bread, peas;
No, don't like being treated this way.

Ain't a thing I can do, lord;
Ain't a thing I can do.

If I'd done listened to what they told poor me, good girl,
I wish I had listened to what they told poor me;
I wish I had been listening to what they told poor me;
Maybe I wouldn't have been treated like this way.



"Cowboy" Thurman Burks, 1983. (Courtesy Roanoke Times and World-News)

Down here for a long, long time,
Down here a long, long time,
Darling, don't know when I'll ever see you again.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Corner Morris, "Going Down the Road Feeling Good," BRI 006, 1982.

Riley Puckett, "I'm Going Where the Chilly Wind Don't Blow," Columbia 15392, 1928.

John Snipes, "Going Where the Chilly Winds Don't Blow," Rounder 2016, 1974.



6. BED BUGS MAKING THEIR LAST GO 'ROUND—Byrd Moore, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Richmond, Indiana, June 22, 1928. 3:09.

Judged by his numerous appearances on early 78 r.p.m. recordings, Byrd Moore ranks as one of Southwest Virginia's most successful early recording artists, yet very few facts are available concerning his life. Moore reportedly was born in the 1890s in Kentucky and worked as a barber in Wise County. In the late twenties and thirties he took part in the making of over twenty-five records on labels such as Gennett, Champion, and Okeh; most of these are string band tunes and songs on which Moore plays guitar as part of a duo or larger group. Moore did, however, record a few solo performances such as the one featured here. Those who knew him recall that his repertoire contained many finger-picking blues numbers. He died in the Wise County poorhouse in the late 1940s.

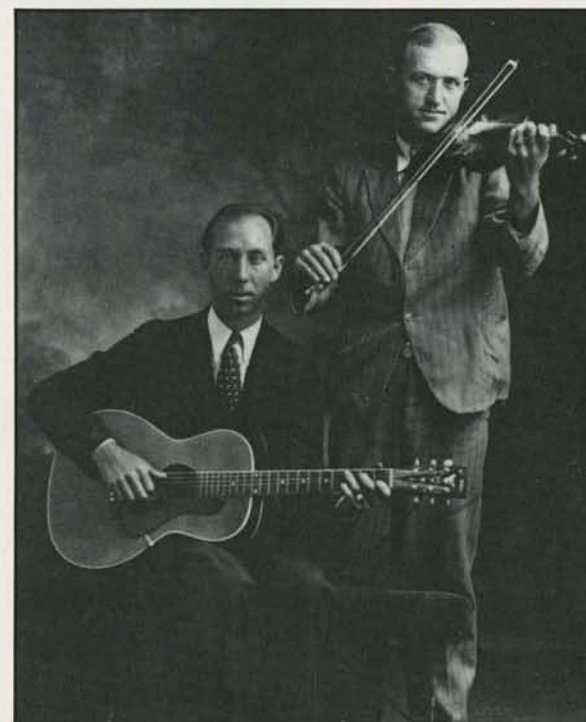
From a transcript of the initial verses, "Bed Bugs Making Their Last Go 'Round" would appear to be a standard eight-bar blues, yet upon playing, the song proves to be a remarkable rhythmic performance. Moore's vocals often start on the offbeat, and the artist allows plenty of time for his guitar instrumentals. Modern listeners may find the building pace of "Bed Bugs" somewhat distracting in comparison to contemporary music, but this progressive increase in tempo appears in many early recordings. Midway through the song Moore leaves the A-A-B lyric pattern altogether for a combination of verses from other traditional sources including "Salty Dog."

Well, it ain't no use me a-hanging around this town;
It ain't no use hanging around this town,
'Cause the women in Virginia gone and turned the damper down.

Well, the mailman passed, but he did not leave no news;
The mailman passed, he did not leave no news;
But I tell the world he left me with the bedbug blues.

Well, some of you people a-sure does make me tired;
Some of you people sure does make me tired;
A mouth full of gimme, a handful of much obliged.

