The CHARLOTTE COUNTRY MUSIC STORY

WBT
You've Got Me Wrapped Around Your Finger
PILOT LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
CRAZY Water Crystals
PE-RU-NA
KOLOR-BAK
A Solution for Coloring Gray Hair
COMING!
CLAUDE CASEY
And His Pine State Playboys
Sparks
BLUEBIRD
Electrically Recorded
NOBODY'S DARLING ON EARTH
WBT
Stage
Radio

Presented by
North Carolina
Arts Council
Folklife Section
Spirit Square
Arts Center
Charlotte, NC
October 25, 26,1985

As President of the Board of Directors of Charlotte's community center for the arts, it is particularly exciting to host *The Charlotte Country Music Story.* In addition to marvelous entertainment, *The Charlotte Country Music Story* will preserve a part of this region's cultural heritage and recognize many of the artists whose pioneering work here in this community led to the formation of country music.

I am grateful to the many individuals and organizations named elsewhere in this book whose effort made *The Charlotte Country Music Story* possible. I especially wish to thank the Folklife Section of the North Carolina Arts Council for serving as the coordinator of the project.

Sincerely,

Roberto J. Suarez, *President*
Board of Directors

THE CHARLOTTE COUNTRY MUSIC STORY

George Holt is director of the Folklife Section of the North Carolina Arts Council and producer of The Charlotte Country Music Story.

The Charlotte Country Music Story is the culmination of many months of research and planning directed by the Folklife Section of the North Carolina Arts Council in partnership with the Spirit Square Arts Center of Charlotte. It represents a novel collaboration between a state and a local cultural agency to recover a vital piece of North Carolina's cultural history. Too often we fail to appreciate the value of cultural resources that exist close at hand; frequently, it takes an outside stimulus to enable us to regard our own heritage with appropriate objectivity and pride.

A young newcomer to Charlotte, Tom Hanchett, first proposed to Spirit Square Arts Center that a series of concerts be arranged to present some of the artists who helped make Charlotte a center of the emerging country music industry in the 1930's and '40s. A folk music enthusiast and a historian employed by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, Hanchett had learned that scores of important early country music artists, some professional, most amateur,came to Charlotte to broadcast on Charlotte's WBT, the most powerful radio station in the Carolinas, and to record for RCA Victor in makeshift recording studios located in the warehouse of Southern Radio Corporation and later at the Hotel Charlotte.

Taking an interest in Hanchett's proposal, Spirit Square approached the North Carolina Arts Council for support and soon thereafter the Council's Folklife Section agreed to direct the production.

The Charlotte Country Music Story is really a complex body of tales drawn from hundreds of individual family dramas and sweeping historical themes. In large terms, it is the story of struggling families caught in the throes of the industrialization of the Carolinas: the transformation of an essentially rural, agrarian society with its distinctive mix of customs and racial relationships to a more urban economy based on the manufacture of textiles, tobacco products, and furniture.

In the early decades of this century, hundreds of thousands of Carolinians abandoned their farms for the promise of a small but steady weekly wage at the cotton mills and factories. The farmers called it "public work" then, and those who answered the call found that they had driven a hard bargain. As exhausting and unprofitable as farm labor could be, it nonetheless afforded families a measure of independence and variation of routine, amenities largely denied them when they entered the mill village, run and owned by the company.

One of the great success stories arising from the social turmoil brought on by the farm-to-factory-town shift lies in the cultural resilience and creativity of the farmers and mill hands who bore the effects of change. *The Charlotte Country Music Story* celebrates these hard-working Southerners who carried their folk music and dance traditions to high levels of skill and accomplishment. The first country or hillbilly artists (as they were typically called in the 1920s and '30s) helped countless families cope with the pain of dislocation and lifted the spirits of millions of ordinary folk during the dark days of economic depression and war.

Their achievements are closely tied to the advent of commercial broadcasting and recording that permitted talented amateur musicians to reach vast audiences. In the early days, radio work and phonograph recordings did not bring in much money. Performers who proved popular on radio were encouraged to try to make a living by entertaining the public at schoolhouse concerts and community events where a small admission price could be charged.

With the wisdom of hindsight we can fully appreciate the accomplishments of these grass-roots performers who created a distinctive genre of American music and entertainment characterized by heartfelt sincerity and joyful exuberance, the best of which stands equal to the finest expressions of other art and entertainment forms.

