



**PLAYING  
FOR THE  
MAN AT  
THE DOOR**

**FIELD RECORDINGS FROM THE COLLECTION OF MACK McCORMICK 1958-1971**

**PLAYING FOR THE  
MAN AT THE DOOR**

**PRODUCED, WRITTEN, AND ANNOTATED BY  
JEFF PLACE and JOHN W. TROUTMAN**

**SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAYS BY  
SUSANNAH NIX  
MARK PURYEAR  
DOM FLEMONS**

**PLAYING  
FOR THE  
MAN AT  
THE DOOR**

# 7

## TRACK LISTINGS

# 11

## THE MYSTERY OF MACK McCORMICK: THOUGHTS ON MY FATHER

BY SUSANNAH NIX

# 13

## AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE BLUES IN TEXAS

BY MARK PURYEAR

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the Collection of Mack McCormick, 1958–1971

SFW 40260

Produced, written, and annotated by Jeff Place and  
John W. Troutman

Supplemental essays by Susannah Nix, Mark Puryear,  
and Dom Flemons

Published in 2023 by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560  
folkways.si.edu

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Art direction, packaging and book design by Visual Dialogue  
visualdialogue.com © 2023 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

This book contains bibliographic references

Printed in the United States by WestRock

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN-13: 978-1-7341305-1-5 (CD version)

ISBN-13: 978-1-7341305-2-2 (LP version)

# 18

## THE MAN AT THE DOOR

BY JEFF PLACE AND JOHN W. TROUTMAN

**24**

# **THE COLLECTION**

**BY JEFF PLACE AND JOHN W. TROUTMAN**

**29**

# **THOUGHTS ON MACK'S COLLECTION**

**BY DOM FLEMONS, THE AMERICAN SONGSTER**

**31**

# **THE ARTISTS**

**BY JEFF PLACE AND JOHN W. TROUTMAN**

**41**

# **ABOUT THE MUSIC**

**BY JEFF PLACE AND JOHN W. TROUTMAN**

**50**

**SOURCES**

# TRACK LIST

- 1. LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS**  
**MOJO HAND** 4:03  
(Sam Hopkins/EMI Longitude Music Co., BMI)
- 2. MANCE LIPSCOMB**  
**GOD MOVES ON THE WATER** 2:33  
(Arr. by Mance Lipscomb/BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)
- 3. ROBERT SHAW**  
**THE CLINTON** 2:18  
(Arr. by Robert Shaw/BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)
- 4. KID WIGGINS**  
**SUGAR BLUES** 2:44  
(Clarence Williams-Lucy Fletcher)
- 5. DUDLEY ALEXANDER and  
WASHBOARD BAND**  
**ST. JAMES INFIRMARY** 4:16
- 6. CEDELL DAVIS**  
**DARLIN' (YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU)** 2:55  
(Riley B. King-Jules Bihari/Universal Music-Careers, BMI)
- 7. DENNIS GAINUS**  
**YOU GONNA LOOK LIKE A MONKEY** 2:25  
(Alex Hill-Clarence Williams/Universal-MCA Music Publishing, ASCAP)
- 8. THE GREY GHOST**  
**ONE ROOM COUNTRY SHACK** 3:42  
(Mercy Dee Walton/Sony/ATV Songs, LLC, BMI)
- 9. EDWIN "BUSTER" PICKENS**  
**GROCERIES ON MY SHELF (PIGGLY WIGGLY)** 4:26  
(Charles McFadden)

TRACK LIST

- 10. HOP WILSON**  
**3 O’CLOCK BLUES** 4:52  
(Lowell Fulson/Sony/ATV Songs, LLC, BMI)
- 11. JEALOUS JAMES STANCHELL**  
**ANYTHING FROM A FOOT RACE TO A RESTING PLACE** 3:11  
(James Stanchell)
- 12. JAMES TISDOM**  
**SALTY DOG RAG** 3:18  
(John Gordy-Edward Crowe/Hill & Range Songs, BMI)
- 13. GOZY KILPATRICK**  
**GOIN’ TO THE RIVER** 1:35  
(Gozy Kilpatrick)
- 14. JOE PATTERSON**  
**QUILLS** 1:14  
(Joe Patterson)
- 15. LIGHTNIN’ HOPKINS**  
**MA PA CUT THE CAKE** 1:42  
(Sam Hopkins)
- 16. OTIS COOK**  
**CRAZY ABOUT OKLAHOMA** 3:12  
(Jimmy Reed/EMI Longitude Music Co., BMI-Sabarco Publishing Co., BMI)
- 17. THE GREY GHOST**  
**LITTLE RED ROOSTER** 3:51  
(Willie Dixon/BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Hoochie Coochie Music, BMI)
- 18. THE SPIRITUAL LIGHT GOSPEL GROUP**  
**MY WORK WILL BE DONE** 3:00
- 19. JAMES TISDOM**  
**STEEL GUITAR RAG** 1:42  
(Leon McAuliffe-Merle Travis-Cliffie Stone/Bourne Co., ASCAP)
- 20. MANCE LIPSCOMB**  
**TALL ANGEL AT THE BAR** 3:02  
(Mance Lipscomb/BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)
- 21. GEORGE “BONGO JOE” COLEMAN**  
**THIS WHOLE WORLD’S IN A SAD CONDITION** 8:59  
(George Coleman)
- 22. LIGHTNIN’ HOPKINS**  
**WORLD’S IN A TANGLE** 5:51  
(Sam Hopkins/Cicadelic Music, LLC, BMI)
- 23. ROBERT SHAW**  
**SOMEDAY BABY** 5:39  
(Robert Shaw)
- 24. CEDELL DAVIS**  
**IT’S ALRIGHT** 3:36
- 25. R.C. FOREST and GOZY KILPATRICK**  
**CRYIN’ WON’T MAKE ME STAY** 1:54
- 26. ALLEN VANN**  
**CHINA TEA** 2:31
- 27. GEORGE “BONGO JOE” COLEMAN**  
**PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS** 3:24  
(George Coleman)



**28. LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS**

**TOM MOORE'S FARM** 4:34

(Arr. by Sam Hopkins/BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)

**29. MANCE LIPSCOMB**

**TOM MOORE'S FARM** 4:56

(Arr. by Mance Lipscomb/BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)

**30. JEALOUS JAMES STANCHELL**

**DON'T DO ME NO SMALL FAVORS  
(HELP THE BEAR)** 1:37

(Arr. by James Stanchell)

**31. BILLY BIZOR**

**FOX CHASE** 2:20

**32. R.C. FOREST**

**BLACK WIDOW SPIDER BLUES** 2:03

(Lowell Fulson/BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Reconsider Music, BMI)

**33. HARDY GRAY**

**COME AND GO WITH ME TO THAT LAND** 5:26

**34. CEDELL DAVIS**

**ROLLIN' AND TUMBLIN'** 3:18

**35. LEROY "COUNTRY" JOHNSON with  
EDWIN "BUSTER" PICKENS**

**TRAIN ROLL UP** 1:44

**36. EDWIN "BUSTER" PICKENS**

**SHORTY GEORGE** 4:32

**37. JOEL HOPKINS**

**MATCHBOX BLUES** 1:49

(Lemon Henry Jefferson)

**38. BLUES WALLACE**

**IT'S MY LIFE BABY** 4:16

(Don Robey-Ferdinand Washington/Songs of Universal, Inc., BMI)

**39. ANDREW EVERETT**

**HELLO CENTRAL, GIMME 209** 3:08

**40. JIM WILKIE**

**BAD LEE BROWN** 2:33

**41. R.C. FOREST and GOZY KILPATRICK**

**TIN CAN ALLEY BLUES** 2:49

(Lonnie Johnson-Porter Grainger/Wixen Music Publishing, Inc. o/b/o Lonesome Ghost Blues, BMI)

**42. MURL "DOC" WEBSTER**

**MEDICINE SHOW PITCH** 1:52

**43. MANCE LIPSCOMB**

**SO DIFFERENT BLUES** 2:45

(Mance Lipscomb/BMG Bumblebee o/b/o Tradition Music Co., BMI)

**44. JAMES TISDOM**

**I FEEL SO GOOD** 2:41

(Willie Broonzy/Songs of Universal, BMI)

**45. LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS**

**MR. CHARLIE** 4:51

(Sam Hopkins/Concord Music Group o/b/o Baby Tate Music, BMI)

**46. EDWIN "BUSTER" PICKENS**

**THE MA GRINDER** 2:08

**47. PAUL ELLIOTT**

**DEEP ELLUM BLUES** 2:37

TRACK LIST

- 48. ANDREW EVERETT**  
**K.C. AIN'T NOTHING BUT A RAG** 2:00
- 49. KID WIGGINS**  
**LONESOME ROAD** 2:24
- 50. DENNIS GAINUS**  
**OLD JUDGE BLUES** 3:15
- 51. MELVIN "JACK" JACKSON and  
LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS**  
**THE SLOP** 2:24  
(Sam Hopkins/Figs D Music, Inc., BMI)
- 52. LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS**  
**CORRINE, CORRINA** 3:20  
(Sam Hopkins/Figs D Music, Inc., BMI)
- 53. JIMMY WOMACK**  
**TALKING BLUES** 1:35
- 54. JOEL HOPKINS**  
**GOOD TIMES HERE, BETTER TIMES  
DOWN THE ROAD** 3:05
- 55. ROBERT SHAW**  
**PUT ME IN THE ALLEY** 2:26  
(Arr. by Robert Shaw/Hornsby Music Company, BMI)
- 56. WALTER BRITTEN**  
**AUCTIONEER** 0:35
- 57. HARDY GRAY**  
**RUNAWAY** 3:27
- 58. HOP WILSON**  
**BROKE AND HUNGRY** 4:14  
(Hop Wilson-Eddie Shuler/Trio Music, BMI-Fort Knox Music, BMI-Kemisco Music, BMI)
- 59. MAGER JOHNSON**  
**BIG ROAD BLUES** 3:46  
(Tommy Johnson/Peer International Corp., BMI)
- 60. MANCE LIPSCOMB**  
**CASEY JONES** 2:27  
(Arr. by Mance Lipscomb/Barton Music Corp. o/b/o Ding Dong Music Corp., BMI)
- 61. JIMMY WOMACK**  
**ATOMIC ENERGY** 2:15  
(Jimmy WOMACK)
- 62. LONG GONE MILES with  
LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS and LOVE CRAZY**  
**NATURAL BORN LOVER** 4:24  
(Sam Hopkins-Luke Miles)
- 63. E.B. BUSBY**  
**SWANEE RIVER BOOGIE** 1:44  
(Arr. by Albert Ammons)
- 64. LONG GONE MILES**  
**ROCK ME BABY** 2:53
- 65. LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS**  
**BLUES JUMPED A RABBIT** 3:51  
(Arr. by Sam Hopkins)
- 66. BONGO JOE**  
**GEORGE COLEMAN FOR PRESIDENT,  
NOBODY FOR VICE PRESIDENT** 3:12  
(George Coleman)

**THE MYSTERY OF**

**MACK McCORMICK:**

**THOUGHTS ON MY FATHER**

**SUSANNAH NIX**

## **THERE WAS NOTHING MY FATHER LOVED MORE THAN A GOOD STORY.**

Above all else, he considered himself a storyteller. Whether he was writing plays, searching for undercelebrated musicians, documenting traditional work songs, shanties, street cries, recipes, and anything else he could get people to share with him, or simply spinning a good yarn for one of the many curious visitors who sought him out over the years, his passion for stories was at the heart of everything he did.

I am no great historian of my father's work. The best of it was done either before I was born or when I was too young to remember. In his acclaimed liner notes for the 1974 Henry Thomas *Ragtime Texas Complete Recorded Works* (McCormick 1974), he describes how, during the many hours that Henry Thomas filled our house, three-year-old me “taught herself to dance, named a fuzzy doll in his honor, and responded to him purely as a joyful sound come to visit.”

I remember that beloved stuffed toy but not the music. After my father completed that project—one of his last notable pieces of writing to see the light of day in his lifetime—Henry Thomas was neatly filed away on the shelves in his office and never taken out again.

My father's work sprawled through our house and through our family's lives, consuming whole rooms, years of his life, and most of his energy. It was like looking at the pieces of a shattered mirror, every shard revealing a small part of the whole, but none giving the complete picture. He was always working, always struggling to conquer the demons that stood between him and the fulfillment of his plans, and always frustrated by his inability to make his grand dreams a reality.

The musicians who preoccupied him professionally are intimately familiar to me because I grew up reading their names off the mountains of files, books, records, and tapes that were as familiar as the furniture. I can remember the stories he and my mother used to tell, but the music itself remained largely unknown to me. I can't recall the yards of reel-to-reel tapes that filled a whole bookcase in the spare bedroom ever being played, and the shelves of records related to my father's work sat collecting dust for most of my life. The music he played around the house for his own enjoyment was very different—Johannes Brahms, Antonín Dvořák, Scott Joplin, Cole Porter, George and Ira Gershwin, Duke Ellington, and Willie Nelson. That was the music I grew up around, the music my dad taught me to love, and the music I'll always associate with him.

That probably seems odd to anyone who knows of Mack McCormick because of Henry Thomas, Lightnin' Hopkins, Robert Johnson, or the dozens of other musicians his name has been connected with, some of whom have been collected in this box set. The legend that grew up around my father in music circles was only one small shard of the whole, not the complete picture. He was a complicated, troubled, often difficult man who liked his secrets and enjoyed stoking his own myth with red herrings, both for his own protection and because it made for a better story.

The Mack McCormick at the center of that myth is almost as much a mystery to me as the man who was my father is a mystery to the music enthusiasts who've traded tales of Mack McCormick back and forth for decades. So, it was with fascination that I sat in a Folkways sound booth with Jeff Place in 2019 and listened to these songs for the very first time. What a wonder to hear these recordings made so long ago by people who are no longer with us. Despite my complex feelings about my father and his work, it brings me great pleasure to see this music he preserved released into the world at long last so that others may listen and perhaps hear something new in something very old.

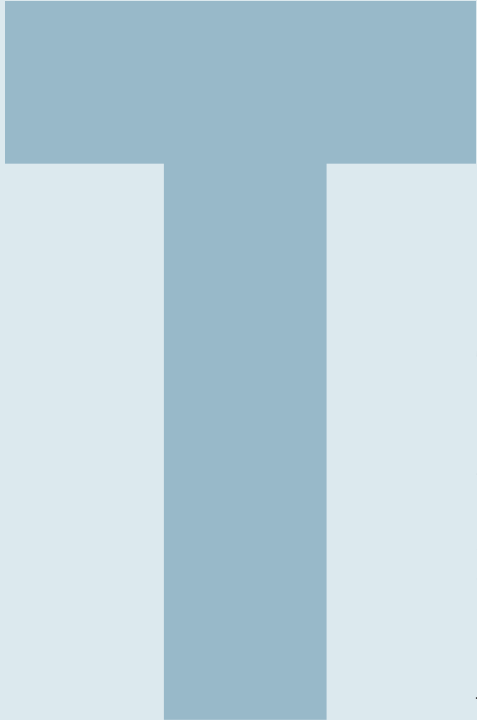
**AFRICAN AMERICANS**

**AND THE**

**BLUES**

**IN TEXAS**

**MARK PURYEAR**



This singular, impressive collection of recordings made by Robert “Mack” McCormick, presents an excellent record of the vernacular African American music during the years he conducted fieldwork.

McCormick focused on a region defined by himself and Paul Oliver, during their years of collaboration, as “Greater Texas” (Govenar 2019). The region includes Western Louisiana, East Texas, and sections of Oklahoma and Arkansas. McCormick’s field recordings and documentation of African American and Hispanic communities in the region surely will continue to enrich and deepen our understanding of the complex variety of vernacular performance forms and associated contexts in the region. The recordings and documentation span the period after World War II, when a considerable number of musicians, some whose recording careers date to the late 1920s, were still vividly recalled by relatives, fellow musicians, and other community members.

Although not academically trained, McCormick was passionate and determined in his research, collecting and writing about the music. His prodigious efforts were envied by many of the collectors and academics who followed. McCormick’s archive is legendary among researchers and collectors worldwide. Many sought his assistance with their own research and documentation of the African American musicians and communities in the region.

McCormick was a key resource for music collectors such as Chris Strachwitz (b. 1931), who immigrated with his family in 1947 from postwar Germany to the United States. When Strachwitz established Arhoolie Records in 1960, the label’s first three releases were recordings of Texas blues artists, featuring Mance Lipscomb (introduced to Strachwitz by McCormick), followed by Black Ace (Babe Karo Turner) and Melvin “Lil’ Son” Jackson. Like John Lomax and his son Alan Lomax, McCormick viewed the collection and preservation of African American and other ethnic groups’ folk traditions as central to understanding this country’s cultural and social values.

McCormick referred to the individuals and communities where he conducted fieldwork as “tribal people” to distinguish them from the individuals and communities with middle-class aspirations in the region (Govenar 2019). McCormick distinguished between the populations that retained cultural practices from the early 20th century and those that sought and attained more mainstream cultural values.