Well, I dreamed last night my bed was a-falling down;
I dreamed last night my bed was a-falling down;
Nothing but the bedbugs a-making their last go 'round.



Byrd Moore (seated) and Jess Johnson, c. 1931. (Courtesy Alma Kilbourne and Kinney Rorrer)

Well, this song is almost over, and the show will take a ride;
Song is almost over, show will take a ride;
If you hear me play anymore, finish on the other side.

Gonna treat you mean, pick you clean.
Anyway you, honey, get to be your salty dog.

Salty dog, you salty dog, you salty dog, you salty dog,
Hey, you salty dog.

I don't care for nobody, nobody cares for me;
If you want to, honey, one more chance on me.

Gonna treat you mean, pick you clean;
Anyway you, honey, get to be that salty dog.

A-what's your name, a-Liza Jane?
What's your name, Little Liza Jane?

Gonna treat you mean, pick you clean;
Anyway you, honey, get to be your salty dog.

I don't care for nobody, nobody cares for me;
If you want to honey, one more chance on me.



7. BLACK SNAKE MOAN—Spence Moore, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Smyth County, Virginia, August 16, 1983, by Vaughan Webb. 3:20.

No artist on this album is more representative of the songster tradition than Spence Moore. His large and varied repertoire is a sampler of Southwest Virginia musical traditions. Moore is equally comfortable with ballads, hymns, sentimental songs, blues, hillbilly blues, string band tunes, and country and western material. Not surprisingly he has learned

from numerous sources, both living artists and recordings.

Moore was born in 1919 into a family with strong musical interests. His father played several instruments including the fiddle, banjo, accordion, and harmonica. On the latter his father could play blues, Spence recalls. Moore took up the guitar as a child and eventually joined a medicine show with his brother in the late 1930s. He settled near Chilhowie, Virginia, after World War Two and has performed for many local events and radio programs.

Moore pulled his version of "Black Snake Moan" from Blind Lemon Jefferson's 1927 recording for Okeh (8455). The song follows a simple A-B lyric format, and the words carry the type of mild sexual inference which led some to label blues as sinful.

*Hmmm, black snake crawling in my room;
Come here, pretty mama, come and get this black snake soon.*

*Hmmm, tell me what's a matter now;
You wouldn't write no letter 'cause she didn't love me no how.*

*Hmmm, black snake crawling in my room;
Come here, pretty mama, come and get this black snake soon.*

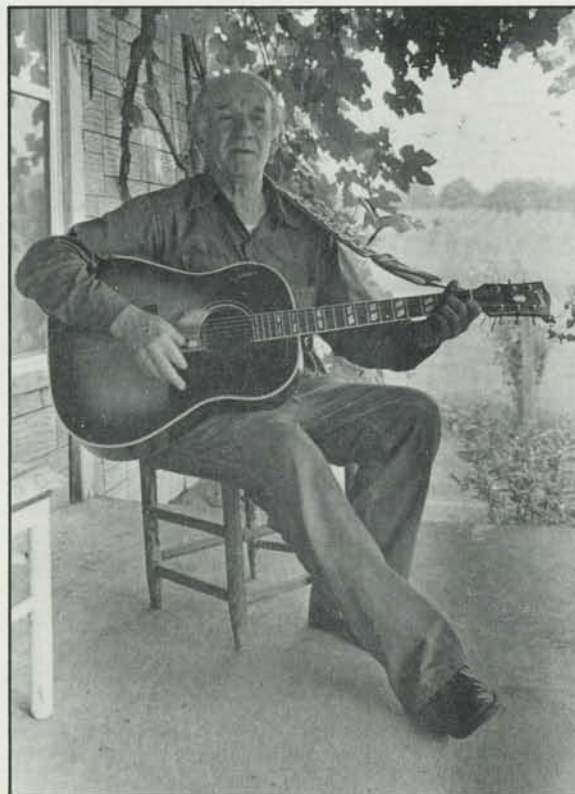
*Oh, that must have been a bedbug; you know a chinch can't bite
that hard;
Come here, pretty mama, come and get this black snake soon.*