It should be made clear that *The Charlotte Country Music Story* is meant not to bid farewell to an era but to open a new one in which Charlotteans and North Carolinians will lay claim to their cultural heritage with appreciation and understanding. Our program merely scratches the surface of one rich vein of North Carolina's cultural past. We hope that the celebration will stimulate others to work with their native cultural resources in imaginative and enlightened ways.

I regret that it is beyond our scope to deal adequately with the contributions of black Carolinians to the Charlotte story. Country music owes a great debt to the influences of Afro-American bluesmen and gospel singers. Significant recording of black artists took place in Charlotte during the 1930s and '40s and gospel quartets such as the Golden Gate Quartet and the Four Knights were well-loved performers on the radio. This is another story altogether which we must call attention to as soon as possible.

I am grateful that so many of the marvelous artists we honor can take part in our program and I hope that those who are unable to be here will realize how much we appreciate their contributions to the heritage of this state and nation.

George Holt

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CHARLOTTE COUNTRY A SIXTY YEAR TRADITION

John Rumble directs the Oral History Project for the Nashville-based Country Music Foundation, a private, non-profit organization that operates the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Many of the quotations used in this article come from interviews made for the Foundation's archives.

On a warm southern evening early in the 1940s, a country band stood waiting in a small schoolhouse in Patrick, South Carolina. It was a quarter till eight, but so far only the janitor was there to see the Briarhoppers, radio stars of Charlotte, North Carolina station WBT. "Come on, boys," sighed Roy "Whitey" Grant, one of the bandmembers."Let's put these instruments in the car and go back home." The janitor cautioned him: "Don't leave. This building'll be full." Just then, Grant recalls, "I started seeing wagons and lanterns and lights coming through the woods from different directions. Believe it or not, at eight o'clock that building was full, and people was sitting in the windows."

The incident speaks volumes about WBT country performers, the loyalty of their fans, and a fascinating era of music history. Back then there was no television, of course, only radio. Many rural or small-town folks set their watches by the Briarhoppers' weekday programs, and neighbors often gathered on Saturday nights to hear WBT barn dance shows featuring the station's country talent. When fans did see entertainers in person, it was often in a one- or two-room schoolhouse. Even concerts held in civic auditoriums were relatively homespun affairs compared to modern package shows with their banks of loudspeakers and complex lighting panels. Many of the schools had no electricity at all, explains mandolin player Arval Hogan: "We would just hit the stage and perform natural, without a p.a. system."

To those who haven't lived through it, the country music world of 1940 or 1950 may seem like another planet. But in those days of poor roads and limited incomes, a radio barn dance or schoolhouse show could be as exciting as Christmas or the Fourth of July. What's more, that world has left us a vital legacy. As Charlotte's 1985 country music festival proves, WBT veterans still know how to hold an audience with picking, singing, and all-around good times.