## **BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The long historical presence of people of African heritage in the region that is now Texas underlies the significance of McCormick’s collection. People from outside African American communities—notably residents, travelers, researchers, and collectors who were not of African American heritage—dominated the early documentation of African American vernacular music and performance practices. This reflects the long history and cultural dynamic centering on the construct of race in the United States, dating to the country’s colonial settlement. For example, prohibitions on educating the enslaved population in North America greatly impacted the lack of early African American written accounts of music, dance, and associated cultural practices among enslaved communities. Significant insight into these practices during the centuries of enslavement, derived in part from primary source materials, such as travelers’ journals, comes from Dena Epstein’s important book, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (1977).

The first documented presence of people from Africa in what is now Texas dates to 1528, when Esteban (also known as Estevanico), a Muslim from Morocco and a free person, was a member of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's expedition into the region. Spanish colonial rule of the three provinces in what is now the state of Texas lasted from 1776 to 1821. By 1792, in the province of Texas in particular, there were an estimated 34 people of African heritage, along with over 400 people identified as mulattoes, both free and enslaved. After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, the Mexican government officially opposed slavery and outlawed the institution in 1829. But by the onset of the Texas Revolution in 1835 there still were an estimated 5,000 enslaved people in the province.

Music was crucial to maintain the health, cooperation, and control of enslaved people during the height of the Trans-Atlantic and Caribbean slave trades. Early accounts of the banjo and related musical instruments of West African origin played by enslaved people explain how enslaved people maintained creative agency and cultural continuity despite being held as property in the system of chattel slavery. There are accounts of the “banza” (or banjo) in Saint-Dominique from the late 18th century relating to runaways or Maroons. In the early 19th century, Henry Latrobe heard banjos played in New Orleans by people of African heritage. The banjo, in various forms, moved with enslaved and free people of African heritage throughout the Texas Gulf Coast region during this period.

The 1836 constitution of the Republic of Texas legalized slavery and prohibited free people with any amount of African ancestry from living permanently in the Republic. Similarly, slavery was legal in the state of Texas, after the United States annexed the Republic of Texas in 1845. The state government passed slave codes to regulate the enslaved population and restrict the rights of free African Americans. Because slaveholders from other states brought their enslaved people with them to Texas, more than 30 percent of the state's total population was enslaved, according to the 1860 Census. Texas joined the Confederacy in 1861, following a failed attempt to secede from the United States to avoid abolishing slavery and the associated political, economic, and social changes. Such was the resistance that even after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 freed the enslaved people in the Confederate States, it had little impact on the institution of slavery in Texas until federal intervention.

Juneteenth, the now nationally recognized celebration of eman-

ipation, exemplifies the resilience and fortitude of Texas's enslaved population despite the state's efforts to prolong the institution of slavery. On June 19, 1865, Union Army General Gordon Granger landed in Galveston and proclaimed the emancipation of enslaved African Americans in Texas. The first Juneteenth celebration on June 19, 1866, in Galveston involved both free and formerly enslaved African Americans. However, racial animosity during Reconstruction resulted in the passing of Black Codes in 1866, which restricted the liberty and economic activities of African Americans in Texas.

People of African heritage—enslaved, formerly enslaved, and free—persistently contested their sociopolitical status. Their relentless struggle for full human rights and citizenship began upon arrival in the British colonies in 1619 and continued through the Revolutionary War, Civil War, ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, and the two World Wars. The struggle continues to the present day.

## JUNETEENTH, THE NOW NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED CELEBRATION OF EMANCIPATION, EXEMPLIFIES THE RESILIENCE AND FORTITUDE OF TEXAS'S ENSLAVED POPULATION DESPITE THE STATE'S EFFORTS TO PROLONG THE INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY.

African Americans have long served in the armed forces in Texas, including the U.S. Army's Ninth and Tenth Cavalry, known as Buffalo Soldiers. These two regiments served in combat, as scouts, and as security escorts for settlers invading Native lands in Texas. From 1866 to the early 1890s, Buffalo Soldiers participated in major campaigns against Native nations, including Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Comanche.

African Americans, along with Indigenous and Mexican cowboys, also worked as ranch hands on cattle drives. William (Bill) Pickett was one such horseman whose innovative skills and technique of bulldogging developed into the standard rodeo competition used today. Joshua Houston, an enslaved African American brought to Texas from Alabama with Sam Houston's wife, was educated, a skilled

blacksmith, and helped build Sam Houston's family home before he was freed in 1862. After his emancipation, Joshua successfully established a home, blacksmith business, and church—and also purchased land for other Blacks to settle in Huntsville. Joshua's life is exemplary of what many formerly enslaved people in Texas sought to achieve after their emancipation.

African American musical practices at the end of the 19th century in Texas included cowboy songs, such as “Home on the Range” and “Git Along Little Dogies,” which John Lomax collected in 1908, as performed by a Black former trail cook. John and Alan Lomax later collected cowboy songs performed by Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter (1885–1949). Jack Thorpe, who worked as a trail hand after arriving in New Mexico from New York City, wrote of hearing Black cowboys playing banjo and singing “Dodgin Joe” at their camp near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1889. The song was about a Texas cutting horse known for its speed. Afterwards, Thorpe commenced collecting and composing cowboy songs while working in Texas and New Mexico, which resulted in his short book, *Songs of the Cowboys* (1921). This, together with John Lomax's more thorough and expansive compilation, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1922), document the presence and important role of Black cowboys during the cattle-boom era. Clearly, African Americans and other marginalized people contributed to all aspects of Texas—intellectually, culturally, and artistically—thereby influencing the region's distinctive character.

## **AFRICAN AMERICANS OF “GREATER TEXAS” DOCUMENTED BY MACK MCCORMICK**

The vernacular music of African Americans in Texas greatly influenced the styles of several musical genres, including country blues, gospel, swing, and jazz. Well-known commercially recorded artists included Blind Lemon Jefferson (1893–1929), an innovative and virtuoso guitarist and vocalist and street performer in Dallas, and Blind Willie Johnson (1897–1945), who performed country blues and religious music. Johnson accompanied his singing with masterful “bottleneck” or slide guitar, which is a style that became popular after it was introduced by Native Hawaiian musicians who toured the Southern states. Ledbetter and Aaron Thibaux “T-Bone” Walker (1910–1975) are two other notable musicians from the region who both worked with and were influenced by Blind Lemon Jefferson and who played distinctive styles of music. Additionally, Ledbetter and

Walker had considerable success nationally during their lifetimes.

Paul Oliver, a noted researcher and author who collaborated with McCormick, wrote about “Fast Western” piano players in the East Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas lumber-camps and levee-camps, whose style influenced boogie-woogie piano. Oliver understood the germinal nature of African American piano players who vividly exemplify the scope of African American vernacular music in the region by way of both commercial and field recordings. Yet McCormick's field recordings and associated documentation capture another vital aspect of African American music and life in “Greater Texas” from the 1940s through the 1970s. The McCormick box set, along with associated materials in his collection, are a valuable record of both urban and rural life in the “Greater Texas” African American communities he documented.

A significant amount of McCormick's fieldwork reflected that he was a longtime resident of the region. McCormick keenly perceived the subtle and also not-so-subtle social dynamics between the dominant white communities and the African American and Mexican American communities he engaged with. He understood from firsthand experience that just his presence in an African American community could trigger scrutiny or negative attention from local law enforcement. Similarly, the presence of white people in rural Black communities could arouse both curiosity and suspicion, especially if the person was not there in a recognized capacity or role. McCormick was skilled at setting at ease the people he encountered in African American communities. His access hinged on his ability to engage on a personal level while providing some certainty that his presence would not create risky situations that might disrupt the lives of the musicians and people in the communities he documented.

Many members of those communities where the musicians lived and performed seemed to value and treasure the country blues and other African American vernacular music documented by McCormick. Regardless of popular music trends outside those communities, the tastes of local community members related directly to their historic experiences. The blues, in its many forms, engendered memories of youth for older community members, who could completely relax, enjoy entertainment, and socialize without the scrutiny of the larger white society.

Harding “Hop” Wilson, whose music appears in this collection, exemplifies the access McCormick developed in documenting



African American music. After serving in the U.S. Army from 1942 until 1946, Wilson performed blues and popular music in Houston venues as a vocalist and on a double-neck lap-steel guitar. Although he made several commercial recordings, Wilson rarely performed for white audiences. He did not like to tour or travel far, preferring to stay in the Louisiana, East Texas, and Houston areas. He recorded in 1958 with the drummer Ivory Lee Semien and their recordings have influenced blues and rock musicians since the 1960s. McCormick recorded and documented Wilson in the venues and settings where he regularly performed. This access indicates the trust Wilson extended, allowing McCormick not only to fundamentally expand the historical record of African American vernacular music in the region, but also to invaluablely document the changing artistic and cultural landscape in “Greater Texas.”

## THE PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE MCCORMICK COLLECTION POWERFULLY RECORDED THE HISTORY OF THE RACIALLY SEGREGATED AND RESTRICTIVE LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE COMMUNITIES WHERE HE CONDUCTED FIELDWORK.

In Texas, Black neighborhoods and commercial areas were historically near industrial zones, railroad yards, livestock holding pens, and agricultural areas. Many of these communities were defined by the “tracks” and rail yards that separated them from their white neighbors. A corollary was that most illicit activities, such as entertainment venues catering to Black patrons such as bars, dance halls, gambling establishments, and brothels, were in or directly adjacent to the Black communities. Nevertheless, this did not restrict members of the white community from easily accessing Black communities to engage with almost complete impunity in less socially acceptable and illicit activities. Instead the majority of social stigma and accusations of criminality was regularly projected on the Black community. The development of interstate highways after World War II negatively impacted and further isolated many of those Black neighborhoods.

Alan Govenar’s *The Blues Come to Texas: Paul Oliver and Mack McCormick’s Unfinished Book* (2019) contains firsthand accounts of these legally condoned restrictive practices in East Texas. Although there are many class and cultural differences among African Americans, the dominant culture often makes little or no distinction when defining acceptable and restrictive social norms. Yet, with many creative solutions, intellectual rigor, and tenacity, generations of African Americans sustained themselves despite housing restrictions and limited opportunities for banking and education. The photographs in the McCormick collection powerfully recorded the history of the racially segregated and restrictive living conditions in the communities where he conducted fieldwork. They portray the substandard infrastructure and forced proximity of less favorable living and environmental conditions. The photographs also portray the personal pride, tenaciousness and resilience of people and communities that were stronger than the wide range of socioeconomic forces they faced during their lifetimes.

### CONCLUSION

Clearly, an impressive number of musicians from the region known as “Greater Texas” performed and recorded music that remains influential. McCormick’s collection greatly expands the historical record of musical and performance practices in the region and is a remarkable archive of the musicians, music, and social activities that crucially sustained the well-being of those marginalized communities.

The absence of official documentation—such as birth, marriage, and real property records—affected Black musicians and their communities in Texas, especially in rural areas throughout the state. This also demonstrates the negative impacts of racism, racial segregation, and how the dominant white culture viewed Black, Hispanic, and Native Americans long after Reconstruction and into the 20th century.

Through his collecting and archiving, McCormick consistently demonstrated his respect for the musicians he documented and that he fully understood the centrality of African American vernacular music to the American music canon. McCormick amassed a singularly important collection that greatly enhances the record of African American vernacular music and performing arts in the region.


**THE**

**MAN**

**AT THE**

**DOOR**

**JEFF PLACE AND JOHN W. TROUTMAN**



Robert “Mack” McCormick knocked on a lot of doors in his lifetime and lived in quite a few places before settling eventually in Houston. His legend among music writers and fanatics grew from his vast knowledge of Southern vernacular music and his extraordinary success in finding elder blues artists and their families. The intimate knowledge he was able to secure was not simply his currency, but the gold standard for “deep” research. He achieved such status among his peers despite the challenges he faced in his early years.

His parents, Greg and Effie Mae McCormick, met while training as X-ray technicians in Cincinnati but separated in 1932, two years after his birth. His father traveled the country and Mexico to demonstrate new X-ray technology to doctors, while Mack and his mother moved around parts of Ohio, Missouri, Colorado, Alabama, and West Virginia, with Effie Mae often taking odd jobs as she struggled to find the work that she was trained to perform.

Even though young Robert frequently moved across the country and sometimes between households, he soon recognized that wherever he lived, the radio was his north star. He became absorbed by late-night big band relayed broadcasts from swanky nightclubs and hotels on the East and West Coasts, and he took any jobs he could as a teenager to be part, somehow, of that world—typically by running errands for radio stations and pushing around equipment for local ballrooms. Meanwhile, the American Legion of Ohio recognized his early talent for writing with a “best essay” award in tenth grade. That year, 1946, they moved again—this time to Houston. Bouncing between schools was a hardship—he moved at least 20 times during his first 16 years—and he remembered his high school years as “really sort of a black period for me.” He never received a diploma, and two weeks after moving to Houston, the 16-year-old hitchhiked to New Orleans, where he discovered a path for putting his interest in writing and passion for jazz to work. Orin Blackstone, a local record dealer and jazz discographer, convinced McCormick to serve as the Texas editor for Blackstone’s acclaimed *Index to Jazz* (1944–1948).

McCormick hitchhiked back to Houston, but the job did not pan out and he never heard from Blackstone again. However, he had found his calling. The challenge for McCormick at that point—a challenge that remained intact for most of the rest of his life—was how to make a living as a music researcher and writer. To make ends meet for the next ten years or so, he worked the counters, grills, fountains, or sinks

of Bantam Buffet, Elliott's Waffle Shop, and a slew of other local Houston eateries. At the same time, he began to find his people far from home. By 1947, he was corresponding with discographers and record collectors worldwide, from Australia to Canada to England, hounding them with extensive questions that signaled knowledge and built trust. He had a breakthrough in 1948 when he began serving as the Houston correspondent for *Down Beat* and began work the following year as a press agent for the Buddy Ryland Orchestra from Nacogdoches, Texas.

However, in August 1949, just when he had begun to establish his bona fides and lay a foundation for success, Dallas police arrested him for forgery. A local newspaper reported that officers found in his hotel room "a check-protecting machine, about 50 drivers' license forms, various blank checks, and a memorandum book in which he kept notations of cashed checks." He cooperated with police and confessed to keeping additional forgery equipment in Houston, where police found in his room "rubber stamps with names of Houston business firms and street addresses.... At least six different names were used by the youth in cashing checks in Houston." Effie Mae was devastated. He wrote her from Houston's Harris County Jail shortly after his arrest:

*I do realize it was a mistake to try to beat the law. But I was fired from my fo[u]rth or fifth job because of being late or absent—due to asthma. I get desperate and discouraged—I couldn't see how to break out of the vicious circle. And I didn't want to ask any more money from you—rather I wanted to start paying you back. All I could see to do was to keep some money coming in while I worked out some way of making a living in some-my-own-boss-sort of thing. And that was just about to happen. I had several things that might have worked out.*

Despite his predicament, McCormick continued writing for *Down Beat* and other periodicals, while provid-

ing jazz research notes to Dick Martin, a New Orleans radio personality, for delivery on the air. McCormick never let on in his correspondence that he was writing from a prison cell—his friend Ed Badeaux or Effie Mae would mail and retrieve correspondence for him. His chosen career path, however, also was a source of friction between McCormick and his mother, and she worried about the escalation of his obsession, which she considered an impractical distraction. Moreover, she had her own struggles, often roving from job to job, sometimes asking him for help along the way, and she hoped he would break out of a vicious cycle that he seemed to inherit. Soon after he was arrested, Effie Mae warned him to limit his correspondence and "forget records etc." Yet, she did as best a mother could to acknowledge his successes while he was in jail: "I read your write up about Mel and Ryland bands [in] *Down Beat* and it was good your name was printed at the end."

McCormick kept going. At one point, he gained access to a typewriter and wrote pianist and band-leader Claude Thornhill, whom he had briefly met while on assignment to cover jazz performances at Houston's new Shamrock Hotel. He described his ilk thusly: "I imagine that at one time or another you've been buttonholed by that weird type of jazz collector known as the discographer...one who not only collects the records but also trys [sic] to find out the personnel of the recording groups, etc. Therefore, this letter won't be too much of a shock to you." He then asked Thornhill for session information on the trumpeter Harry James, who was the subject of McCormick's latest research. Jail would not slow down his pursuits.

However, other forces did slow him down—forces that likely often contributed to his inability to keep any job that required him to show up on time each day to a workplace. Throughout his adult life, McCormick suffered episodes of depression, as well as paranoid delusions, both hallmarks of bipolar disorder. He was released on probation in May 1950 and ordered to pay monthly restitution payments. In November 1951, he

could not deliver. He wrote to his probation officer, "During the past month I have had what amounts to a nervous breakdown which coming, as it did, at such a crucial time leaves me with problems at every turn... the basis for this col[l]apse was my reaching a saturation point of worry and anxiety following which things lost true perspective and living became an unrealistic venture. That has been my condition these past weeks." McCormick sold his record collection and furniture and kept up the payments with the officer's personal assistance; but his undiagnosed condition did not improve and could leave him feeling paralyzed for days or weeks at a time. As he wrote in 1960 to Paul Oliver, a longtime collaborator, "Have just gotten your letter wondering at the two months silence—which I can only explain as one of those bizarre funks which overcome me from time to time, bringing apathy and leaving me in disorder. So much so that I discovered a letter, or rather two letters, had lain around here unmailed for a month's time even tho I realized you'd be anxious and wondering.... Well, so much for this line of thought, which is simply to say I've been in one of those things."

