John Jackson's home. If I look to the East where the Jacksons lived most of the time prior to 1950, when John moved away. It was here that John worked on the Jones' farm — and here that the workers sang:

Farmer Jones and his corn — where does it grow?  
Cut two for the blackbird, two for the crow,  
Two to pull up and two to grow.

Well, time moves along and some things change — others don't. In 1860 there were 5,018 whites, 3,520 black slaves, and 312 free blacks in the County. Today there are 11,018 whites, 3,500 black slaves, and 312 free blacks in the County. Today there are 4,423 whites and 945 blacks. Farmer Jones' son is the Rappahannock County Clerk and John and his family moved into when John was 4 years old (or Jobbers) Mountain to the F.T. Valley top of the old Reid place where John was living salesmen, newcomers to the community, records (cylinder, 78, and LP's), radio, and television — to name a few sources. There are some songs in John's repertoire which seem to be much more restricted to his family. And there are purely coincidental occurrences in John's life which have had great influence on his music. For example, the acquaintance struck up by the Jackson family with "Happy," a waterboy on a road gang in the F.T. Valley when John was about 10 years old. From Happy came open tuning and guitar techniques which John might have missed had Happy been sent elsewhere to serve out his time.

When John was growing up, whites and blacks alike had house parties and dances and there was some mixing though to what degree each group learned the other's songs is not clear. MacEdward Leach and Horace Beck collected songs in the area in 1947 and again in 1949 and recorded about 160 songs from 22 people — white and colored. There are several examples of Negroes singing what are normally considered to be white ballads ("Lady Margaret," "Bold Soldier," "False Hearted Mary," and others) and there are several songs which are common to both groups ("Jessie James," "John Hardy," "Bill Bailey") generally. The repertoires of the two groups seem to be rather distinctive. We should point out that Leach and Beck did not stumble into any of the Jackson family or any of the 14 local musicians that John has learned songs from.

There is an additional factor involved in John's musical repertoire that we have found common to many other traditional musicians. That is, there is a tendency to stop adding songs from current popular sources when the musical style changes beyond a certain point. John has learned a few songs from Elvis Presley recordings but the evolution of "rock" beyond Presley was apparently too much of a style change. Too, the Presley songs that John learned were fairly straightforward blue songs.

The essence of John Jackson's uniqueness lies NOT in the fact that he plays or in the content of his repertoire but rather in his talent and creativity. Many other musicians from this area play much of the same material but John plays it better and adds something of his own genius to it. He will say, "Now I learned that from a 78 recording of Blind Blake — course, he didn't have that little slide in his hand, but that didn't stop him from playing it..." Compare the Blind Blake versions of "Early Morning Blues" and "Too Tight Rag" with John's versions on this record.

In summary then we can say that here is a talented and creative man whose pride in his work is reflected both in his music and in the square, clean sides of the graves he digs. His music repertoire consists of songs learned from recordings of the popular singers of his time — i.e., Race and Hillbilly recording artists; songs from various other sources, those with his peer group; and "personal songs," learned from his family, which have meaning beyond the songs themselves.

if space allowed we could discuss other factors which are important in the making of John Jackson, the musician — as well as John Jackson, the man. For example, the reproductive socio-economic system that has existed here for over a hundred years — replacing an even more repressive 200-year reign of chattel slavery — or the lack, until recently, of an opportunity for a high school education for Negroes. All we can say in conclusion is, Here is John Jackson — he is what he is both because of these factors and in spite of them.