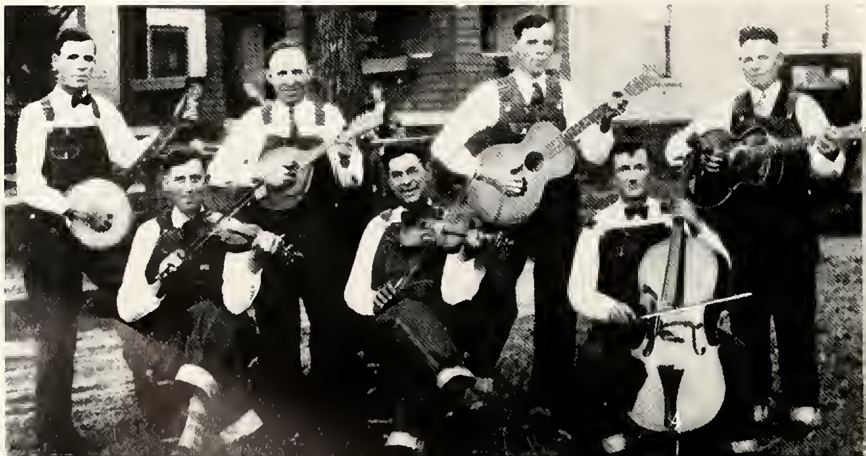
Promise, 1920–1940

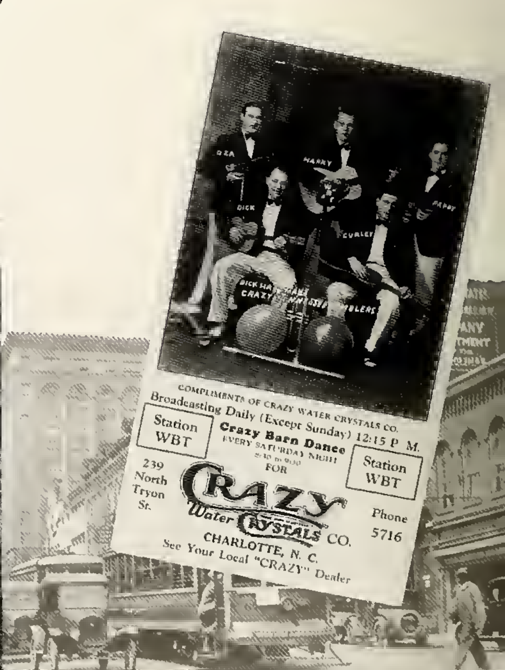
Radio was the key to country music in Charlotte from the 1920s to the 1950s. WBT, the city's flagship station, was founded in 1922, just two years after commercial radio broadcasting began. During the decade of the twenties, WBT changed hands at least three times, finally becoming a Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) affiliate owned by the network itself. Along the way, the station upped its power from 100 watts to 25,000; by 1933 it was a 50,000-watt giant, as strong as any radio outlet in the United States. Since WBT lacked clear-channel status (assigned by the federal government), there were gaps in its coverage caused by interference from other stations. Yet millions of listeners lived within its umbrella, and the Charlotte powerhouse gave musicians the exposure they needed to book personal appearances or negotiate recording contracts.

Charlotte's country artists found acceptance within a context of variety programming. Like other stations—then sprouting like mushrooms—WBT sought broad audiences in order to win sponsors. As a result, early broadcasts used everything from local dance bands and pop singers to minstrel shows or storytellers. In contrast to CBS originations from New York or Chicago,

PE-RU-NA
PERUNA TONIC
PE-RU-NA
RU-NA

Left to Right
Woodlawn String Band, Downtown Charlotte, Dick Hartman's Tennessee Ramblers. *Page 5:* Charles Crutchfield. *Page 6:* The Briarhoppers: *(L to R)* Sam Briarhopper, Bill, Elmer, Minnie, Zeb, Dad, Charlie Crutchfield, Billie and Homer.





COMPLIMENTS OF CRAZY WATER CRYSTALS CO.
Broadcasting Daily (Except Sunday) 12:15 P. M.
Station WBT
Crazy Barn Dance
EVERY SATURDAY NIGHT
8:30 to 9:30
FOR
Station WBT
239 North Tryon St.
CRAZY
Water CRYSTALS CO.
Phone 5716
CHARLOTTE, N. C.
See Your Local "CRAZY" Dealer

which usually showcased pop orchestras and vocalists, WBT's country programs offered homespun fare in the form of the Woodlawn String Band, Fisher Hendley's Carolina Tar Heels, the Hawaiian Serenaders, or other Carolina-based acts.

Charlotte's country music scene expanded during the 1930s despite a nationwide economic depression. As falling prices let more and more families buy radio sets, radio stations proliferated, with some six hundred outlets in service by mid-decade. Just as important, demographics were right for country music broadcasting. Most southerners—and a great many northerners—still lived on farms or in rural villages where Saturday-night hoedowns were a part of everyday life. For sponsors marketing products to such down-to-earth audiences, country music was a natural advertising medium.

Two firms played crucial roles in financing Charlotte country shows of the thirties and forties: Chicago's Consolidated Drug Trade Products Company and the Crazy Water Crystals Company, a laxative manufacturer headquartered in Mineral Wells, Texas. Both organizations sponsored country programs throughout much of the nation, and both lent early country radio a medicine-show format. ("For fifty-six years," read one advertisement, " 'Crazy' water has come to the aid of the weak and the ailing, and it has made of them men and women ready to face life's hardships.") Crazy Crystals maintained a Charlotte office, whose managers recruited a multitude of artists for WBT and other Carolina stations. Probably the best-known acts were Dick Hartman's Tennessee Ramblers—who had worked Crazy Crystals shows in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Rochester, New York, before coming to WBT—and Mainer's Mountaineers, famed for their hit song *Maple on the Hill.* Charlotte's first Crazy Crystals programs began in 1933. A year later, the firm organized WBT's *Crazy Barn Dance,* which lasted into the late 1930s and set precedents for similar WBT shows of the next decade. About this same time, Consolidated Drug Trade Products launched the Briarhoppers program, a staple of WBT's schedule for years. Just as most American stations had daily shows like *Briarhopper Time,* weekly jamborees like the *Crazy Barn Dance* were taking hold in several cities, North and South. In Nashville, for example, the Grand Ole Opry was going strong, while Chicago's National Barn Dance was already an NBC network sensation. Everywhere country radio was growing by leaps and bounds, and Charlotte was fast becoming a vibrant regional music center.