Throughout the 1950s, McCormick continued to take jobs when he could, working as a memo machine operator, mail clerk, and shipping clerk, among others. He briefly tried living in Southern California when an acquaintance found him a job at the Douglas Aircraft Company plant, but this did not last. He would accept and leave jobs in California with the same frequency as in Texas, working as a factory assembler, dishwasher (for two days), mail handler (for one day), and freight handler (for two). In addition to struggling with his disorder, he struggled also against the expectation that he should pursue a "normal" line of work. The notion that nothing should stand in the way of his calling determined many of his choices for the rest of his life—choices that, when combined with acute bouts of paranoia, continued to haunt him. He wrote his mother:

*I've decided to slip into the vagrant-bum-drifter class to which I actually seem to belong. For a very good reason—I feel. Spending eight hours a day at a job then rushing home to go to bed early enough to get up to go work is a life to which I can't adjust. Except for short periods such as the Douglas routing which drove me nearly idiotic. Very simply, I have more important things to do. Which is a very assuming kind of a statement given impetus by a declaring ego. At the moment—as for the past four years—that more important thing to do is writing. Of course, that seems exceedingly foolish in that I have yet to produce anything which I haven't been ashamed of for several good reasons. (Otherwise, you'd have seen an example of my efforts). Still, I'm convinced I have that ability, that's just a matter of sweating and starving around.*

By 1953, he was back in Houston, working as a “balloon dart hanky pank” for a carnival, followed by a two-month stretch as an orderly and cook's helper for a construction outfit. In 1954, he joined the Coast Guard with limited success. By 1957 and for several years that followed, he drove cabs. Once he landed that job, his fortunes began to change—perhaps it was the flexible hours it afforded—he would work, when he could work. With it he found a semblance of stability. In addition, of course, the job enabled him to drive around town in search of old 78 rpm records, or better, the artists whose remarkable voices and words ringing out of those records increasingly obsessed and haunted him. In between his fares, he knocked on doors.

Fieldwork formed an important element of what was an explosively prolific, at times irrefutably manic, period of productivity by McCormick from the late 1950s through the 1960s. McCormick moved from his pursuit of jazz discography and plunged himself into Texas and Deep South blues, cowboy songs, and conjunto on both sides of the border. He followed his interests and instincts, which led to deep dives into

wide-ranging topics, such as the history of Hawaiian or *bajo sexto* guitars, or the ins and outs of hog butchering. McCormick wrote plays, a passion that extended through the end of his life. One of his earliest, staged in London, received poor reviews. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he booked tours and produced records for local blues artists Sam “Lightnin” Hopkins and Mance Lipscomb, recruited and recorded a slew of talent for a variety of record label owners, and started his own label, Almanac Records. He gained increasing prestige among blues writers and researchers for his knowledge and access to Black Texas musicians, while his liner notes and other published pieces drew widespread praise (as widespread as possible within such otherwise tight circles of music criticism). Peter Guralnick, one of the most revered music writers of the 20th century, once said of McCormick's sprawling 1975 liner notes on the life and music of 1920s recording artist and songster Henry Thomas, “Mack went beyond the facts and reimagined the world and music of Thomas—it's one of the most extraordinary pieces of writing on blues I've ever read” (quoted in Hall 2002).

By the 1950s, Mack had begun to style himself as a folklorist. The field of folklore had increased in stature and provided new sorts of employment opportunities—either to make field recordings for folk labels popping up all over the country and Europe, or to find “unfound” musicians, who perhaps could deliver ancient wisdom, woes of hardship, and murder ballads to an emergent audience of thousands of white progressive college students who could not get enough. Mack became deeply involved in Houston's hootenanny and folklore scenes, producing performances with Ed Badaeux and recruiting local as well as national talent. He sometimes recorded these concerts on tape machines, which coincided with his burgeoning interest in making field recordings of a variety of people who interested him, or who seemed to interest other folklorists. He forayed into the world of prison recordings, for example, following the lead of John and Alan

Lomax and other white folklorists who felt Black and Brown musicians and singers incarcerated in Texas prison farms could reveal the real—the unfiltered, unvarnished, vulnerable performances of the unfree, who could not escape the blues hounds let into the penitentiary gate, but who perhaps saw opportunity to get an afternoon off, or at least one punctuated by the rewinding of tapes or directions to sing the “old songs,” whatever those were. Notions of “field work” indeed held very different meanings for all involved.

In 1965, Alan Lomax encouraged the organizers of the Newport Folk Festival to recruit Mack to find and deliver for the festivalgoers' edification a gang of incarcerated people who would sing work songs while actually chopping wood, demonstrating the unfree, uncompensated labor they provided daily to the state of Texas. The state's attorney general declined Mack's request, so instead he assembled a group of men recently transitioned from prison camps to halfway houses and drove them to the festival. McCormick later claimed to have pulled the plug when Bob Dylan's “gone electric” soundcheck cut into his group's rehearsal time. Folklore bona fides.

By then, McCormick was several years into what became a decades-long, ultimately doomed book project with Paul Oliver, a fellow traveler from the UK. Their collaboration on Texas blues was challenged from the start: living thousands of miles apart from one another, Mack copied and then sent Paul boxes of his fieldwork notes across the Atlantic, while Paul delivered chapter drafts. They wrote back and forth, poring over the notes, sharing their esoteric knowledge, finding glee in discovery, and editing a monumental volume of original research and writing. Oliver had made a handful of trips to the United States during those years, but ultimately the project relied upon Mack's ability to locate and establish rapport with often difficult-to-track-down, sometimes-because-they-did-not-want-to-be-found blues musicians and their family members and friends. Finally, they abandoned

the book due to ongoing frictions and a falling out in the late 1970s.

Indeed, the power dynamic of a white stranger in the 1960s knocking on Black folks' doors, or even striking up a conversation at one of the locals' favorite pool halls or restaurants, certainly led many to turn away or close the door, for good reason; the threats they endured by white people, often in sheep's clothing, combined with a lack of protection from local law enforcement, left them vulnerable, vigilant, and on edge. Some of the older musicians cited a reluctance to talk due to their church's advice to leave those memories behind, while others provided their own reasons or excuses for getting folks who looked like Mack to leave them alone. Yet, despite those dangers, many ended up willing to speak with him, and often, were generous in sharing their stories.

## **INDEED, THE POWER DYNAMIC OF A WHITE STRANGER IN THE 1960s KNOCKING ON BLACK FOLKS' DOORS, OR EVEN STRIKING UP A CONVERSATION AT ONE OF THE LOCALS' FAVORITE POOL HALLS OR RESTAURANTS, CERTAINLY LED MANY TO TURN AWAY OR CLOSE THE DOOR, FOR GOOD REASON**

It helped that Mack had learned to present himself as disarming, empathetic, repulsed by the Jim Crow protocols of deference, and genuinely interested in their stories. Thanks to this odd combination of coercion, respect, and generosity (on the part of those who spoke with him), thousands upon thousands of typed, single-spaced pages of fieldwork for this project fill his archive: interview notes and transcriptions with

hundreds of blues musicians and their families and acquaintances, as well as vivid, detailed descriptions, from Mack's perspective, of these encounters. The candor expressed through many of the interviews is striking. McCormick documented his general fieldwork and recording methods in his notes, including many notes to himself about fieldwork preparation. In interviews, he often described a "grid system" by which he methodically conducted fieldwork on a county-by-county basis; he estimated working through more than 700 counties in the United States. More

## **MCCORMICK UNDERSTOOD THE VIBRANCY OF THE BLUES AND THE CONTEXT FROM WHICH IT SPRANG, AND COULD OFFER A STRONG WORKING KNOWLEDGE AND DEEP RESPECT WHEN TALKING WITH OR ABOUT THE MASTERS OF THEIR CRAFT.**

likely, as expressed in his fieldnotes, people provided leads, which he followed, one by one, which often took him on long drives and certainly on many wild goose chases. However, his appointment as a 1960 census taker facilitated this work. The job provided not only a source of income, but also an excuse when working in redlined and otherwise segregated Black neighborhoods to knock on doors while on "official" government business. He could then impose upon them a few more questions of his own: "Do you have any records?" "Are there any singers in your family?"

It also helped that McCormick had come to acknowledge and disavow the faulty preconception established by some of his fellow blues researchers that the blues was nonindustrial, an escape from work, and anti-modern. In fact, the so-called "country blues" represented by many of the performances in this collection was, for Black Southerners, one of the most radical,

McCormick used the Houston Folklore Group's newsletters to ask the membership for leads on finding artists or their families. Using this method in fall 1960, he found Carrie B. Jefferson, the sister of Lemon Henry "Blind Lemon" Jefferson. McCormick had even written J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, for leads on Jefferson's family, under the auspices of the Houston Folklore Group.

McCormick's acute bouts of paranoia, well documented in his archive, impacted his trust of those around him, including some of his closest colleagues. In order to stave off unauthorized publications of his research findings, he planted several so-called "hoaxes" in the fieldwork he shared with Paul Oliver and others. He then separately documented his hoaxes—essentially as "notes to self" in his archive—so that he could keep track of whatever fabricated findings he had spun.

Although McCormick often interviewed women during the course of his field and festival work, the absence of women's voices is glaring in his Texas field recordings. McCormick's notes indicate that he hoped to record a number of women, but if he did so, he did not retain the recordings. He conducted extensive and in some cases the only known interviews with a number of early blues women in Texas, including L.V. Thomas, Bernice Edwards, and Willie Mae Brown, the notes from which exist in his archival collection.

Beginning in 1969, McCormick focused increasing amounts of his time toward researching the life of Mississippi blues legend Robert Johnson. Sixteen of Johnson's recorded songs had been released by Columbia Records in 1961, spurring covers by the Rolling Stones, Cream, and other rock acts, as well as widespread interest in Johnson's life. McCormick interviewed several of Johnson's family members and friends in the years that followed and wrote (and rewrote, several times over the ensuing decades) a book-length manuscript on his search for Johnson. McCormick's claims to unique knowledge of Johnson's life raised his reputational authority among blues writers and critics, even as the book never materialized and McCormick's professional output, impacted by his mental illness, all but collapsed. Smithsonian Books published an edited and annotated version of the book, *Biography of a Phantom: A Robert Johnson Blues Odyssey* (2023).

modern genres of the early to mid-20th century; it was steeped in songs about travel and the excitement of the big city—sometimes in Southern locales such as Dallas, New Orleans, or Memphis, but also in Northern destinations such as St. Louis or Chicago. In the midst of Jim Crow terrorism and white supremacist demands of deference, it was a freedom genre replete with songs about hitting the road or riding the rails and getting lost in adventure, hokum, and romance. For the most practiced and talented, this modern music offered an exchange of one form of labor for another, an intensive form of highly skilled labor that required a consummate command of an instrument and a working knowledge of hundreds of the latest popular hits from vaudeville to Vicksburg—that enabled escape from the dependency and poverty of sharecropping. McCormick understood the vibrancy of the blues and the context from which it sprang, and could offer a strong working knowledge and deep respect when talking with or about the masters of their craft.

By the mid-1970s, however, McCormick was increasingly subsumed by demons. The mental illness he lived with may or may not have impacted the frequency and the outcomes of his bad dealings with others—including with family members of artists who interested him the most. While conducting fieldwork and writing a manuscript on the life of blues legend Robert Johnson, he fell out with Johnson's sister Carrie Thompson, who in 1972 had signed a rudimentary agreement to allow McCormick to include in the book her stories of her brother. After Thompson provided photographs and rights to Steve LaVere the following year to publish the images and her stories, and to pursue any claim that she might have to proceeds from the sale of Johnson's recordings, McCormick refused to return family photographs that she had lent him, created fraudulent agreements that he claimed Thompson had signed, and stalled a major Columbia Records release of Johnson's recordings for 15 years. He began ignoring his research to fabricate new theories about Johnson's life and

death, peppering his conversations with acolytes and interviewers with false information that, in some cases, he seems to have believed. His research and publication output plummeted, and he became increasingly overwhelmed by the burden of keeping track of and maintaining the various truths and untruths that he spun into the world, often believing them as one and the same. Meanwhile, and until his death in 2015, he fastidiously maintained his archive—what he referred to as "the monster"—including the hundreds of hours of field recordings conducted during his productive years in the 1960s, that no others heard until now.

Manuscript documents in the Robert "Mack" McCormick Collection at the National Museum of American History uniquely enable researchers to explore deeply the possibilities, power dynamics, and problems associated with the interactions between "folklorists" and "the folk." McCormick's field recordings reveal the intimacies and nuances of the encounters—the fits and starts, the song selections and exclusions, the reliance on male musicians and the absence of women's voices, the compliance and the push back, the occasional sounds of children or family pets in the background as the singer and the recordist got down to business. They also chronicle the beauty and the bark of the country's songster traditions, and their deep expanse. As McCormick sought to find the next commercially viable Huddie Ledbetter or Mississippi John Hurt, what he found was far more sublime—a rich tapestry of voices by people who had entertained their families, neighbors, and communities long before and long after folks like McCormick came a-knocking. Although many of the people featured in this box set were little known beyond their intimate circles of family, friends, co-workers, fellow buskers, nightclub patrons, and church congregants, the musical traditions they nurtured and sustained, cultivated and innovated, will continue to nourish and prompt contemplation for all who hear their voices.

**THE  
COLLECTION**

**JEFF PLACE AND JOHN W. TROUTMAN**



# WHAT IS THE ROBERT “MACK” MCCORMICK COLLECTION? HOW DID IT COME TO BE, AND WHAT SHOULD WE MAKE OF IT?

Music scholars with an interest in vernacular American music from the early- to mid-20th century have long heard of the incredible research McCormick conducted with musicians in Texas and throughout the South from the 1950s through the 1970s. He conducted hundreds of interviews with musicians and their relatives, many of them long since dead, their voices and memories stilled, save for what they shared on McCormick’s tapes. Sometimes they provided new details to the lives of noted songsters such as Texas Alexander and Huddie Ledbetter. Sometimes they detailed stories of violence—lynchings and escapes, brutal treatment by landowners or wardens, the premature deaths of artists like Robert Johnson and Blind Lemon Jefferson. Sometimes they shared remarkable stories of resilience and jubilation—golden information that enthralled McCormick’s circles of researchers and blues fanatics.

A group of avid record collectors had emerged in the 1950s, McCormick among them. They were intrigued with and increasingly obsessed by the music of the 1920s and 1930s preserved on those old 78 discs. During and after the Great Depression, many of the record labels failed and their masters destroyed. Today, in an era where you may go online and hear almost every old 78 out there, it is hard to imagine that these records were once so scarce that only a handful of people were likely to have them or be able to hear them. In 1952, 1932 was the recent past, but somehow these recordings seemed like artifacts from ancient history. Many of these super-collectors became obsessed to learn more about the artists who made the recordings. If the records were only a few decades old, certainly some of them were still alive. This was true not only for blues collectors, but also for those interested in every type of American vernacular music: country, string-band, Mexican American conjunto and corridos, Cajun music, and more. In the mid-20th century, the collectors shared the music they discovered during their searches for old records by recording them onto reel-to-reel tapes (at a slow speed with different songs on each track to save money) and mailing them back and forth to one another. McCormick was no exception. Working with the artists’ names and place names in their songs, they began their pursuit for the musicians or those who knew them. If one looks at the list of tapes McCormick exchanged with his fellow collectors, you may see many of the names of the musicians that he and Paul Oliver went on the road to try and find.

McCormick got deep into his pursuit of the history of these musicians and songs. For him it was about the search, the detective work looking for every minute detail. Even before Chris Strachwitz launched Arhoolie Records in California in 1960, he sometimes traveled throughout East Texas with McCormick to search for examples of the music—typically the blues—that most obsessed him. Whereas Strachwitz cared most about the music and the melodies, McCormick seemed more

intrigued by the lyrics and the stories they told. He often pointed out lyrics to Strachwitz that, poignant in their message, Strachwitz might otherwise have missed.

McCormick, it is important to understand, was not a record scout. He was not there solely to discover and record little-known artists for profit. He was equally impassioned to learn all he could about the music and the artists and to conduct research for future publications and posterity. Undoubtedly, many people he recorded might have thought that a record was in the offing and that they would make money. Indeed, Robert Shaw was paid for McCormick's sole release on his record label, and Mance Lipscomb was paid for recordings licensed by McCormick to Reprise. However, the vast majority of this music would end up stored in McCormick's house for the next 50 years, inaccessible to others until now.