*Hmmm, black snake crawling in my room;
Come here, pretty mama, come and get this black snake soon.*

*Hmmm, tell me what's the matter now;
She wouldn't write me no letter 'cause she didn't love me no how.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

A few of the numerous early recordings using the "black snake" theme are:



Spence Moore, 1983. (Blue Ridge Heritage Archive)

Blind Lemon Jefferson, "That Black Snake Moan," Paramount 12407, 1926; "Black Snake Moan," Okeh 8455, 1927; "Black Snake Dream Blues," Paramount 12510, 1927; "That Black Snake Moan No. 2," Paramount 12756, 1929.

Victoria Spivey, "Black Snake Blues," Okeh 8338, 1926; with Lonnie Johnson, "New Black Snake Blues—Parts 1 and 2," Okeh 8626, 1928.

Daddy Stovepipe and Mississippi Sarah (Johnny Watson and Sarah Watson), "Black Snake Blues," Gennett 6212, Champion 15361, 1927.

The Honey Dripper (Roosevelt Sykes), "Jet Black Snake," Decca 7188, 1936.



8. LONG GONE LONESOME BLUES — Bobby Buford, vocal and guitar; and Keith Rogers, harmonica. Recorded in Pulaski (Pulaski County), Virginia, March 27, 1984, by Fred Williams and Vaughan Webb. 1:58.

The combination of Bobby Buford and Keith Rogers epitomizes the social, racial, and technological crossovers of the Southwest Virginia blues tradition. Born in 1934 in Pulaski, Bobby Buford learned both blues and country and western songs from his father and an uncle. At the same time he was strongly influenced by such recording artists as Jimmy Reed, Lightnin' Hopkins, and Hank Williams.

Following his musical tastes, Buford has built a varied repertoire and in recent years has teamed up with Keith Rogers, a white harmonica player also living in Pulaski. Rogers was born in St. Charles (Lee County) in 1953. His skills on the harmonica are self-taught, though like nearly all musicians have done since the advent of phonographs and radios, he has listened intently to the work of other artists.

"Long Gone Lonesome Blues" was written and originally recorded by Hank Williams in 1949. Disregarding the traditional Afro-American formats, it, too, typifies the use of the term *blues* by whites to describe any song about hard times, and the last line of each verse approaches the "yodelling blues" most closely associated with the white country and western star Jimmy Rodgers. Both Williams and Rodgers were influenced by the black music of the South. Bobby Buford learned the song from Williams' recordings, thus the following performance by a black-white duo is a complex melange of cultural forces, not the least of which is the recording industry. In short, the listener here is presented with a traditional songster accompanied by a white revival musician playing a commercial country and western song shaped by both the black and white musical traditions of the South.

*I went down by the river to watch the fish swim by;
I got to the river so lonesome I wanted to die, oh, lord;
But when I jumped in the river, the doggone river was dry;
I said she's long gone and now I'm lonesome blues.*

*You know I had me a woman, she couldn't be true;
She made me file my money, but she made me blue;
I know a man needs a woman he can lean on;
My leaning post done left and gone;
I said she's long gone and now I'm lonesome blues.*

Well, now I'm gonna find me a river, one that's cold as ice;



Bobby Buford (right) and Keith Rogers, 1983. (Blue Ridge Heritage Archive)

When I find that river, lord, I'm gonna pay the price, oh, yeah;
Going down in there three times, but, lord, I'm only coming up
twice;
Because she's long gone and now I'm lonesome blue.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Buck Mountain Band, "Yodeling blues," Okeh 45428, 1929. Reissued on New World 290.
Jimmie Rodgers, "Blue Yodel No. 11," Victor 23796. Reissued on New World 287.
Hank Williams, "Long Gone Lonesome Blues," MGM 10645, 1949.

ENDNOTES

¹Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 25-28.

²For further discussion of musical and social definitions of blues see: David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

³"Key To The Highway" as sung by Dave Dickerson; recorded in Blacksburg (Montgomery Co.), Virginia, April, 1965, by the staff of Books, Strings and Things (retail book store). This and all subsequent field recordings are housed in the Blue Ridge Heritage Archive, Ferrum College.