Much of the credit for the Briarhoppers' popularity belongs to announcer Charles Crutchfield, who eventually became WBT's program director and later its station manager. His magnetic voice and warm, personal style were as much a part of the show as the music itself, lending continuity to the broadcast throughout many changes in personnel. "Crutch," as he's known to friends, injected parody into the Briarhoppers' broad rube comedy, then common in the country music field. Tongue-in-cheek, he'd poke fun at Radio Girl perfume, Kolorbak hair dye, and Zymole Trokeys cough drops, all part of the Drug Trade line. Crutchfield was at his best, though, when heaping scorn upon Peruna, an all-purpose tonic with a high alcohol content. "We don't care what you do with it," he's say. "Put it in the radiator of your car—it'll clean it out." During their run at WBT, Crutchfield and the Briarhoppers sold railroad carloads of the stuff, partly because fans could trade a "Pee-roo-ny" boxtop for a picture of the band. "About half of the Piedmont Carolinas went around with half a buzz on most of the time," says Crutchfield with a wink, "but they were happy."

All in all, commercial radio gave amateur performers the chance to become full-time musicians. To be sure, some WBT artists were seasoned professionals by the time they arrived at the station. Johnny McAllister, for instance, came to the Briarhopper cast from vaudeville and the New York theatrical stage. But country radio took many Carolinians straight from farms or cotton mills. "I picked peaches (before I got in the music business) for a dollar a day—ten hours a day for a dollar," remembers Cecil Campbell. (With the Tennessee Ramblers, his starting daily salary was eighteen dollars.) "Picking the guitar was not quite as bad as that, even if you had to ride all night (to show dates)." Claude Casey, a Briarhopper star of the forties, likewise recalls the lure of radio talent fees, but for him the sheer joy of performing was just as big as a thrill: "To play music and make *money* for it—man! That was better than working in a factory somewhere, cooped up."

Radio stardom also gave musicians the chance to make records. During the Depression years, WBT supplied a vast pool of talent for country recording sessions. National firms had begun to market country music in the mid-1920s, but the onset of the Great Depression virtually wiped out sales. By 1936, however, things were looking up again. RCA Victor, the most active label in the Carolina territory, cut dozens of sides in Charlotte over the next four years. Southern Radio Corporation—RCA's Carolina distributor for radios, recordings, and record players—furnished warehouse space where New York executives set up temporary studios, using portable equipment shipped by truck or train. Musicians generally

considered recording a sideline, for radio and personal appearances were their bread and butter. Nevertheless, as Southern Radio's Thomas Jamison stressed, the Carolinas were a natural market for country music, and RCA did quite well with WBT acts like the Mainers or the Monroe Brothers. The company also held Charlotte sessions with performers from other stations, like Grand Ole Opry star Uncle Dave Macon. Although New York and Chicago dominated the pre-World War II recording industry, record-making thrived in Charlotte and other southern cities, including Knoxville, Atlanta, Dallas, and Memphis. With a bit more effort and a bit more luck, Cecil Campbell argues, Charlotte might have pre-empted Nashville's later claim to the title "Music City, U.S.A."

Fulfillment, 1940–1955

The 1940s saw a massive expansion of country music—in Charlotte and elsewhere. World War II revived the American economy and pushed recording and music publishing to new heights. New barn dance shows appeared on every hand. Meanwhile, population shifts and the mingling of people from different regions in military service further nationalized a music that already had large followings on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. And even though more and more rural folks were moving to town, many of them still had a love for rural entertainment.