## McCORMICK'S FASCINATION WITH TEXAS BLUES MUSIC INSPIRED HIM TO EXPLORE ALL CORNERS OF ITS MULTIFACETED HISTORY. FROM INVESTIGATING MUSICIANS HE KNEW FROM OLD RECORDS, HE DISCOVERED MANY OTHER MUSICIANS

McCormick's peers, by contrast, often succeeded in releasing field recordings as well as studio-produced records of the artists they encountered. The 1952 release of Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* reissued many records from the 1920s and '30s and helped fuel this revival. Other collectors formed what was to be a rash of 78 reissue labels, includ-

ing Yazoo, Origin Jazz Library, Biograph, and Blues Classics, which anthologized the works of what the collectors came to canonize as the golden-age of blues artists. McCormick for a time ran his own, short-lived label, called Almanac. A similar abundance of labels formed in Europe, as even more Europeans than their American counterparts fell in love with American roots music during this revival period.

Many artists who had recorded thus were rediscovered on both sides of the Atlantic, along with some intriguing artists who had never before gathered much more than a local following. Folk festivals and concerts allowed for these musicians to reach larger audiences previously unaware of them. This revived a vast repertoire of old songs, which found their way onto the albums of contemporary musicians.

From the late 1950s through the 1960s, Mack McCormick and his one-time partner Paul Oliver recorded blues artists throughout Texas. Both conducted their own solo recording trips and shared tapes and information through the mail. Although planning to publish a definitive tome on the Texas blues, their partnership collapsed in the 1970s. In 2019, after both had passed away, the Texas A&M University Press published an edited version of the book.

McCormick's fascination with Texas blues music inspired him to explore all corners of its multifaceted history. From investigating musicians he knew from old records, he discovered many other musicians, including people who played with and knew the artists on those 78s, but never had a shot at recording until McCormick showed up at the door. He developed a systematic approach to canvassing areas to find people and their stories. Strachwitz recalled that Mack knew many tricks for finding them, including, in rural areas, first pulling into the local feed store to ask around.

During and after Reconstruction, many African Americans moved to Texas to find work, particularly in the lumber industry or on cotton farms along the Brazos River. The cotton farms in East Texas could be

brutal places, however, where Black people often were incarcerated under dubious laws designed to force them to labor under conditions sometimes described as worse than slavery. The lumber camps were rough places as well. Many worked these places when they had to, but sought a better way to make money without the hardship and without the surveillance and control of white landowners. For those who developed exceptional skills as instrumentalists or songsters, music provided a path to a better income, autonomy, and the freedom to travel. Some learned to play instruments and traveled wherever they could to make money.

Some of the musicians McCormick encountered did not travel far, however, and instead remained in their communities, building only a local reputation. They played taverns and local events. James Tisdom, for example, played local cattle fairs, while Leroy Johnson did not stray far from playing his local joints. Many of these musicians followed cyclical patterns of working as manual laborers or farmers, and as local entertainers. When labor crews for the railroad, timber, and other industries traveled to new job sites, musicians followed their camps or anticipated their stops along the way. Anticipating weekly frolics and other gatherings, they made the rounds to entertain workers at turpentine mills and on cotton plantations. They also followed or joined itinerant seasonal medicine shows throughout the region. This was true for musicians living all over the South, not just in Texas.

Sometimes, Texas artists found other local outlets to perform. Singer Joe Pullum had his own successful blues program on KTLG in Houston and showcased many of the local pianists. As Pullum told Paul Oliver, his show "allowed for those fellows to get a break." Church life could create a conundrum for those who loved to sing both sacred and secular music. Most songsters included religious songs alongside their other offerings, but some like Blind Willie Johnson performed them exclusively. Some in their older years retained their secular repertoire, while others

The *Galveston Daily News* (October 1, 1904) featured a recent editorial from the Bonham, Texas, newspaper that lamented the wave of Black men abandoning the local cotton fields for better lives as musicians.

performed only in church. Others spent their life moving from one camp to another, playing whatever their audiences would tip them to hear.

Indeed, rich musical environments existed throughout Texas, inspiring, if not also requiring, traveling musicians to develop astonishingly diverse repertoires. The songsters learned sea shanties from Galveston (one of the more famous examples being Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter’s performances of “Haul Away Joe”). They learned work songs associated with particular plantations and mills. African American musicians exchanged songs with Mexican and Mexican American musicians, who introduced the 12-string guitar. Consequently, many Black Texas blues singers included a few Spanish-language songs in their song bag. African American string bands like the Wright Brothers and Coley Jones and the Dallas String Band included hill-billy and cowboy music in their performances. With such a diverse and rich history of Black music in Texas, McCormick’s goal was to understand and chronicle all of it and to discover how the stories interwove.

Musicians in the early 20th century often used the railroads to get from town to town. In the 1920s and 30s, more than 50 railroads operated in Texas. As a result, a strong piano tradition developed along the Santa Fe Railroad. Local proprietors, typically near railroad crossings, installed pianos for the itinerant musicians to play. Pianists shared pianos, but they also learned, exchanged, and shared their repertoire while plying their trade. They honed set pieces like “The Ma Grinder,” “Groceries on the Shelf,” “The Cows,” and “Put Me the Alley,” each performed in the pianist’s own style.

Pianists were plentiful in some small towns, like Fort Bend and Wharton, but many musicians also headed to the bigger towns. They performed in African American theaters or in brothels—particularly piano players, who needed to play in venues where pianos were more or less permanently installed. Theaters that catered to Black audiences thrived in Texas, especially after World War I. Black women owned many of these

clubs, which afforded important outlets for professional musicians. For example, Ella B. Moore’s Park Theatre hosted well-known nationally touring blues acts as well as lesser-known artists like Kid Wiggins. The musical world that McCormick chronicled in his fieldwork was complex, rich, and spoke in profound ways to the history and diverse experiences of African Americans in Texas and its neighboring states.

In 2019, McCormick’s daughter Susannah Nix donated her father’s papers and recordings to the Smithsonian Institution. Archivists at the National Museum of American History organized and processed his over-90 linear feet of manuscripts and research notes, dozens of his fieldwork interviews captured on cassettes, and over 4,000 photographs, while the staff at Smithsonian Folkways organized and listened to his 590 open-reel tapes. Roughly 290 of these were field recordings of music and interviews conducted during his most intensive blues research period. The staff digitized and logged the recordings by artist and song titles, whenever possible, and also worked to distinguish the recordings McCormick had conducted from those he collected from other recordists.

McCormick’s history with the Smithsonian began decades before his collection was donated to the institution. Ralph Rinzler at the Smithsonian had hired him to identify possible participants to perform and speak at the 1968 Festival of American Folklife, which that year featured Texas folklife. McCormick recruited musicians such as Robert Shaw, as well as craftspeople and poets, to travel to D.C. that year for the Festival. He continued to serve as one of the main fieldworkers for the Festival through 1976, when it was a grand affair, extending for over two months with rosters of participants changing every two weeks. McCormick worked with the Festival’s Regional America section, which focused on folk traditions of the United States. As part of his work, he traveled extensively around the United States: recording a string band in southern Pennsylvania, chasing the roots of bluesman William

Racial assumptions and Jim Crow power dynamics profoundly informed the encounters between McCormick and the individuals he interviewed and recorded. McCormick felt it important to put interviewees and artists at ease, but such efforts sometimes derived from racist assumptions. For example, in a lengthy description to Paul Oliver on his methods for establishing rapport, McCormick wrote that he sometimes used the “Negro variety of English.” One can only wonder what the people he encountered thought of his theatrics. His writings also reveal examples of the harassment he would receive from white law enforcement officers while visiting people in segregated Black neighborhoods or business districts. In a letter to Oliver dated May 18, 1960, McCormick wrote: “As I mentioned Chris [Strachwitz] and I were stopped by two cops last summer for simply dropping in a bar where I bought some cigarettes. Altho this hasn’t happened often, it is an ever-present possibility – if it happens to you, give them a straight forward reason for being there on business and try not to argue. I’d say you’re [sic] easiest explanation in all cases is simply ‘I’m a talent scout for making records and it’s my business to go out and find people.’ This satisfies everyone.” He also described spending some nights in jail over “tangling with cops” who believed he was in their jurisdiction to provide support for local civil rights efforts.

Moore in Tappahannock, Virginia, and checking out a conch shop in Key West. In 1971, he helped Rinzler stage a festival at the site of the 1967 Montreal Expo, which featured bigger-named artists, some of whom he recorded. He sent samples of his fieldwork to Washington, but retained much of it, which now comprises part of the Robert “Mack” McCormick Collection at the Smithsonian.

by McCormick, is now available for researchers to hear and explore, his life’s work shared with us all. His incredible archive documents the experiences of hundreds of musicians who shared their stories and music with him. It includes thousands of pages of McCormick’s original writings on music and myriad other topics, and reveals his influence on the small cohort of white blues researchers who played an outsized role in chronicling the history and crafting for decades the dominant narratives of American music.

## McCORMICK’S HISTORY WITH THE SMITHSONIAN BEGAN DECADES BEFORE HIS COLLECTION WAS DONATED TO THE INSTITUTION. RALPH RINZLER AT THE SMITHSONIAN HAD HIRED HIM TO IDENTIFY POSSIBLE PARTICIPANTS TO PERFORM AND SPEAK AT THE 1968 FESTIVAL OF AMERICAN FOLKLIFE, WHICH THAT YEAR FEATURED TEXAS FOLKLIFE.

The collection reveals that McCormick’s interests extended far beyond music. He recorded interviews, photographed, and collected recipes from all sorts of people who captivated him. The archival collection also includes a trove of unpublished writings, including his efforts as a playwright, which was one of his major passions. The collection also includes some of the earliest versions of mix tapes: reels and reels of 7” tape recordings of old 78s that he exchanged by mail with other collectors, documenting an important aspect of their work and their listening culture.

All of this material, for decades retained exclusively

**THOUGHTS**

**ON**

**MACK'S**

**COLLECTION**

**DOM FLEMONS, THE AMERICAN SONGSTER**

## THINK OF YOUR FAVORITE RECORD.

What drew you to its sound? Do you know anything about the musician or the players on the record? If so, how much do you know about them? Do you know any information about their lives, their families, or the situations around their making of the record? For that matter, how important is it to know anything about the artist in relation to your own interest in the record itself? Mack McCormick asked these questions and a thousand more.

Drawn to the sounds emanating from his speakers, he wasn't satisfied to just hear his favorite records. Instead, he was eager to find more information. Embodying the energy of a true music fanatic, he crafted a home-grown method to study the music he loved on a folkloric level. Also, he spent his entire lifetime collecting stories and data about a way of life in Texas and other parts of the South that no longer exist half a century later. *Playing for the Man at the Door: Field Recordings from the Collection of Mack McCormick, 1958-1971* provides a captivating glimpse into Mack McCormick's search for the answers behind his favorite records, as well as the details about the songsters he met along the way.

While Mack's difficult personality and mental health issues limited his ability to complete much of his life's work, he had high personal standards as a documentarian and it is prominently shown in the recordings selected for the box set. In the 21st century, it is easy to forget that when Mack began collecting the music on this collection in 1958, there were no reference books on the "blues." He learned—along with other folklorists, record collectors, and enthusiasts—that even official records lacked details about the artists and their lives. Mack and his contemporaries realized that they needed to create the reference books themselves so that future generations could know and study the blues. So, he took to the streets, knocking on doors and asking questions about these faces erased by the shiny shellac surfaces of old 78 records. Confined only to personal expressions coming from the speakers, these records beckoned Mack to step across the social lines drawn by Jim Crow laws, racist ideology, and strict segregation. Once there, he found that for each person he had heard on record, there were dozens if not hundreds of other musicians who lived in the same communities and had their own stories to tell about the blues.

While Mack McCormick's mental health began to deteriorate in the years following these recordings, he carefully kept under wraps his collection which he dubbed "The Monster," refusing to let anyone see or hear his sources, skeptical of others' intentions. Decades later, with his collection now part of the Smithsonian, we may benefit from the awe-inspiring performances captured by Mack McCormick's microphone. *Playing for the Man at the Door* is a reminder that we still have a lot to learn about the blues.

THE  
ARTISTS

JEFF PLACE AND JOHN W. TROUTMAN

## DUDLEY ALEXANDER

**(B. 1914)** In 1959, McCormick recorded Dudley Alexander, who came to Houston in the 1940s from New Iberia, Louisiana, following the trail of many Black Louisianans who in the 1920s moved to and established a section of Houston aptly called “Frenchtown.” The Louisiana French music wafting in Houston’s clubs intrigued McCormick, credited with coining what became the standard spelling of the term “zydeco” following Alexander’s spoken introduction to one of his songs. McCormick found Alexander and his group at Irene’s, a club in Frenchtown, where they typically sang in French due to their predominantly French-speaking audiences.

## WALTER BRITTEN

**(B. 1919)** Walter Britten was a famous Texan auctioneer who at age 16 in 1935 began performing his skills at the Amarillo Livestock Show. He was one of the most sought-after auctioneers for all the big ranchers and went on to lead auctions at the Houston Livestock Show for 40 years. In 1988, he published his memoir *Sold*.

## BILLY BIZOR

**(1913–1969)** Billy Bizer was a blues harmonica player from Texas and the cousin of Lightnin’ Hopkins. McCormick interviewed Bizer, who recorded with Hopkins in the early 1960s and also recorded two solo LPs in the late 1960s.

## E.B. BUSBY

**(B. 1907)** A blind piano player from Conroe, Texas, E.B. Busby learned to play from Frank Reese, a local pianist. Busby was strictly an instrumental performer and not a vocalist. McCormick recorded eight pieces by Busby in one day, including several boogie-woogie standards.



## GEORGE “BONGO JOE” COLEMAN

**(1923–1999)** Bongo Joe was a striking street performer in multiple Texas cities as he traveled throughout the state for decades, making his own brand of music. In the 1960s, he bicycled around both Galveston and Houston with an umbrella and three 50-gallon oil drums as cargo. As a youth, he learned about steel drums from Caribbean sailors who docked in Galveston. He began to play in the 1940s and for years he performed on steel drums for tourists on the Galveston Sea Wall near Murdoch’s Pier with a three-foot washtub to receive tips. He combined drumming, whistling, and improvised recitations to create unforgettable performances, and later became a popular, longtime fixture at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Chris Strachwitz recorded him in San Antonio and released one Bongo Joe album on his Arhoolie label in 1968.

## OTIS COOK

**(CA. 1910–1979)** Otis Cook was a bluesman from Bastrop County, Texas, who recorded in Texas in the 1930s and later lived in Berkeley, California. In McCormick’s interview, Cook claims to have learned the song “Howlin’ Wolf” from Funny Paper Smith while traveling near Tulsa with Texas Alexander. At one point Cook moved to Chicago and adopted “John Smith” as an alias to escape legal troubles at home, which may have caused Cook himself to be misidentified as Funny Paper Smith for many years.

## CEDELL DAVIS

**(1926–2017)** Ellis CeDell Davis was born in Helena, Arkansas, and contracted polio at age ten, which shaped his unique guitar sound and technique: he played left-handed while fretting the strings with a butter knife. Davis spent most of his life performing for local audiences in Arkansas juke joints and on the *King Biscuit Time* radio show on KFFA in Helena. Starting in the 1950s, he often performed alongside Robert Nighthawk. Although recorded by McCormick in December 1969 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Davis did not appear on a record until the release of a compilation album in 1983. He did not release a full solo album until 1993. Later in life, Davis enjoyed a successful career recording for Fat Possum Records and touring until ill health hampered his ability to play. McCormick’s recordings of Davis are previously unreleased—like many songs in this collection—and the earliest of Davis known to exist.

## PAUL ELLIOTT

**(B. 1916)** Born in Waco, Paul Elliott was a Houston barber. McCormick noted that his shop was also a gathering place for musicians.

## ANDREW EVERETT

**(1892–1967)** Andrew Everett lived in Silas, Alabama, before moving to Texas. McCormick noted that he played in turpentine camps and worked on railroad gangs and in sugar refineries.

## R.C. FOREST AND GOZY KIRKPATRICK

**(FOREST B. 1915)** R. C. Forest (or Forrest) grew up on a farm in a sharecropping family but found his way to Houston to work at the Orange Crush bottling plant and other assorted jobs along the way, including playing music at house parties and juke joints. Gozy Kirkpatrick, a young man when McCormick encountered him, frequently played with Forest. McCormick may have been the only person to record Forest or the duo.

## VINCENT FRANK (AKA BLUES BOY VINCENT)

**(B. 1920)** Vincent Frank lived in the Third Ward in Houston, where he often played as a one-man band using the stage name Blues Boy Vincent. He played some of the earliest forms of zydeco and in this collection he plays with Dudley Alexander. Frank's son Preston (b. 1947) is still active with his family zydeco band and his grandson Keith (b. 1972) is one of the current stars of the genre.

## DENNIS GAINUS

**(B. 1905)** From Crockett, Texas, Dennis Gainus was a cousin to both Blind Lemon Jefferson and the blues musician Jack Johnson. He heard many great musicians passing through his area and learned to play the 12-string guitar from a Mexican émigré named Seville. These are his only known recordings.

## THE GREY GHOST

**(1903–1996)** Roosevelt Thomas Williams, known as the Grey Ghost, earned his nickname by arriving in towns on an empty boxcar, performing at a local venue or frolic, and then seeming to vanish into thin air. One brief highlight of his long career, which stretched from the 1920s through the 1990s, was his 1940 composition, “Hitler Blues.” For years, he fascinated McCormick, who recorded him in October and November 1964. The Grey Ghost enjoyed a brief comeback near the end of his life, recording for Spindletop Records and performing on the Texas blues circuit.