⁴"Hesitation Blues" as sung by Malcolm Johnson; recorded in Big Stone Gap (Wise Co.), Virginia, Fall, 1973, by Roddy Moore, Paul Congo, and George Reynolds.

⁵"Take Care My Wife And Baby" as sung by Howard Twine; recorded in Elliston (Montgomery Co.), Virginia, 8 January 1978, by Kip Lornell.

⁶Allen J. Neal, *Bicentennial History of Washington County, Virginia, 1776-1976* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1977), p. 436.

⁷E.F. Striplin, *The Norfolk and Western: A History*, (Roanoke, Va.: The Norfolk and Western Railway Company, 1981), pp. 33-35.

⁸Striplin, p. 40.

⁹Compilation by Workers of the Writers' Program of the Works Projects Administration in the State of Virginia, *The Negro in Virginia* (New York: Hastings House, 1940), p. 307.

¹⁰Striplin, p. 83.

¹¹James B. Murphy, "Slavery and Freedom in Appalachia: Kentucky As a Demographic Case Study," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 80 (1982), 153-54.

¹²Murphy, p. 165.

¹³Striplin, pp. 80, 82.

¹⁴Darold T. Barnum, *The Negro in the Bituminous Coal Mining Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), p. 6.

¹⁵Barnum, p. 8.

¹⁶Telephone interview with Sam Murphy, Big Stone Gap, Virginia, 31 August 1983. Unless otherwise noted, all interviews were conducted by Vaughan Webb.

¹⁷Barnum, p. 18.

¹⁸*U.S. Census of Population: General Social and Economics Characteristics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1972), p. 209.

¹⁹Telephone interview, Murphy, 1983; and telephone interview with Talmadge Warren, Big Stone Gap, Virginia, 31 August 1983.

²⁰Interview with Howard Armstrong and Carl Martin, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, January, 1976, by Roddy Moore and Kip Lornell.

²¹Telephone interview, Warren, 1983.

²²Barnum, pp. 16-22

²³Interview with Nat Reese, Princeton, West Virginia, 6 July 1983.

²⁴Interview with Howard Twine, Elliston, Virginia, 19 January 1984.

²⁵Interview with Earl Gilmore, Clinchco, Virginia, 5 January 1984.

²⁶John Jacob Niles, "Shout Coon Shout," *The Musical Quarterly*, 16 (1930), 523-24.

²⁷Striplin, *Norfolk and Western*, p. 83.

²⁸Interview with Thurman Burks, Lowmoor, Virginia, 16 January 1984.

²⁹Interview with Josh Thomas, Hollins, Virginia, Spring, 1970, by Clifford Endres.

³⁰Interview, Martin and Armstrong, 1976.

³¹Interview with Spence Moore, Chilhowie, Virginia, 16 August 1983.

³²Interview, Burks, 1984.

³³Tony Russell, *Blacks, Whites and Blues* (London: Studio Vista, 1970), p. 48.

³⁴Barry O'Connell, *Dock Boggs: His Original Recordings* (New York: Record Book & Film Sales, Inc., 1983), p. 6. These are notes to the album *Dock Boggs: His Twelve Original Recordings*, Folkways Records, RBF 654.

³⁵Interview with Lesley Riddle, Rochester, New York, February/March, 1973, by Ron Soodalter.

³⁶Russell, p. 41.

³⁷Kip Lornell, "'I Used To Go Along and Help': Lesley Riddle Remembers Songhunting with A.P.," in *The Carter Family*, ed. John Atkins (London: Old Time Music, 1973), p. 35.

³⁸Russell, p. 41.

³⁹The author is indebted to Dr. Charles Wolfe of Middle Tennessee State University for his research on the activities of W.E. Myer and to the Clarence Myer family for graciously opening family papers for examination.

⁴⁰Interview, Twine, 1984.

⁴¹O'Connell, pg. 7.