WBT was quick to take advantage of these trends. While the Briarhoppers continued their weekday programs, the station assembled three big weekly shows for regional or national CBS networks: the *Dixie Jamboree,* a Saturday-morning feature hosted and scripted by Claude Casey; the *Carolina Hayride,* a Saturday-night barn dance staged at the Charlotte Armory; and *Carolina Calling,* a Sunday-morning show that sometimes mixed country and pop acts. WBT country talent—both established performers and recent arrivals—worked all of these programs, offering a wide range of sounds and styles. Solo singers Claude Casey and Fred Kirby added soothing love songs to the Briarhoppers basic repertory of hoedowns and frolic tunes. Roy Grant and Arval Hogan (Whitey and Hogan) kept country music's duet harmony tradition alive and well. Now led by Cecil Campbell, the Tennessee Ramblers specialized in western songs, and both the Rangers Quartet and the Johnson Family Singers sang some of the finest gospel music ever heard. Early in the decade, the legendary Carter Family also broadcast over WBT; a little later, versatile instrumentalist Arthur Smith emerged from the Briarhoppers to form his own band, as did Claude Casey. Assisting these performers were a number of top-flight announcers, among them the unforgettable Grady Cole, known far and wide as "Mr. Dixie."

As in the 1930s, radio provided a springboard for other music ventures. WBT artists extended the range of their tours and now played to larger crowds than ever before. Although RCA sessions tapered off, smaller firms like Super Disc or Sonora held recording dates in Charlotte after World War II. Some of the records these sessions yielded caught the attention of the national music press; a few became substantial hits. Southern Radio Corporation remained an important RCA distributor, and the Columbia, Decca, and Capital labels all set up distributorships in the Queen City. Similarly, big-time music publishers courted WBT stars in hopes of gaining radio exposure for their song catalogues. Several WBT artists published songs or songbooks through houses like Hill and Range or Acuff-Rose.

After 1950 a series of sweeping changes gradually ended country music's heyday in Charlotte. The Jefferson-Standard Life Insurance Company, which bought WBT in 1945, did continue the Briarhopper show for a time. But the firm wasn't wedded to country music in the manner of Crazy Crystals or Consolidated Drug Trade Products, and these companies too cut back radio advertising as discount drugstore chains captured once-secure markets. As television attracted larger audiences, radio stations were forced to adopt specialized formats in order to survive; many country acts were dropped in the process. Moreover, competition forced the wide-spread use of recorded music instead of expensive live talent. Changing popular tastes, reflected in the upsurge of rock and roll, also dethroned country music as king of Charlotte radio. The simple fact was that Americans were becoming increasingly citified and wanted uptown entertainment. Consequently, some of WBT's pickers retired or took up alternative careers.

But country music in Charlotte never really died. Far from it. Arthur Smith went on to set up publishing and recording operations there and also founded a long-running television show. As a television personality, Fred Kirby found a whole new audience among Charlotte-area children. The Briarhoppers regrouped about ten years ago and still delight listeners at bluegrass festivals around the region. And whatever the transformations in Charlotte's musical landscape, its country entertainers have created a living tradition, one filled with friendliness, humor, and good old-fashioned fun—enduring qualities that have made them heroes to legions of fans, both old and new.

John W. Rumble

THE PIEDMONT TRADITION

Della Coulter is a folklorist on the staff of the Folklife Section of the North Carolina Arts Council. This article draws on the research of Wayne Martin, John Rumble, Archie Green, Ed Kahn, Pat Ahrens, Glenn Hinson, Mike Paris, Donald Lee Nelson, Wesley Wallace, Allen Tullos, and Tom Hanchett and was completed with the assistance of Homer Sherrill, Claude Casey, Roy Grant, Arval Hogan, Hank Warren, Pauline Grant, Dorothy Sherrill, William E. Dixon, Beatrice Dixon Smith, Hayden Dean Dixon, Dorsey M. Dixon, Jr., Margaret Martin, Bill Mansfield, George Holt, Chris Mayfield, Monroe Brinson, Metrotape, Inc., the John Edwards Memorial Collection and the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, the Country Music Foundation and the North Carolina Museum of History.

In the decades before the advent of commercial broadcasting and recording, several generations of gifted musicians and singers entertained family and friends in piedmont communities from Danville to Greenville with hoedowns, waltzes, ballads, and popular sentimental songs. There were many influences on these developing piedmont musical styles. Sunday church services, camp meetings, and sacred singing schools nurtured the spiritual growth and the musical abilities of piedmont singers from the towns of most rural areas. The travelling medicine shows which crisscrossed the back roads, brought entertainers with new songs and old songs in new styles to rural communities all over the piedmont.