## HARDY GRAY

**(B. 1924)** On a 1968 trip to Alabama, McCormick recorded Hardy Gray, who introduces himself and says he was born in 1924 in Troy, Alabama. The recordings make clear that Gray was a songster. He sang mainly church music, but McCormick got a range of songs from him—from religious numbers to “Careless Love,” “She’ll Be Coming ’Round the Mountain,” and more.

## JOEL HOPKINS

**(1904–1975)** Joel Hopkins was one of Lightnin’ Hopkins’s two brothers who were also musicians. He sang and played guitar and traveled with Blind Lemon Jefferson in the 1920s, but because he made a living mostly as a manual laborer, music remained a sideline in his life. He traveled for a time as a roustabout for Ringling Brothers Circus, where he also performed buck dances in Bailey’s Colored Minstrels, one of the circus’s side attractions. The recordings of Hopkins discovered in McCormick’s archive, as well as one album with his brother Lightnin’ for Arhoolie and a few tracks released in Europe, are the only recordings known to exist.

## LIGHTNIN’ HOPKINS

**(1912–1982)** One of the most important and best-known artists with whom McCormick recorded and worked was Sam “Lightnin’” Hopkins. Originally from Centerville, Texas, Hopkins developed a seemingly endless repertory of songs, often making them up on the spot. As Hopkins told Paul Oliver, he’d sometimes just begin a “kind of ramble about different things” and see where it took him. During the 1940s Hopkins played as a duo with Thunder Smith as “Lightnin’ and Thunder,” which released their first record in 1947. For the next decade, Hopkins primarily recorded singles for small labels.

Hopkins had stopped recording by the time music historian Sam Charters tracked him down in Houston about a decade later. He convinced Hopkins to record again, for an album that Folkways released. Accustomed to the singles market, Hopkins insisted on receiving cash after each song. It was a savvy decision, enabling him to leave the studio as soon as he made as much money as he wanted for the day’s work, regardless of whether he had recorded enough songs for an album. Charters and those who later recorded Hopkins’s albums often had to search for him the next day to round out the track list.

Fellow record collector Chris Strachwitz had been intrigued by a Hopkins song he heard on the radio, so when he later visited Texas, he asked McCormick to bring him to Hopkins. McCormick had learned about Hopkins’s general whereabouts from Charters and tracked him down with Strachwitz, which led to many recordings being released on Arhoolie. In 1959, McCormick took over Hopkins’s management, which led Hopkins to tour outside Texas for the first time and to release several albums on various labels. Around 1963, Hopkins let McCormick go and went on to make hundreds of recordings and to release albums for many different labels through the 1960s and 1970s.

## MELVIN “JACK” JACKSON

Melvin Jackson was a Houston piano player who often accompanied Lightnin’ Hopkins. He owned a shoeshine parlor, which also served as a gathering place for musicians and singers who came to visit and play. Jackson was one of Hopkins’s go-to piano players during the period when he regularly performed in piano and guitar duos.

## LEROY “COUNTRY” JOHNSON

**(B. 1910)** While a child and young man, Leroy Johnson and his family worked as sharecroppers in Plantersville, Texas. As a teenager he moved to Houston and worked for an oil company while playing music on the side. He often performed with partner Richard McIntyre on the street corners and in local clubs. His recordings had been only a few sides released on the Freedom label until McCormick visited him.

## MAGER JOHNSON

**(1905–1986)** Mager Johnson of Crystal Springs, Mississippi, was the brother of the well-known bluesman Tommy Johnson. Mager, Tommy, and their brother LeDell labored in cotton fields when young, but from 1919 to 1924, they also played music together throughout the region, frequently in private homes. Mager continued to play locally for the next half century.

## MANCE LIPSCOMB

**(1895–1976)** Mance Lipscomb was born and lived in Navasota, Texas, a small town northwest of Houston in the Brazos bottoms, where he worked for most of his life as a tenant farmer and a local musician. While looking for Lightnin’ Hopkins, McCormick and Chris Strachwitz visited Navasota, where the rancher Tom Moore, notorious for his maltreatment of Black laborers, told them to talk to Lipscomb. What they found was a prodigious talent: a true songster with a tremendous memory, who could play anything, thanks to decades of entertaining locals in taverns and at picnics. Lipscomb could play all night and into the morning. The tapes that Strachwitz took back to Berkeley provided the content for the first-ever Arhoolie Records release in 1960, one of many Lipscomb records Strachwitz released over the years. Consequently, Lipscomb’s life changed dramatically, as he soon found himself playing concerts and major folk festivals alongside Mississippi John Hurt, Gary Davis, Fred McDowell and many other top-name blues artists.

## LUKE “LONG GONE” MILES

**(1925–1987)** From the Houston area, Luke Miles had little access to records when he was young, so he mostly made up his own songs. However, as a friend of Lightnin’ Hopkins, Miles performed with him—deriving much of his style, as well as his nickname, from Hopkins. In 1953, Miles, Luther Stoneham, and J.D. Hall formed a band and played local joints. Miles’s recording career was limited to one 1964 LP, *Country Born*, and a few singles on Smash and Kent.

## JOE PATTERSON

**(B. CA. 1897)** From Ashford, Alabama, Joe Patterson was in his mid-60s when Ralph Rinzler invited him to perform at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival. Working that year as fieldwork coordinator for the Festival, Rinzler had heard a tape recording of Patterson’s music, made by John Buckner, a local landowner. Rinzler recorded Patterson and his friend Willie Doss in Alabama in April 1964 before bringing Patterson to the Festival, where he received a standing ovation. Vanguard released a selection of songs from this performance in 1965.

Patterson was known for playing the quills, an older African American music-making tradition, which had almost vanished by the time Rinzler recorded Patterson. Quills worked like a set of pan pipes, with reeds bound together and blown into for sound. Very few examples of performances on quills existed on recordings before Patterson’s.

McCormick also was interested in quills and searched for Patterson after learning more about him while working for Rinzler at the Smithsonian. McCormick discovered that Patterson encountered significant challenges immediately after his brief stardom at Newport, as he was admitted in 1966 into Searcy Hospital, a still-segregated state psychiatric institution located outside Mobile. When McCormick met Patterson there in the summer of 1968, he discovered that Patterson had no instruments nor activities to keep him occupied. Using hospital tape and local cane reeds, Patterson made a new set of quills for McCormick and played them while McCormick recorded. McCormick and Rinzler lobbied the hospital to allow Patterson to continue making quills and gained the administration’s support until Patterson’s health worsened.

## EDWIN “BUSTER” PICKENS

**(1916–1964)** Blues pianist Buster Pickens got around—from playing traveling medicine shows and making his first recording backing Perry Cain in 1948, to working with Texas Alexander and Lightnin’ Hopkins. Pickens spent decades playing in rowdy barrelhouses throughout Texas and years on the “Santa Fe Circuit,” a series of joints that musicians played along that rail line. He released only one album under his name, on Heritage Records in 1962. He died in 1964 during a bar fight with his cousin.

## ROBERT SHAW

**(1908–1985)** Robert “Fud” Shaw was from the Fort Bend County town of Stafford, a prime cattle-raising area in Texas. He learned to play the piano when young and performed at regional roadhouses in the 1920s and 1930s. In later years, he played piano in venues throughout Houston’s Fourth Ward. Like Buster Pickens, he also worked the Santa Fe Circuit, in which musicians used the Santa Fe railroad to travel from gig to gig. Shaw had never recorded before McCormick recorded him in 1963. Those recordings formed the content for his release, *Texas Barrelhouse Piano* (1966), on McCormick’s own Almanac Records.

After settling in Austin, Shaw opened the Stop and Swat grocery store. During the 1960s he played with many in the burgeoning Austin music scene, including Janis Joplin. He retired from the store in 1967 in order to return to a full-time career of playing music, this time both domestically and abroad. McCormick recruited him to perform at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in 1968, and at the former World’s Fair Expo site in Montreal in 1971.

## JEALOUS JAMES STANCHELL

James Stanchell was a songster who acquired a large repertoire by playing for tips in many venues throughout Houston. He often mixed songs learned from jukeboxes with his own compositions.

## JAMES TISDOM

**(1912–1995)** After hearing of a mysterious Corpus Christi street singer, known variously as “Smokestack” or “Howling Wolf,” McCormick wondered if this might be the elusive Funny Paper Smith, who had recorded a handful of 78s and had used the nickname “Howling Wolf” in the past. McCormick and Mance Lipscomb, who was scheduled to perform at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, went to the docks, where locals told them about James Tisdome, a singer known as “Smokestack” who played on Ramirez Street. McCormick and Lipscomb eventually found Tisdome and learned that he was a songster with a wide repertoire in blues, rhythm and blues, country music, and more who had traveled throughout South Texas and the Mexican borderlands. At one point, Tisdome had been part of a small group called Dynamite, Explosion, and Gun Powder (Tisdome was Explosion), which the Pearl Beer Company hired to perform music and tap dance for promotional events.

Having grown up working as a cowboy, Tisdome was familiar with the culture and often performed at rodeos, barbecues, and fairs. When McCormick recorded Tisdome in April 1962, he was just back from the Quarter Horse Races in Goliad, Texas. Tisdome also recorded a few singles for Universal-Fox, Original, Rio Grande Music Company, and Ropal Records. For the rest of his life, he continued to play street corners and for local venues and events.

## ALLEN VANN

**(B. 1903)** Allen Vann was originally from Taylor, Texas, but early in life moved to San Antonio and became a lifelong resident there. While a child, he learned piano and during the 1920s and 1930s played in local bands like Millard McNeal's jazz band, Johnson's Orchestra, Royal Garden Band, and Troy Floyd's Orchestra (1927–1932). He recorded with Troy Floyd in 1928, but after Floyd's band broke up, Vann formed his own orchestra.

## BLUES WALLACE

Little biographical information exists about Blues Wallace, who was a one-man band with guitar, drums, and harmonica. He lived in San Antonio, and in the 1950s occasionally held residencies at local clubs such as the Mellow Bar and Cafe.

## MURL “DOC” WEBSTER

**(B. 1917)** Murl Webster was a medicine show performer who with his wife ran what became one of the last traveling medicine shows. In 1963, McCormick found him in Texas working in the furniture business while still occasionally performing on the road. Over the years, Webster had employed many piano players, including Buster Pickens and the Grey Ghost. Multi-instrumentalist Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown also toured with him. Webster performed a variety of card tricks and toured with a portable platform, public address system, breakaway model of a human body to demonstrate organs causing pain, and a dancing clown.

## LLOYD “KID” WIGGINS

**(B. 1896)** Lloyd Wiggins started dancing while a boy and soon joined the Monkey Johnson traveling medicine show. He worked for a time at the Park Theatre in Dallas, and later traveled extensively in the vaudeville act, “Kid Wiggins and Aunt Jemima,” with his wife, pianist Alice Moore. Known for his performances of “Sugar Foot Blues,” Wiggins joined the Sugar Foot Green Minstrel Show in the late 1920s and traveled with them through the Depression, eventually adapting the name “Sugar Foot Green.” During this era, he also performed with Buster Pickens.

## JIM WILKIE

McCormick did not record much biographical information about Jim Wilkie, a Texan who passed through Houston on a stopover in 1958 and shared a few songs with him. Wilkie eventually moved to a ranch near Corpus Christi and became a writer.

## JIMMY WOMACK

**(B. 1921)** Born in St. Louis, Jimmy Womack was severely injured in World War II. Afterwards, he worked as a mechanic when possible, but typically made a living by playing music. Although he composed hundreds of songs, McCormick’s recordings—when Womack lived in Shreveport—are the only ones known to exist. McCormick referred to him as a folk poet.

## HARDING “HOP” WILSON

**(1921–1975)** Born in Crockett, Texas, Harding Wilson used a double-neck steel guitar with one neck tuned to an open G chord and the other tuned to an open E. Wilson often moved back and forth to play each neck during one song. Texas blues and western swing bands were major influences, motivating him to purchase his first electric steel guitar in 1939. Wilson was known regionally and did not travel much, but his music influenced later Texas guitarists like Johnny Winter. He recorded for Goldband and Ivory Records, releasing a total of nine singles.



**ABOUT**

**THE**

**MUSIC**

**JEFF PLACE AND JOHN W. TROUTMAN**

## 1. LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS MOJO HAND

**Lightnin' Hopkins, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 424, SH15/16, recorded March 15, 1962, Houston, Texas)

McCormick recorded this performance during a hootenanny on March 15, 1962, at Houston's Alley Theatre—the oldest operating theater in Texas. The concert featured local performers from the Houston Folklore Society, along with Sam “Lightnin'” Hopkins as the special guest. This was not the first time Hopkins had played the Alley Theatre; the Houston Folklore Group first invited him to play it nearly three years earlier, in July 1959. That performance marked the first time Hopkins had played a concert for a white audience—totally captivating them, according to McCormick. One of Hopkins's most popular numbers, “Mojo Hand” became the title of his biography.

## 2. MANCE LIPSCOMB GOD MOVES ON THE WATER

**Mance Lipscomb, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 480, ML18, recorded April 1963)

In 1912, after reading about the sinking of the *Titanic*, street singer Blind Butler (1873–1936) and his wife Ophelia composed this song and published it as a broadside ballad. The local Hearne, Texas, newspaper soon printed the song, which later appeared in Dorothy Scarborough's book *From a Southern Porch* (1919). In 1929, Blind Willie Johnson recorded the best-known version of this popular gospel blues, which is just one of several songs written by African American composers about the sinking of the *Titanic*. Johnson knew and traveled with Butler and by the time Johnson recorded it, the song was very well-known in Texas.

## 3. ROBERT SHAW THE CLINTON

**Robert Shaw, piano**

(from tape 023, FR21, recorded possibly March 1963, Austin, Texas)

Referring to a famous stopping place at a junction of the Santa Fe Railroad lines in Oklahoma, “The Clinton” was often performed in Texas, along with a number of other songs associated with the pianists who operated along the Santa Fe line. Robert Shaw said that this was the first song he learned while living in Louisiana.

## 4. KID WIGGINS SUGAR BLUES

**Kid Wiggins, vocal; Buster Pickens, piano**

(from tape 014, FR13, recorded May 1961)

Although Kid Wiggins claimed to have written it, “Sugar Blues” is a 1919 composition by Clarence Williams and Lucy Fletcher. Leona Williams and Her Dixie Band first recorded it in 1922. Many notable jazz artists, such as Fats Waller, Clyde McCoy, and Ella Fitzgerald, have recorded it since.

## 5. DUDLEY ALEXANDER and WASHBOARD BAND ST. JAMES INFIRMARY

**Dudley Alexander, vocal and concertina; Alex Robert Jr., fiddle; Vincent Frank, washboard**

(from tape 002, FR4, recorded April 1959, Houston, Texas)

Dudley Alexander and Vincent Frank had a small zydeco group which played at Irene's, a Houston club. They were some of the earliest zydeco (originally la-la music) musicians. “St. James Infirmary” has taken many variations over the years and derived from a centuries-old English ballad called “The Unfortunate Rake.”

## 6. CEDELL DAVIS DARLIN' (YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU)

**CeDell Davis, vocal and guitar; James Lee, guitar**

(from tape 523, recorded December 1969, Arkansas)

B.B. King, “The King of the Blues,” made some of the most popular blues records of all time. This composition by King was a standard feature of his, and soon became the live sets of many other artists.

## 7. DENNIS GAINUS YOU GONNA LOOK LIKE A MONKEY

**Dennis Gainus, vocal and guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 1; recorded May 1, 1959)

The Hokum Trio first recorded this old tin-pan-alley song by Clarence Williams and Alex Hill in 1930. Later that year, Clarence Williams and His Novelty Band rerecorded the song, which found its way into the repertoire of many Western Swing Orchestras, as well as that of Texas bluesman Smokey Hogg.

## 8. THE GREY GHOST ONE ROOM COUNTRY SHACK

**The Grey Ghost (R.T. Williams), vocal and piano**

(from 035, FR36, recorded November 1964)

Pianist Mercy Dee wrote and first released this song in 1953 on the Specialty label. It is now a blues standard.

## 9. EDWIN “BUSTER” PICKENS GROCERIES ON MY SHELF (PIGGLY WIGGLY)

**Buster Pickens, vocal and piano**

(from tape 047, FR55, possibly recorded August 1960)

Charlie “Specks” McFadden wrote and recorded “Groceries on My Shelf” for Decca Records in 1937. Robert Shaw and Roosevelt Sykes (who toured with McFadden) also recorded the song, featured in the repertoire of many Texas pianists.

## 10. HOP WILSON 3 O’CLOCK BLUES

**Hop Wilson, vocal and steel guitar**

(from tape 058, FR46, recorded March 9, 1966, Houston, Texas)

Lowell Fulson composed and recorded “3 o’clock Blues.” When B.B. King famously covered the song in 1952, it became his first R&B hit and a fixture in King’s concerts afterwards. McCormick made this recording at Irene’s, a Houston club at 7116 De Priest Street, which became a legendary place for both blues and early zydeco music.