⁴²Interview, Reese, 1983.

⁴³Interview, Riddle, 1973.

⁴⁴Lornell, p. 35.

⁴⁵Archie Green, "The Carter Family's 'Coal Miner's Blues,'" *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 25 (1961), 234.

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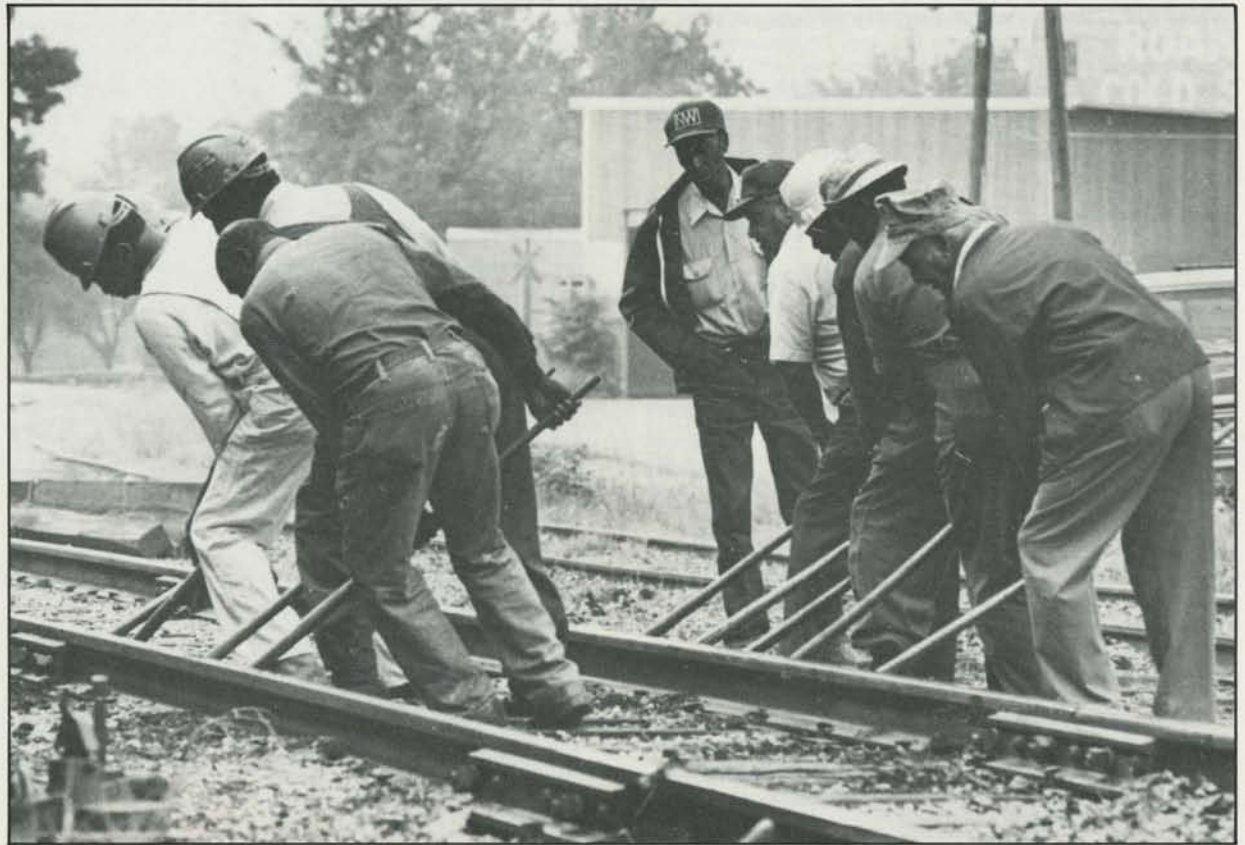
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Track lining crews such as this one photographed in Roanoke in 1984 have all but disappeared, yet their cadence-setting singing is well remembered by Southwest Virginia songsters of both races. (Blue Ridge Heritage Archive)

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