In the late 1880s and early 1900s, with the expansion of the railroad through the piedmont crescent, the coming of the textile mills to the region, and the growth of the furniture and tobacco industries, the number of small towns and villages increased dramatically. The sons and daughters of farmers, loggers, and sawmill operatives moved into the piedmont towns where mill work or furniture factory jobs would supplement the family's income. In many cases, whole families moved into piedmont textile towns where father, mother, and children all took mill jobs to stave off destitution. The rapid growth of small towns and the frequent movement of people between mill jobs and communities created a variety of opportunities and places for piedmont musicians to play, swap tunes, and entertain fellow workers. Music flourished in the villages and towns as well as the countryside where it was born.

Before records and radio, music in the Carolinas was homemade entertainment. Claude Casey, who was born in Enoree, South Carolina, at the southern tip of the piedmont and raised in the Danville area at the piedmont's north end, remembers the local square dances where his father played the fiddle. While his father bowed, someone else beat time on the fiddle strings with a couple of straws. "In the old days, the fiddle and banjo was it," remembers Claude. "That's the good stuff." And the "good stuff" was also found in Sherrills Ford, about twenty-five miles north of Charlotte, where Homer Sherrill was born. "Back then you played on the porch or in the yard, or wherever you could play," says Homer. "You'd get together and play all day or half of a night. For square dances, you'd play in one room with a high ceiling in an old-time country house. You'd put meal on the floor, make it slick for the dancers, and you'd play in there. Just a fiddle and banjo, or maybe fiddle and guitar. That's all you'd have. You'd take up a collection each set, and maybe get a nickle apiece out of the dancers. You'd be covered in corn meal by the end; your eyebrows all full of it and everything else, too."

The musicians who played for these get-togethers were special people to their neighbors. Good fiddlers like J. E. Mainer of Concord and his brother-in-law Roscoe Banks, or Wilmer Watts in Belmont, or Homer Sherrill in Hickory

Upper left:
Dorsey Dixon and Dorsey Dixon Jr.
Center:
Rising Generation, Gregtown, Augusta, Georgia
Upper right:
Family with calf, Wylie Mill, Chester, SC, November, 1908

were much in demand for local dances. If a piedmont singer or musician had a talent for songwriting, like Dorsey Dixon of East Rockingham, he could be expected to entertain friends gathered at his house with humorous songs about local people, places, and events. In times of tragedy or suffering, a well-known local songwriter like Dixon might be asked to compose a song or set a poetic tribute to music in memory of his neighbor's lost loved one.

Although a few musicians were socially suspect "rounders" whose drinking habits and rambling urges were on the outside edge of acceptable behavior, far more Carolina musicians were hard-working farmers, mill hands, or mechanics by trade. Their love of music filled their hours off from work, bringing good times, good tunes, and good friends together. Memories of these local musicians linger on in the piedmont communities around Charlotte fifty and sixty years after they played and sang. Gwen Foster, the harmonica virtuoso who lived in and worked at the mills of Gastonia, Belmont. and Dallas, is seldom remembered by his given name, but those who witnessed his playing still marvel at how the slight man of Oriental complexion they called "China" drew such inventive melodies from his harmonica. To the long-time residents of Hannah Pickett, Entwhistle, and Midway mill villages of Rockingham, sixty miles east of Charlotte, the guitar songs and duets of mill workers Howard and Dorsey Dixon linger with the memories of front-porch gatherings and all-day church singings in the 1920s and 1930s.

This widespread musical talent in the Carolina piedmont was a significant source for North and South Carolina radio stations and Charlotte-based recording companies in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. The advent of radio and recordings widened the audience for piedmont musicians like Gwen Foster, Wilmer Watts, J. E. Mainer, Dave McCarn of Belmont, and George Wade, Luther Baucom, and Reid Summey, the Three Tobacco Tags of Gastonia, who were already recognized in their communities as popular and gifted entertainers.

Smaller, local radio stations (up to 500 watts of broadcasting power) were among the first commercial media to recognize the talent in their own back yards. In competition with the more powerful, and better-financed metropolitan stations that were usually affiliated with a national network, these smaller stations played on their hometown image by broadcasting local talent. Short, live musical programs featuring musicians from the area who played for the exposure and the fun of it helped attract listeners within the broadcasting radius of the smaller stations.