## 11. JEALOUS JAMES STANCHELL ANYTHING FROM A FOOT RACE TO A RESTING PLACE

**Jealous James Stanchell, vocal and guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 2; recorded July 13, 1959, Houston, Texas)

Lightnin’ Hopkins was planning to record for McCormick on this day but forgot his guitar. He left to borrow one from Jealous James Stanchell, who returned with Lightnin’ and provided McCormick a few songs of his own.

## 12. JAMES TISDOM SALTY DOG RAG

**James Tisdome, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 018, FRD 16/17 recorded possibly 1968, Corpus Christi, Texas)

Red Foley’s 1952 recording of “Salty Dog Rag” became a country-music hit. It is a schottische that can be danced by one or multiple couples.

## 13. GOZY KILPATRICK GOIN’ TO THE RIVER

**Gozy Kirkpatrick, vocal and harmonica**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 2; recorded March 1959, Houston, Texas)

Gozy Kirkpatrick was a young resident of Houston when McCormick recorded him. The song’s two verses are also found in a Fats Domino song of the same name, released in 1953. This very different rendition of the song raises the question: did Domino’s recording feed into the quickly adapting Texas blues traditions of the mid-1950s, or did Domino instead adapt an older song to fit his New Orleans-based rhythm-and-blues mold?

## 14. JOE PATTERSON QUILLS

**Joe Patterson, vocal and quills**

(from tape 511, recorded July 19, 1968, Searcy Hospital, Mt. Vernon, Alabama)

Mack McCormick was interested in the music of Henry “Ragtime” Thomas, a Texas bluesman (b. 1874), who along with his guitar played the quills—an instrument made from cane strapped together resembling a pan pipe. The rising availability of harmonicas at the turn of the 20th century soon led to the widespread decline of quills in the South. However, in the 1960s, Ralph Rinzler located and recorded Joe Patterson, a quills player from southeastern Alabama, who subsequently performed at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival.

When McCormick visited Patterson at the Searcy Hospital in 1968, Patterson had no quills. McCormick had someone collect and bring reeds from a nearby river, which Patterson crafted into quills by cutting the reeds to proper sizes and binding them together with hospital tape. McCormick thus not only saw quills played, but also recorded Patterson for the final time in his life, thereby adding a few selections to the otherwise scant recordings that exist of quills.

## 15. LIGHTNIN’ HOPKINS MA PA CUT THE CAKE

**Lightnin’ Hopkins, vocal and foot rhythms**

(from tape 051, LOD 1, recorded March 15, 1962, Houston, Texas)

This recording comes from Hopkins’s 1962 Alley Theatre performance, during which Hopkins rose from his chair and performed some buck dancing for the audience.

## 16. OTIS COOK CRAZY ABOUT OKLAHOMA

**Otis Cook, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 540; recorded September 14, 1971, Elgin, Texas)

This is Otis Cook’s take on a song penned by bluesman Jimmie Reed.

## 17. THE GREY GHOST LITTLE RED ROOSTER

**The Grey Ghost (R.T. Williams), vocal and piano**

(from 035, FR36, recorded November 1964)

Bluesman and songwriter Willie Dixon composed many of the great Chicago blues songs released by Chess Records. The rendition by Chester Burnett (aka Howlin’ Wolf) of “Little Red Rooster” in 1961 on Chess is one of the many highlights in his repertoire.

## 18. THE SPIRITUAL LIGHT GOSPEL GROUP MY WORK WILL BE DONE

(from tape 508)

McCormick’s tapes and papers provide no leads as to the identity of the Spiritual Light Gospel Group. The members of this group may have come from Houston.

## 19. JAMES TISDOM STEEL GUITAR RAG

**James Tisdome, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 020, FR 18; recorded possibly 1968, Corpus Christi, Texas)

Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys recorded “Steel Guitar Rag” in 1936, with Leon McAuliffe on the steel. McAuliffe took credit for the composition of this instrumental hit, which was particularly popular in Texas. In fact, Sylvester Weaver, an African American steel and slide guitarist from Kentucky, had written and first recorded the song in 1923 as “Guitar Rag.”

## 20. MANCE LIPSCOMB TALL ANGEL AT THE BAR

**Mance Lipscomb, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 491, recorded April 14, 1962)

Mance Lipscomb recalled first hearing this song in church while growing up in the Brazos bottom churches of Texas.

## 21. GEORGE “BONGO JOE” COLEMAN THIS WHOLE WORLD’S IN A SAD CONDITION

**Bongo Joe, vocal and steel drum**

(From tape 005, FR6, recorded, recorded June 12, 1959, Murdoch’s Pier, Galveston, Texas)

This is a great example of Bongo Joe Coleman’s improvisational style—recorded during the time he intrigued passersby and tourists by performing on the Sea Wall in Galveston.

## 22. LIGHTNIN’ HOPKINS WORLD’S IN A TANGLE

**Lightnin’ Hopkins, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 445, SHD 15/16, recorded March 15, 1962, Houston, Texas)

This performance from Hopkins’s 1962 Alley Theatre show seems improvised and loosely based on blues artist Jimmy Rogers’s Cold War-themed song from 1951 of the same title. As Hopkins notes during the recording, his wife Nettie was sitting in the audience. However, it was not her first time seeing her husband play the Alley Theatre. During Hopkins’s performance at the May 16, 1960, Hootenanny-in-the-Round, Nettie sat next to John T. Jones, described by McCormick as “the heir to the Jesse Jones Empire which includes half the business buildings in Houston and minor items [such] as The Houston Chronicle.” Since his debut at the Alley Theatre in 1959, Lightnin’ Hopkins had become a local icon within a growing number of Houston social circles.

## 23. ROBERT SHAW SOMEDAY BABY

**Robert Shaw, vocal and piano**

(from tape 030, FR 29, recorded June 10, 1963, Austin, Texas)

“Someday Baby” is an unreleased outtake from McCormick’s *Texas Barrelhouse Piano* album on his own Almanac label.

## 24. CEDELL DAVIS IT’S ALRIGHT

**CeDell Davis, vocal and guitar; James Lee, guitar**

(from tape 523, recorded December 1969, Arkansas)

This up-tempo number features CeDell Davis’s butter-knife slide-guitar work weaving in and out of James Lee’s boogie rhythm.

## 25. R.C. FOREST AND GOZY KILPATRICK

**CRYIN’ WON’T MAKE ME STAY**

**R.C. Forest, vocal and guitar, Gozy Kirkpatrick, harmonica**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 1, recorded March 1959, Houston, Texas)

McCormick recorded other artists, including Lightnin’ Hopkins and Dennis Gainus who performed versions of this song, which was commonly played throughout Texas and Mississippi.

## 26. ALLEN VANN CHINA TEA

**Allen Vann, piano**

(from tape 024, FR 22, recorded March 19, 1962, San Antonio, Texas)

While interviewing Allen Vann, McCormick asked him about his early days of performing in dance bands in Texas. Vann responded by playing “China Tea” to demonstrate his style from the era.

## 27. GEORGE “BONGO JOE” COLEMAN PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS

**Bongo Joe, vocal and steel drum**

(from tape 577, recorded October 5, 1966, Galveston, Texas)

This rendition of “Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is” illustrates the hypnotic nature of Bongo Joe Coleman’s street performances.

## 28. LIGHTNIN’ HOPKINS TOM MOORE’S FARM

**Lightnin’ Hopkins, vocal and guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 2, recorded July 16, 1959)

Lightnin’ Hopkins recorded this as “Tim Moore’s Farm” for Gold Star in 1946. He recalled that he had first heard it performed by Texas Alexander. In his introduction to the song, Hopkins speaks of Moore’s menacing reputation and the local lynchings by white supremacists who had terrorized Black families in the area for decades.

## 29. MANCE LIPSCOMB TOM MOORE'S FARM

**Mance Lipscomb, vocal and guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 2, recorded June 30, 1960, Navasota, Texas)

This is Mance Lipscomb's take on "Tom Moore's Farm." He worked for most of his life as a sharecropper in the Navasota area, where Moore operated. When McCormick released his *Treasury of Field Recordings* sets, he honored Lipscomb's request to not be identified by name, for fear of reprisals from Moore and his brothers.

For years, Texas musicians sang at their own risk about the brutality of Tom Moore, who with his three brothers terrorized African American workers who picked cotton on his ranch, not far from the Brazos River. Musicians, many of whom worked at times for Moore, learned the song from one another and circulated it while taking care to avoid Moore's wrath. The long days and treacherous conditions resembled slavery, particularly for incarcerated people paroled from the penitentiary and then forced to work for Moore. Accordingly, Mance Lipscomb, in his recording of this song, referred to Moore's Farm as a "second penitentiary." McCormick recorded another song about Tom Moore by Johnny Jackson, Houston Page, Fredell Fly, and Robert Hopwood on December 31, 1965, at the Ramsey State Farm prison in Otey, Texas.

One story attributes the song's origins to Yank Thornton, a young farmhand who, after suffering Tom Moore's treatment in 1936, wrote the song while working in the fields. Thornton began performing it with his guitarist, Mance Lipscomb, and its popularity spread widely throughout the state.

## 30. JEALOUS JAMES STANCHELL DON'T DO ME NO SMALL FAVORS (HELP THE BEAR)

**James Stanchell, vocal and guitar**

(from TBAD4; recorded July 13, 1959, Houston, Texas)

This is another song from James Stanchell's stop-in at a Lightnin' Hopkins session in 1959. Stanchell created a song based on an old saying in African American lore: "if you see me and the bear fighting, help the bear." In the 1960s, two distinct R&B singles used the same phrase: Ted Taylor's "Fight the Bear" and Jimmy McCracklin's "Fight the Bear." The phrase also appeared in a Margaret Walker poem, "For My People." A recent rap song incorporating the line by Mystikal, "Help the Bear," went viral online.

## 31. BILLY BIZOR FOX CHASE

**Billy Bizer, harmonica; Lightnin' Hopkins, guitar**

(from tape 445, SH15/16, recorded March 15, 1962, Houston, Texas)

This recording of "Fox Chase" took place during Lightnin' Hopkins's 50th birthday at Houston's Alley Theatre. Billy Bizer often played this common harmonica work-up with his cousin Lightnin' on guitar. They had played together in the late 1930s, both in Texas and Mississippi, before Bizer relocated to California, where he lived for nearly 20 years. He returned to Texas in 1960 and immediately began gigging again with Hopkins. This piece was for decades a perennial favorite of many blues harmonica players.

## 32. R.C. FOREST BLACK WIDOW SPIDER BLUES

**R.C. Forest, vocal and guitar**

(from 087, TBAD 4; recorded Houston, Texas)

Lowell Fulson wrote "Black Widow Spider Blues" and released it in 1947 on the Big Town label. Originally from Oklahoma, Fulson played with Texas Alexander. He ultimately moved to California and became a star on the West Coast blues scene.

## 33. HARDY GRAY COME AND GO WITH ME TO THAT LAND

**Hardy Gray, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 518, recorded 1968, Alabama)

This spiritual is of unknown origin and may date to the 1800s. In 1930, Texas blues singer Blind Willie Johnson recorded the song, which gained renewed popularity among Civil Rights activists during the 1960s.

## 34. CEDELL DAVIS ROLLIN' AND TUMBLIN'

**CeDell Davis, vocal and guitar; James Lee, guitar**

(from tape 523, recorded December 1969, Arkansas)

"Rollin' and Tumblin'" is one of the best-known and frequently recorded blues tunes, characterized by its trademark slide-guitar lick. Hambone Willie Newburn first recorded it in 1929 as "Roll and Tumble Blues." Muddy Waters, Elmore James, and others later recorded important versions before it became a staple of blues-rock groups, such as Cream, Canned Heat, and Johnny Winter.

### **35. LEROY “COUNTRY” JOHNSON with EDWIN “BUSTER” PICKENS TRAIN ROLL UP**

**Leroy Johnson, vocal and guitar; Buster Pickens, piano**  
(from tape O48, FR 56; recorded Houston, Texas)

This short track, featuring a bouncing rhythm guitar by Leroy “Country” Johnson, is one of several unreleased recordings from the McCormick Collection that feature Buster Pickens.

### **36. EDWIN “BUSTER” PICKENS SHORTY GEORGE**

**Buster Pickens, vocal and piano**  
(from tape O26, FR 25, possibly recorded 1960, Houston, Texas)

“Shorty George” was widespread, played by many pianists in Texas. According to Oliver and McCormick, “Versions of a blues on this theme, though rarely collected in the field by researchers, are known to a great many people. The identity of Shorty George himself has not been ascertained and the line ‘Shorty George died out on the road’ seems to be a unifying factor.” The name “Shorty George” appeared in multiple musical contexts, including songs related to prisons. In one recorded by Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter, the name referred to a train that brought women to visit incarcerated men. He sang, “Shorty George ain’t no friend of mine.”

### **37. JOEL HOPKINS MATCHBOX BLUES**

**Joel Hopkins, vocal and guitar**  
(from tape O15, FR14, recorded 31 October, 1959)

This is one of Blind Lemon Jefferson’s best-known compositions, first recorded in March 1927. Dozens of blues artists in Texas and elsewhere have covered it in the decades that followed. In 1956, rockabilly guitarist Carl Perkins adapted and recorded Jefferson’s song as “Matchbox” on Memphis’s Sun Records label.

### **38. BLUES WALLACE IT’S MY LIFE BABY**

**Blues Wallace, vocal and guitar with band**  
(from tape 542, recorded 1966)

This recording, which conveys the raw sound of a Houston club, is one of the rare instances when McCormick’s tapes and papers provide no leads on the identity of the performer: Blues Wallace, one of the few electric guitarists recorded by McCormick. In 1955 for Houston’s Duke Records, Bobby “Blue” Bland recorded this song—credited to label owner Don Robey.

### **39. ANDREW EVERETT HELLO CENTRAL, GIMME 209**

**Andrew Everett, vocal and guitar**  
(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 1, recorded 1959, Houston, Texas)

After the invention of the telephone, the phrase “Hello Central” found its way into many songs, including “Hello Central Give Me Heaven,” Lightning’ Hopkins’s recording of “Hello Central (Give Me Central),” and Huddie “Lead Belly” Ledbetter’s recording of “Hello Central, Give Me Long Distance Phone.” Hopkins also recorded a similar version of the rendition provided here by Andrew Everett.

### **40. JIM WILKIE BAD LEE BROWN**

**Jim Wilkie, vocal and guitar**  
(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 1, recorded May 1, 1958)

This song (aka “Little Sadie”) exists in various forms and appears in many old folk song collections, as early as Vance Randolph’s *Ozark Folk Songs*, vol. II (1922). Its earliest recording was by Clarence Ashley in 1929. Many well-known artists, from Woody Guthrie to Johnny Cash, have also recorded the song over the years.

### **41. R.C. FOREST and GOZY KILPATRICK TIN CAN ALLEY BLUES**

**R.C. Forest, vocal and guitar; Gozy Kirkpatrick, harmonium**  
(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 2, March 1959, Houston, Texas)

Forest and Kilpatrick’s distinctive version of “Tin Can Alley Blues” derives from Lonnie Johnson’s 1928 recording of the song on the Okeh label.

### **42. MURL “DOC” WEBSTER MEDICINE SHOW PITCH**

**Doc Webster, voice**  
(from tape O14, FR 13, recorded 1963, Kendleton, Texas)

McCormick’s interests in recording the sounds of Texas ventured beyond music and into the verbal arts. He researched and met with auctioneers, as well as performers in tent and medicine shows, which employed many Texas blues musicians over the years. This recording is an example by Doc Webster of a typical “medicine show pitch.”

### **43. MANCE LIPSCOMB SO DIFFERENT BLUES**

**Mance Lipscomb, vocal and guitar**  
(from tape 485, ML 23, recorded August 1, 1965, Navasota, Texas)

On tape, McCormick called “So Different Blues” one of his favorite original tunes by Mance Lipscomb.

#### 44. JAMES TISDOM I FEEL SO GOOD

**James Tisdom, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 019, FR 17; recorded possibly 1968, Corpus Christi, Texas)

Big Bill Broonzy wrote and recorded “I Feel So Good” in 1941. In 1948, Andrew “Smokey” Hogg recorded it. James Tisdom recorded his own version in 1950 for the Universal Fox label.

Broonzy was referring to a song, “Ballin’ the Jack” which was a song and popular dance in the 1910s. The title is a railroad term meaning going at full speed, but in blues and other popular recordings it has also implied dancing, as well as suggested a sexual reference.

#### 45. LIGHTNIN’ HOPKINS MR. CHARLIE

**Lightnin’ Hopkins, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 388, MD 8/9, recorded March 15, 1962, Houston, Texas)

Lightnin’ Hopkins often performed “Mr. Charlie” before live audiences. In this story song, the young protagonist typically stutters unless he sings, and as such shares to his employer in a novel way the news that his mill is burning down. In 1968, filmmaker Les Blank released a short film of Hopkins’s “Mr. Charlie.”

#### 46. EDWIN “BUSTER” PICKENS THE MA GRINDER

**Buster Pickens, vocal and piano**

(from tape 026, FR 25, recorded possibly August 17, 1960, Houston, Texas)

Most blues piano players in Texas in the early 20th century knew this tune but gave it their own stamp. It was often an audition piece for someone trying to get a job. Robert Shaw told Paul Oliver, “When a new man came coming for work, the bartender’d tell him ‘Let me hear you knock out “The Ma Grinder.””

#### 47. PAUL ELLIOTT DEEP ELLUM BLUES

**Paul Elliott, vocal and guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 2; recorded October 1959, Houston, Texas)

Elm Street, aka “Deep Ellum,” is one of the central streets in downtown Dallas, notorious for prostitution and gambling. Throughout Deep Ellum, blues singers and string bands played on the streets, in barrelhouses, and in clubs. The Cofer Brothers first recorded the song in 1923. Numerous other artists, including the Grateful Dead, have also recorded it.

#### 48. ANDREW EVERETT K.C. AIN’T NOTHING BUT A RAG

**Andrew Everett, guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 1, recorded 1959, Houston, Texas)

After McCormick first encountered Andrew Everett, he recorded and then included him on the first volume of his *Treasury of Field Recordings*. Everett was no stranger to the railroad, having been involved in track lining and freight-car loading. This is one of many vernacular songs with “K.C.” or “Kansas City” in the title.

#### 49. KID WIGGINS LONESOME ROAD

**Kid Wiggins, vocal; Buster Pickens, piano**

(from tape TBAD 3, 086, recorded May 1961, Houston, Texas)

Another song of Wiggins recorded by McCormick.

#### 50. DENNIS GAINUS OLD JUDGE BLUES

**Dennis Gainus, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 087, recorded May 1, 1959)

This song begins much like Furry Lewis’s “Judge Harsh Blues.” However, Gainus then incorporates several verses from other songs into this performance, including Lewis’s “Kassie Jones.”

#### 51. MELVIN “JACK” JACKSON and LIGHTNIN’ HOPKINS THE SLOP

**Jack Jackson, piano; Lightnin’ Hopkins, vocal and guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 2, recorded January 25, 1960, Houston, Texas)

This is a short improvised piano piece with interplay between Jack Jackson and Lightnin’ Hopkins.

#### 52. LIGHTNIN’ HOPKINS CORRINE, CORRINA

**Lightnin’ Hopkins, vocal and guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 1; recorded July 13, 1959, Houston, Texas)

Lightnin’ Hopkins told McCormick that this was an old song: “older than me twice, I sang it when I was young, and my daddy said he sang it when young, it may be older than him twice.” A variant appeared as sheet music in 1918. Bo Carter recorded the song in 1928, followed by the Mississippi Sheiks in 1930. Many musical genres have treated the song.

#### 53. JIMMY WOMACK TALKING BLUES

**Jimmy Womack, vocal and guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 1; recorded April 1959, Houston, Texas)

Jimmy Womack’s version contributes to a “Talking Blues” genealogy that dates to 1926, when South Carolinian Chris Bouchillion recorded “Original Talking Blues Man.” The style has roots in African American performance traditions, which Bouchillion adopted after hearing that his singing ability was not up to snuff, but his speaking voice had character. The style invites wit and fits with clever protest-song traditions by Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, and others.

## 54. JOEL HOPKINS GOOD TIMES HERE, BETTER TIMES DOWN THE ROAD

**Joel Hopkins, vocal and guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 1, June 12, 1959, Dickinson, Texas)

Joel Hopkins recorded this song for Mack McCormick in June 1959 in Dickinson, Texas.

It first appeared on the album, *Joel Hopkins*, on the Heritage label (later reissued by Document).

## 55. ROBERT SHAW PUT ME IN THE ALLEY

**Robert Shaw, vocal and piano**

(from tape 030, FR 20, recorded June 10, 1963, Austin, Texas)

“Put Me in the Alley” was popular among blues piano players in Texas. It was closely associated with the pianist Peg Leg Will.

## 56. WALTER BRITTEN AUCTIONEER

**Walter Britten, voice**

(from tape 042 FR 42, recorded February 26, 1966)

McCormick was interested in a variety of vocal traditions outside of singing, and occasionally recorded them. Famed Texas auctioneer Walter Britten plies his trade in this 1966 recording. For years, the Britten Auction Academy, named after him, trained some of the finest auctioneers in Texas.

## 57. HARDY GRAY RUNAWAY

**Hardy Gray, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 511, recorded 1968, Alabama)

Hardy Gray recorded this song during McCormick’s trip to Alabama in 1968. No other versions of this song are known, so Gray may have penned it.

## 58. HOP WILSON BROKE AND HUNGRY

**Hop Wilson, vocal and steel guitar**

(from tape 055, FR 43, recorded March 9, 1966, Houston, Texas)

Hop Wilson originally recorded this song in 1958 for Eddie Shuler’s Louisiana label, Goldband Records.

Goldband singles like this one were popular selections on local jukeboxes from Lafayette to Houston.

## 59. MAGER JOHNSON BIG ROAD BLUES

**Mager Johnson, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 575, recorded in Crystal Springs, Mississippi)

Mager Johnson made few recordings, but for decades he locally performed many of the songs written by his brother Tommy. Originally from Crystal Springs, Mississippi, Tommy frequently played on Mississippi sharecropping plantations, where he crossed paths with other legendary bluesmen, such as Charley Patton and Willie Brown. He first recorded in 1928 and participated in only two recording sessions, but his songs are legendary. “Big Road Blues” is perhaps his best-known song; the rock group Canned Heat adapted the lyrics for their 1968 hit, “On the Road Again.”

## 60. MANCE LIPSCOMB CASEY JONES

**Mance Lipscomb, vocal and guitar**

(from tape 526, ML 2, recorded 1960)

The legend of railroad engineer Casey Jones has attracted many songwriters. Vaudevillians Eddie Newton and Lawrence Seibert wrote and published the song in 1909, telling an interviewer that their inspiration was a song associated with African American singers, “started by a roundhouse worker named Wallace Saunders.” John Luther Jones (1863–1900) from Cayce, Kentucky (his nickname Casey arose from his hometown) died when the train he was driving, the southbound passenger train No. 1 of the Illinois Central Railroad, collided with part of a stopped freight train on April 30, 1900. True to the song, the fireman Sim Webb leapt from the train at the last moment and survived. Through the popularity of the songs about him, Casey Jones has become an American legend.

## 61. JIMMY WOMACK ATOMIC ENERGY

**Jimmy Womack, vocal and guitar**

(from the *Treasury of Field Recordings*, vol. 2, recorded March 29, 1959, Houston, Texas)

Many songwriters in the 1950s recorded topical songs about the fears and anxieties of living in the atomic age, as well as the presumed exciting possibilities—albeit often propagandized by the government. This is Jimmy Womack’s own contribution to this Cold War genre about the changes the atom bomb brought to modern life.



**62. LONG GONE MILES with  
LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS and  
LOVE CRAZY  
NATURAL BORN LOVER**

**Long Gone Miles, vocal and guitar; Lightnin' Hopkins, vocal  
and guitar; Love Crazy, vocal**  
(from tape 396, MD 12/13)

A previously unreleased track, this interplay between Long Gone Miles and Lightnin' Hopkins has the feel of one of those classic songs that Hopkins made up on the spot.

**63. E.B. BUSBY  
SWANEE RIVER BOOGIE**

**E.B. Busby, piano**  
(from tape 025 FR 24, recorded 25 April 1963, Conroe, Texas)

During the 1930s and 1940s, a craze for boogie-woogie piano swept house parties and dance halls. When John Hammond organized his first "From Spirituals to Swing" concert at Carnegie Hall in 1938, he featured three of the best-known boogie-woogie pianists: Meade Lux Lewis, Pete Johnson, and Albert Ammons. Billed as the Boogie-Woogie Trio, they played three pianos in tandem. Ammons contributed "Swanee River Boogie," which he first recorded in 1946. Ammons took the song to Number 5 on the Billboard Rhythm and Blues charts as the song gained popularity throughout the country.

**64. LONG GONE MILES  
ROCK ME BABY**

**Long Gone Miles, vocal and guitar**  
(from tape 004, FR 6)

Lil' Son Jackson recorded an earlier version of the song as "Rockin' and Rollin'," which seems to have provided the model for subsequent versions, including this version by Long Gone Miles. B.B. King's version became one of his best-known singles.

**65. LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS  
BLUES JUMPED A RABBIT**

**Lightnin' Hopkins, vocal and guitar**  
(from tape 508 LL1)

This is an unreleased track from McCormick's fieldwork. In the song, Lightnin' Hopkins combines the lyrics from several Blind Lemon Jefferson songs, including "Rabbit Foot Blues" and "Long Lonesome Blues."

**66. GEORGE "BONGO JOE"  
COLEMAN  
GEORGE COLEMAN FOR  
PRESIDENT, NOBODY FOR  
VICE PRESIDENT**

**Bongo Joe, vocal and steel drum**  
(from tape 580, recorded in Galveston, Texas)

Bongo Joe Coleman closes out the collection by pitching his presidential candidacy to passing tourists in Galveston.

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# FIELD AND RESEARCH RECORDINGS IN THE McCORMICK COLLECTION

**The first number is a Smithsonian assigned number. The number in parentheses is McCormick's own number scheme. This list of research tapes is a subset of the full collection.**

- 001 (FR3) Dennis Gainus, Melvin "Jack" Johnson, May 1, 1959
- 002 (FR4) Dudley Alexander and Vincent Frank playing zydeco at Irene's, April 1959
- 003 (FR5) John Lomax Jr.
- 004 (FR6) Various Houston artists
- 005 (FR6) Bongo Joe (George Coleman), June 12, 1959
- 006 (FR7) Dr. John Q, Anderson lecture on Texas music history
- 007 (FR8) Joan Sloan, fiddle
- 008 (FRD 9/10) Jimmy Womack, April 1959, Houston
- 009 (FR9) Jimmy Womack, April 1959, Houston; Marcellus Thomas
- 010 (FR10) Jimmy Womack, April 1959, Houston
- 011 (FR11) Jimmy Womack, November 1965
- 012 (FR12) Jimmy Womack
- 013 (FR12/13) Buster Pickens, August 1960; Lord Alfred, May 1961
- 014 (FR13) Buster Pickens, Kid Wiggins, Dr. Murl Webster's Medicine Show, May 1961
- 015 (FR14) Joel Hopkins, October 31, 1959 (material for Heritage album)
- 016 (FR15) Leroy Johnson, September 1961, Folksay radio show hosted by Mack McCormick
- 017 (FR16/17) James Tisdom
- 018 copy of 017
- 019 (FRD 17/18) James Tisdom
- 020 (FR18) James Tisdom dub
- 021 (FR19) Preacher Nelson, recorded by Tary Owens in Cameron, Texas, in 1966, some material released by Catfish Records
- 022 (FR20) Robert Shaw, April 25, 1962
- 023 (FR21) Robert Shaw, Preacher Nelson, recorded ca. March 1963
- 024 (FR22) Allen Vann, jazz band leader, March 19, 1962, San Antonio
- 025 (FR24) E.J. Busby, piano, children's games, April 25, 1963
- 026 (FR25) Buster Pickens, spare tracks, recorded August 1960
- 027 (FR27) Robert Shaw
- 028 (FR27/28) Robert Shaw dub
- 029 (FR28/29) Robert Shaw dub
- 030 (FR29) Robert Shaw, June 10, 1963
- 031 (FR30) W.J. Jackson interview, medicine show performer
- 032 (FR33) Lead Belly at University of Texas, Austin, June 15, 1949, dub
- 033 (FR34) Lead Belly at University of Texas, Austin, June 15, 1949, dub
- 034 (FR35) Grey Ghost (Roosevelt Williams), November 1964
- 035 (FR36) Grey Ghost (Roosevelt Williams), November 1964
- 036 (FR37) Bill Neely, cowboy songs
- 037 (FR38) Bill Neely, cowboy songs
- 038 (FR39) Tommy Wright, Teodar Jackson, June 1965, uncertain recordist
- 039 (FR40) Randolph J. Brooks, November 1965
- 040 (FR41) Various cattlemen telling lies and stories, February 1966
- 041 (FR41) Various cattlemen telling lies and stories, February 1966, dub
- 042 (FR42) Auctions dub, Walter Britten, auctioneer, unknown blues guitar
- 043 (FR51) Interview with relatives and friends of Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter, including Toledo Bond King (b. 1918, son of Walter Boyd), Zollie Jones (b. 1894), Ida Jones; Ida Lee Johnson singing gospel
- 044 (FR52) Lonnie Starnes, country singer
- 045 (FR53) Houston piano players
- 046 (FR54) Houston piano players
- 047 (FR55) Buster Pickens at a club with a woman vocalist, possibly August 1960
- 048 (FR56) Buster Pickens and Leroy Johnson, Houston, part 1
- 050 (LL1) Lemon Legacy, various artists, Joel Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb
- 051 (LOD1) Recorded at the Alley Theatre Hootenanny, outtakes, March 15, 1962
- 052 (FR) Bongo Joe (George Coleman)
- 053 (FR11) Hop Wilson
- 054 (FR46) Hop Wilson at Irene's, March 9, 1966
- 055 (FR43) Hop Wilson at Irene's, March 9, 1966
- 056 (FR44) Hop Wilson
- 057 (FR45) Walter Britten, auctioneer, February 26, 1966; Lightnin' Hopkins at Irene's
- 058 (FR46) Hop Wilson at Irene's, March 9, 1966
- 059 (FR48) Emma Pulce, ballad singer, New Boston, Texas
- 060 (FR49) Emma Pulce, ballad singer, New Boston, Texas
- 061 (LL2) Lemon Legacy, Herman Johnson, Robert Pete Williams, Pete Harris
- 062 (LL3) Lemon and Alexander Family, interviews about Lemon Jefferson with Texas Alexander families
- 063 (NM-5) Mrs. Vincentia Vigil, New Mexico
- 064 New Mexico fieldwork
- 065 (NM-9) Felix Martinez
- 066 (NM-11/12) Club Bohemico cantina recordings, 1967
- 067 (NBM1) New Mexico fieldwork
- 068 (NBM2) New Mexico fieldwork
- 069 (NBD2) New Mexico fieldwork
- 070 (NBD1) New Mexico fieldwork
- 084 (TBAD1) Research recordings for *A Treasury of Field Recordings*: Dennis Gainus
- 085 (TBAD2) Research recordings for *A Treasury of Field Recordings*: Smokey Hogg, Manny Nichols, Jewell Long
- 086 (TBAD3) Research recordings for *A Treasury of Field Recordings*: Lead Belly, Buster Pickens, Kid Wiggins, Preacher Nelson, Utah Smith
- 087 (TBAD4) Research recordings for *A Treasury of Field Recordings*: R.C. Forest and Gozy Kirkpatrick, Texas Alexander, James Stanchell, Vincent Frank, Utah Smith, Dennis Gainus, Jack Johnson
- 088 (TBAD5) Research recordings for *A Treasury of Field Recordings*: Marcellus Thomas, Mance Lipscomb, Joel Hopkins, Robert Shaw
- 089 (TBAD6) Research recordings for *A Treasury of Field Recordings*: Mance Lipscomb, Andrew Everett
- 090 (TBAM1) Research recordings for *A Treasury of Field Recordings*: Little Son Jackson, Big Joe Turner, Frankie Lee Sims, Andrew Everett, Goree Carter, Clarence Samuels
- 091 (TBAM2) Research recordings for *A Treasury of Field Recordings*: Clarence Garlow, Smokey Hogg, Manny Nichols
- 092 (TBAM3) Research recordings for *A Treasury of Field Recordings*: Little Son Jackson, Big Joe Turner, Clarence Samuels
- 093 Robert Shaw, March 1966
- 095 Robert Shaw
- 097 Almanac 10A, Robert Shaw, *Texas Barrelhouse Piano* album (reissued on Arhoolie) master
- 098 Almanac 10A, Robert Shaw, *Texas Barrelhouse Piano* album (reissued on Arhoolie) master
- 099 Lightnin' Hopkins Blues, side 2
- 100 Long Gone Miles, Lightnin' Hopkins, and Love Crazy, side 1
- 102 Ivor Price, Welsh hymns with harp
- 104 Ivor Price, Welsh hymns with harp
- 145 Festival of American Folklife at *Man and His World*, Montreal, January 1971, Claude Williams, Jay McShann