Dave McCarn, son of a McAdenville card room hand, played and sang with a band called the Yellow Jackets over radio station WRBU (100 watts) in Gastonia, while working his regular shift in a Belmont Mill in the late 1920s. Playing initially without commercial sponsors and just for the air time, musicians like McCarn and his fellow mill hands quickly demonstrated that there were plenty of listeners for "hillbilly" music as well as the light classical and popular sounds served up by metropolitan stations and the national networks. Fiddler Homer Sherrill's first experience in front of the microphone was also in Gastonia in the late twenties. He was just thirteen when he played over WRBU (which would soon change its call letters to WSOC ("We Serve Our City"). Describing the sound he and his fellow musicians brought to the air waves, Homer remembers where it came from and why it was so popular: "Most everything came out of the hills, or out of the country in those days. We built on that base, you know—the old-time folk songs—dressed 'em up and got 'em listenable."

People in the piedmont were listening to records in the 1920s, too. By the late twenties, both musicians and listeners in the Carolinas figured it was high time the Carolina talent had a chance to record. The earliest piedmont musicians to record commercially struck out on their own or at the prompting of friends and family who believed they could pass the record company audition. In 1927 Gwen Foster and two fellow mill hands from the Gastonia area joined with Doc Walsh of North Wilkesboro and travelled to Atlanta to audition for Ralph Peer of Victor records. Foster and Walsh recorded together for the first time as the Carolina Tar Heels during that trip. Six months later when Peer held the first Charlotte recording sessions, Foster and Walsh recorded again, this time much closer to home. A year later Foster hitchhiked back to Atlanta with his friend Dave Fletcher to record guitar duets as the Carolina Twins. Stopping in small towns along the way, they earned money for their meals by playing in barbershops or for local dances, relying on people they met to put them up for a night as they made their way toward Atlanta.

The persistence and adventurous spirit of Foster and Fletcher in seeking out recording opportunities were not uncommon among the first generation of piedmont musicians who succeeded in getting their tunes and songs down on wax. Before the late thirties when Victor began recording regularly in Charlotte, the business of getting a crack at recording often took piedmont musicians days away from the job and miles away from home. Wilmer Watts travelled to Chicago to record in 1927 and then to

Left:
Musicians Gordon Buford,
Gwen Foster, Avery Keever,
A. O. Fletcher, and
unidentified farm owner
(1930) ca.

Right:
Bill and Earl Bolick,
June, 1936

New York in 1929 with his band the Lonely Eagles (formerly the Gastonia Serenaders). In between jobs in the Gaston county mills, Dave McCarn happened onto a Memphis recording session in 1930 while he was hoboing across the country with his brother. He auditioned on the spot and recorded one of his most requested numbers back home, *Cotton Mill Colic.* Gradually, both the field recording crews and the newly established radio stations of the piedmont came to see what folks in the area had known all along: There were dozens of fine musicians in the piedmont and thousands of eager listeners on farms, in small towns, and in the mill villages of the region.

For many Carolina musicians in the generation that included Wilmer Watts, Gwen Foster, Dorsey and Howard Dixon, and Dave McCarn, the advent of radio and records never fundamentally altered their working lives. Many of them had been born in the 1890s and by the late 1920s had long-established trades (Dorsey Dixon and Dave McCarn followed family members into mill work at the age of twelve, Wilmer Watts began working in the mills as a young teenager) or growing families (both Wilmer Watts and Howard Dixon supported families of eight children). A skilled loom fixer or weaver—even a doffer, card room hand, or sweeper—could find regular employment at one mill or another, if not always for the best of wages. The opportunities for steady pay through radio and recording were few, if any, from the late 1920s to the early 1930s. Artists' recording fees were often only one-time payments; the concept of royalty payments was understood but much abused, invariably to the artists' disadvantage. Radio appearances rarely paid anything at all. Earning a living from music was a risky business, particularly in the years of the Depression. Many of the earliest piedmont musicians to gain wider commercial exposure left their jobs at the mills and factories only sporadically to perform on local radio stations or record for a national company.