FIELD AND RESEARCH RECORDINGS

- 149 Festival of American Folklife at *Man and His World*, Montreal, 1971, Bill Williams, Coon Creek Girls, Robert Pete Williams
- 256 Festival of American Folklife at *Man and His World*, Montreal, August 28, 1971, Bill Williams, bluesman from Greenup, Kentucky
- 273 (MLD 16/22) Mance Lipscomb, April 1963
- 281 (BG1) Dubs of Blind Lemon Jefferson, 78s for research
- 282 (BG2) Dubs of Blind Lemon Jefferson, 78s for research
- 283 (B2) Dubs of Blind Lemon Jefferson, 78s for research
- 284 Dubs of Blind Lemon Jefferson, 78s for research
- 285 (BG3) Dubs of Blind Lemon Jefferson, 78s for research
- 286 (BG4) Dubs of Blind Lemon Jefferson, 78s for research
- 287 (BG5) Dubs of Blind Lemon Jefferson, 78s for research
- 333 (NM13) New Mexico fieldwork
- 334 Trio Laredo
- 335 Dubs of Henry Thomas Jefferson, 78s for research
- 338 Bawdy Songs
- 339 John Neal, singing gospel, June 27, 1968, Henderson, Texas
- 340 (NM1) New Mexico: Radio shows
- 341 (NM2) New Mexico: MAS Fernandez, July 7, 1967
- 342 (NM3) New Mexico: Interview with Fernando Martinez, David Martinez, Christine Carcasson
- 343 (NM4) New Mexico: Manuel Vigil
- 344 (NM6) New Mexico: Reies Tijerina, Albuquerque
- 345 (NM7) New Mexico: Reies Tijerina, Albuquerque
- 346 (NM10) New Mexico: Reies Tijerina, Albuquerque, March 2, 1967
- 347 (NM14) New Mexico fieldwork
- 354 (PE6) Prison recordings: song leader Albert Paul East, Lee Prothro, R.G. Williams
- 355 (PE7) Prison recordings
- 356 (PE8) Prison recordings, July 3, 1965
- 357 (PE9) Prison recordings, July 3, 1965
- 358 (PE10) Prison recordings
- 359 (PE11) Prison recordings: Albert Paul East, Lee Prothro, R.G. Williams, July 3, 1965
- 360 (PE12) Prison recordings: Albert Paul East, Lee Prothro, R.G. Williams, July 3, 1965
- 361 (PE13) Prison recordings: Albert Paul East, Lee Prothro, R.G. Williams, July 3, 1965
- 362 (PE14) Prison recordings: Albert Paul East, Lee Prothro, R.G. Williams, July 3, 1965
- 363 (PE15) Prison recordings: Ramsey State Farm, Otey, Texas
- 372 (AM10) safeties (Almanac?) Robert Shaw, Texas Barrelhouse
- 373 (AM11) James Tisdom, June 13, 1968
- 374 (AM11) James Tisdom, June 13, 1968
- 375 (AM12) Lead Belly at University of Texas, part 1A
- 376 (AM14) James Tisdom
- 378 *Treasury of Field Recordings*, v. 2, Master #3, dub of LP
- 379 Long Gone Miles
- 380 (LOD3) Long Gone Miles (with Lightnin' Hopkins)
- 381 (MD1/2) *Unexpurgated Songs of Men*, side 1, bawdy songs sung by members of the Houston Folklore Group
- 382 (MD2) *Unexpurgated Songs of Men*, side 2
- 383 (MD3) *Unexpurgated Songs of Men*, copy of album, sides 1 and 2
- 384 (MD4) *Unexpurgated Songs of Men*, side 2
- 387 (MD6/7) Hootenanny in the Round, Alley Theatre
- 388 (MD8/9) Lightnin' Hopkins, Alley Theatre part 2 (dub), March 15, 1962
- 389 (MD8/9) Hootenanny leftovers
- 390 (MD10, SHD4) Lightnin' Hopkins
- 391 (MD10/11) Lightnin' Hopkins
- 392 Lightnin' Hopkins, Alley Theatre, Hootenanny in the Round, retakes
- 393 Lightnin' Hopkins, Alley Theatre, Hootenanny in the Round, side 1
- 394 (M1) *Unexpurgated Songs of Men*
- 395 (M10) Lightnin' Hopkins Blues, side 1
- 396 (MD12/13) Long Gone Miles (with Lightnin' Hopkins)
- 399 (PE16) Prison recordings: Johnny Jackson, Houston Page, Fredell Fly, Robert Hopwood
- 400 (PE17) Prison recordings: Johnny Jackson, Houston Page, Fredell Fly, Robert Hopwood
- 401 (PE18) Prison recordings: Johnny Jackson, Houston Page, Fredell Fly, Robert Hopwood
- 402 (PE19) Prison recordings: Johnny Jackson, Houston Page, Fredell Fly, Robert Hopwood
- 403 (PE20) Prison recordings: dub Ramsey State Farm, January 1, 1966; Johnny Jackson, Houston Page, Fredell Fly, Robert Hopwood
- 404 (PE21) Dub Ramsey State Farm, January 1, 1966; Johnny Jackson, Houston Page, Fredell Fly, Robert Hopwood
- 405 (PE23) Prison recordings
- 406 (PE24) Prison recordings: Ellis Jail Unit and Wynne Jail Unit, August 1965
- 407 (PE25) Prison recordings: Ellis Jail Unit and Wynne Jail Unit, dubs August 1965
- 408 (PE26) Prison recordings: Ellis Jail Unit, Dave Tiptino, August 1965
- 409 (PE27) Prison recordings: Ellis Jail Unit dubs, various groups
- 410 (PE28) Prison recordings: Wynne Jail Unit, dirty poems, toasts
- 411 (PE29) Prison recordings: Wynne Jail Unit, conjunto group, August 1965
- 412 (PE30) Prison recordings: Wynne Jail Unit
- 417 (SH8B) Lightnin' Hopkins, July 5, 1961
- 418 (SH10) Lightnin' Hopkins, July 26, 1961
- 419 (SH11) Lightnin' Hopkins, Prestige Records 1 of 5, February 1962
- 420 (SH12) Lightnin' Hopkins, Bluesville/Prestige Records 2 of 5, February 1962
- 421 (SH13) Lightnin' Hopkins, Prestige Records 3 of 5, February 1962
- 422 (SH14) February 1962, material from *Walkin' This Road by Myself* album
- 423 (SH15) Lightnin' Hopkins at the Alley Theatre, 50th Birthday, March 15, 1962
- 424 (SH16) Lightnin' Hopkins at the Alley Theatre, 50th Birthday, March 15, 1962
- 425 (SH17) Lightnin' Hopkins, substitutes and dubs
- 426 (SH18) Lightnin' Hopkins, piano, January 25, 1960
- 427 (SH19) Lightnin' Hopkins, Tradition Records album, side 1
- 428 (SH20) Lightnin' Hopkins, Tradition Records album, sides 1 and 2
- 429 (SH21) Lightnin' Hopkins, Tradition Records album, side 2
- 430 (SH22) Lightnin' Hopkins, Prestige Records, side 1
- 431 (SH23) Lightnin' Hopkins, Prestige Records, sides 1 and 2
- 432 (SH24) Lightnin' Hopkins, Prestige Records, side 2; Vee Jay Records
- 433 (SH25) Lightnin' Hopkins, Vee Jay Records and Fire Records
- 434 (SH26) Lightnin' Hopkins, Fire Records 104
- 435 (SH27) Lightnin' Hopkins, Arhoolie Records, Folkways Records
- 436 (SH28) Lightnin' Hopkins, Folkways Records, Candid Records
- 437 (SH29) Lightnin' Hopkins, Candid Records
- 438 (SH30) Lightnin' Hopkins, Gold Star Records
- 439 (SH31) Lightnin' Hopkins, Time Records, Gold Star Records
- 440 (SH32) Lightnin' Hopkins, Time Records, RPM Records

- 441 (SHD3) Lightnin' Hopkins, 77 Records, *The Rooster Crowed in England* album
- 442 (SHD8/9/10/11) Lightnin' Hopkins, studio, mostly matches *Blues in My Bottle/Walkin' This Road by Myself* albums
- 443 (SHD8/12/13) Lightnin' Hopkins
- 444 (SHD13/14/19/8) Lightnin' Hopkins
- 445 (SHD15/16) Lightnin' Hopkins, Alley Theatre
- 457 (SH33) Lightnin' Hopkins, Herald Records, RPM Record, Crown Records
- 458 (LL4) songs related to Blind Lemon Jefferson
- 459 Lightnin' Hopkins, Hootenanny in the Round, side 2; May 8 and 9, 1962; Lightnin' in the Alley Theatre, side 1
- 464 (ML1) Mance Lipscomb, June 30, 1960
- 465 (ML3) Mance Lipscomb, interview, May 30, 1961
- 466 (ML4) Marcellus Thomas; Mance Lipscomb, July 1, 1961
- 478 (ML16) Mance Lipscomb, April 1963
- 479 (ML17) Mance Lipscomb, April 1963
- 480 (ML18) Mance Lipscomb, April 1963
- 481 (ML19) Mance Lipscomb, April 1963, includes interview
- 482 (ML20) Mance Lipscomb, April 1963
- 483 (ML21) Mance Lipscomb, April 1963
- 484 (ML 22) Mance Lipscomb, April 1963
- 485 (ML23) Mance Lipscomb, Navasota, Texas, August 1, 1965
- 486 (ML24) Mance Lipscomb, Navasota, Texas, August 1, 1965
- 487 (ML25) Mance Lipscomb, live show, August 1, 1965, Austin, Texas
- 488 (ML26) Mance Lipscomb, August 22, 1965, at Country Supply
- 489 (ML27) Mance Lipscomb, August 22, 1965
- 490 (ML28) Mance Lipscomb, August 22, 1965
- 491 Mance Lipscomb and others, live radio, April 14, 1962, side 2
- 492 Mance Lipscomb and others, live radio, April 14, 1962, side 3
- 493 (LL5) Blind Lemon Jefferson, 78 dubs
- 496 (SH3) Lightnin' Hopkins, masters 77 Records, *A Treasury of Field Recordings*
- 497 (SH4) Lightnin' Hopkins, masters Heritage Records 1001
- 498 (SH5) Lightnin' Hopkins, interview, Folksay radio show
- 499 (SH6) John Lomax Jr. and Lightnin' Hopkins, Santa Monica, California, July 1960
- 500 (SH7) Lightnin' Hopkins *Last Night Blues*, side 1; *Lightning Strikes Again* dub
- 501 (SH8A) Lightnin' Hopkins, July 26, 1961
- 502 (SH9) Lightnin' Hopkins, July 26, 1961
- 503 Ed Mack Ranch, Shawnee, Oklahoma, August 3, 1969, powwow
- 504 (RD33/34) Lead Belly recorded at University of Texas, Austin
- 505 (FR66) Texas Czech Bands
- 508 Spiritual Light Gospel Group
- 509 Ray Baca, Czech band, June 1967
- 511 Joe Patterson, Alabama recordings; Vergie Cain, Crystal Springs, Mississippi, April 3, 1970, interviews on Robert Johnson (ex-partner)
- 514 Jay McShann; interviews with various jump artists on telephone, January 1972
- 518 Hardy Gray, 1968
- 520 Audrey Boyce interview about Walter Boyd, DeKalb, Texas, April 24, 1966
- 522 Elder Alonzo Lawrence, three sermons, October 1969
- 523 Ellis CeDell Davis and James Lee, December 1969, Arkansas
- 526 (ML2) Joel Hopkins and Mance Lipscomb, 1960
- 527 Joe Patterson
- 531 Lead Belly recorded at University of Texas, Austin, 1949, #2 (dub of acetate)
- 532 Lead Belly recorded at University of Texas, Austin, 1949
- 533 KUEN Cajun Radio: Revon Reed and others at Fred Tate's Lounge in Cajun French
- 534 KUEN Cajun Radio: Revon Reed and others at Fred Tate's Lounge in Cajun French
- 535 Roberta Holmes Hawkins (about her husband, King Solomon Hill), Henry Lewis, Susan Mae Lewis, Joe C. Williams, Serce Butler, November 27, 1969, Sibley, Louisiana
- 540 Otis Cook, Elgin, Texas, September 14, 1971
- 541 Jay McShann and Jimmy Witherspoon, Festival of American Folklife at *Man and His World*, Montreal, 1971
- 542 Blues Wallace, electric guitar and band, 1966
- 543 Tyler String Band with Slim Jackson
- 548 Manuel Holmes. Andrew Everett
- 550 Dennis McGee, Cajun fiddle
- 551 Ed Mack Ranch, Shawnee, Oklahoma, possibly powwow
- 552 Ed Mack Ranch, Shawnee, Oklahoma, possibly powwow
- 553 Otis Cook, February 9, 1971
- 554 James Ross, July 1966
- 556 (FR57) Buster Pickens and Leroy Johnson
- 563 Blues Wallace, KCET
- 564 Australia Carr (Lead Belly's younger stepsister), 1969, Texas, part 1
- 565 Doc Webster's Medicine Show (snake oil pitchman and tricks); George Coleman (Bongo Joe)
- 569 Australia Carr (Lead Belly's younger stepsister), interviewed about Lead Belly about family, 1969, Texas, part 2
- 571 Cajun music: Alphonse Dugas, Ernest Hebout, June 15, 1968
- 575 Mager Johnson (Tommy Johnson's brother), Crystal Springs, Mississippi
- 576 James Ross, July 1966, interview
- 577 George Coleman (Bongo Joe), tape 2, October 1966, Galveston
- 578 George Coleman (Bongo Joe) tape 4, October 1966, Galveston
- 580 George Coleman (Bongo Joe), tape 3, October 1966, Galveston
- 581 (FR) Skip-rope songs
- 585 Elder Alonzo Lawrence, preaching, February 10, 1969
- 586 Elder Alonzo Lawrence, preaching, February 10, 1969
- 588 Willie Redman; Alphonse Dugas
- 589 George Coleman (Bongo Joe), October 1966, tape 1
- 590 (M3) *Unexpurgated Songs of Men*

# ABOUT THE PRODUCERS

**Jeff Place** has been curator and senior archivist at the Center's Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections since 1988. He oversaw the cataloging of the Center's collections and has been involved in the compilation of more than 60 CDs and books of American music for Smithsonian Folkways Recordings including the Lead Belly Legacy Series, *Lead Belly Sings for Children*; the Pete Seeger *American Favorite Ballads* series; and *The Asch Recordings* (Woody Guthrie). Place has received nominations for eight GRAMMY Awards and 12 Indie Awards, winning three GRAMMYS and six Indies. He was one of the producers and writers of the acclaimed 1997 edition of the *Anthology of American Folk Music* and *The Best of Broadside, 1962–1988* (2000). He produced and co-authored (with Robert Santelli) the publication and CD-box set *Woody at 100* (2012) and *Lead Belly: The Smithsonian Folkways Collection* (2014). His other publications include *Pete Seeger: The Smithsonian Folkways Collection* (2019), *The Social Power of Music* (2019), and *Jazz Fest: The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival* (2019).

**John W. Troutman** is curator of music and musical instruments at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. His book *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879–1934* (2009), won the Western History Association's biennial W. Turrentine Jackson Prize for a first book on any aspect of the American West. His book *Kīkā Kīla: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music* (2016) won five book awards, including the Organization of American Historians' Lawrence W. Levine Award for the "Best Book in American Cultural History" and the American Musicological Society's Music in American Culture Award. He is the lead curator of the National Museum of American History's exhibition *Entertainment Nation* and co-editor of its catalog, as well as the editor of *Biography of a Phantom: A Robert Johnson Blues Odyssey* (2023), by Robert "Mack" McCormick. On pedal steel he has performed onstage with CC Adcock, Elvis Costello, Jockey Etienne, Dr. John, Lazy Lester, Robert Plant, Lil' Buck Sinegal, Florence Welch, and more.



# ETHICAL RETURNS WORK BY SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

With increasing urgency, museums are evaluating the ethics surrounding the histories and policies of their collections. Several original photographs of blues artists and/or their immediate families, discovered by curators and archivists while organizing the Robert “Mack” McCormick Collection, raised questions and prompted efforts to transfer them from Smithsonian ownership to the heirs of those who had appeared to only have lent them to McCormick over the years. The Smithsonian has been reckoning with questions of ethical ownership since at least the 1970s, when the protests of Indigenous peoples grew more prominent regarding their ancestors’ remains in Smithsonian collections. In 2022, the Smithsonian announced a formal policy to facilitate the ethical returns of qualified objects in its collections beyond those associated strictly with Indigenous peoples. Such work informed our curation of this collection and our extensive efforts to identify and contact the heirs of its featured artists.

As part of our efforts to recognize the creators of the music in our catalog, Smithsonian Folkways staff endeavor to identify and, where possible, contact and compensate the descendants and heirs of deceased musicians. This investigation process involves detailed research using primary and secondary historical sources as well as publicly available data, including federal census and military records, birth and death indices and voter registries, municipal property records, and obituaries. Every reasonable measure has been taken to enter into royalty agreements with the musicians’ heirs that we could contact, and any omissions are inadvertent. If you are an heir of a musician featured on this record, please send us a message at [royalties@si.edu](mailto:royalties@si.edu).

# CREDITS

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Portions of “The Man at the Door” essay were excerpted from *Biography of a Phantom: A Robert Johnson Blues Odyssey* by Robert “Mack” McCormick and edited by John W. Troutman, Smithsonian Books, 2023

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**Special thanks to:** Susannah Nix, Bill Kroger, Chris Strachwitz, Adam Machado, Craig Orr, David Haberstick, Carolyn Gleason, Matt Litts, Vanessa Broussard Simmons, Robert Horton, Cathy Keen, the Estate of Andrew A. Hanson

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