Those young enough or eager enough to set out on musical careers knew well the risks involved in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Before fiddler J. E. Mainer left his doffing job at Cannon Mill Plant Number Six in Concord for a twice-daily program on WBT in 1934, he checked with the superintendent of the mill to be sure his job would still be waiting for him if he didn't make a go of it as an entertainer. Hank Warren, the Mount Airy fiddler who learned his violin techniques in the high school orchestra, in dance bands, and at fiddlers conventions throughout North Carolina and Virginia, received the promise of a job from a friend back home before setting out on a career which included tours with Jack Richie's Blue Ridge Mountaineers, Warren's Four Aces, Dick Hartman's Tennessee Ramblers, the Swingbillies, and the Briarhoppers. Crucial to many a musician was the knowledge that there were people to turn to and a place to go, if one's hopes of earning a living in music didn't work out.

By the mid- to late-thirties, new opportunities opened up for Carolina musicians because of the increasing interest of commercial sponsors in using local musicians in live radio programs to sell their products. Hubert Fincher, son of J. W. Fincher, general manager of the Crazy Water Crystals programs throughout the Carolinas and Georgia, recalls his father's rationale for linking over-the-air sales of health tonic with performances by Carolina musicians: "Hillbilly music was used from the beginning because of its great popularity, wide acceptance, and the availability of talent." And talent was available in extraordinary numbers. A 1934 Crazy Water Crystals program book featured articles on over a hundred musicians and singers, primarily from piedmont and western North and South Carolina. The Crazy Water Crystals performers appeared on broadcasts from fourteen radio stations including WWNC Asheville, WBIG Greensboro, WBT Charlotte, WPTF Raleigh, WIS Columbia, WAIM Anderson and WFBC Greenville. From this collection of talented and musically ambitious

Whitey and Hogan

amateurs emerged a new generation of professional singers and musicians. They made music a living by combining the exposure which radio gave them with a continuous round of personal appearances in hundreds of schoolhouses, movie theaters, community auditoriums, and town halls across North and South Carolina.

Initially, radio offered little more than free advertising for a band's upcoming personal appearance. A group's real bread and butter was the fifteen, twenty or twenty-five cent admission to their schoolhouse show date, and in the case of the true musical entrepreneurs, the sale of nickle-a-sheet lyrics to their most popular songs. Homer Sherrill, who performed on the original Crazy Water Crystals program over WBT in 1934, recalls the days of the "kerosene circuit," the round of show dates in rural areas so small that only a kerosene lantern lit the stage:

Back in those days you just rode and rode and played and played. It didn't matter how small the buildings were, you played 'em anyway, and just put on the full show. And you got up there and picked your heart out—with no p.a. system, sweat running off your elbows, you couldn't hardly feel the strings on the fiddle. Man, that was rough days then. We played many a place that had no electricity. They'd have an old gas lantern, setting on each side of the stage; that's all the light you had. The windows would be setting full of people, and you just had 'em crowded around the walls. You couldn't even get your breath hardly. And it being so hot inside. You'd just almost suffocate, that's how hot it was. We'd put on two shows some times, and it'd be midnight before we even got away from there. Maybe crack of day we'd get in. No necktie, no hair combed, shoes not tied, and your eyes half shut (and on the radio that morning) you sounded like you're having the most fun in the world!

The thousands of nickels, dimes, and quarters paid by men and women across the piedmont were the coin which kept piedmont musicians on the road and on the radio. The emotional spur which kept piedmont musicians to six-nights-a-week personal appearance schedules and daily radio broadcasts was invariably their deep attachment to the music they played. Arval Hogan remembers, "The real thing was that we loved the music. After a while we seen that we could make a living off of it."

Gradually, as stations like WBT began paying local musicians more, the living that musicians could make compared favorably with that of their Carolina neighbors. In 1935 seventeen-year-old Bill Bolick, later of the Blue Sky Boys, was making $4.50 a week in an auto body shop. He jumped at the chance to earn ten dollars a week playing over WBT's Crazy Water Crystals show. Whitey and Hogan, who played their first radio jobs over WSPA Spartanburg in 1938 and WGNC Gastonia in 1939, initially kept their jobs on the mill's second shift. Whitey recalls their unbelievable job offer from Charles Crutchfield at WBT in 1941: "At the Firestone Cotton Mill in Gastonia we had fifteen dollars a week for forty hours at the mill. When Mr. Crutchfield called us up and offered us twenty-five dollars a week, we could hardly speak to each other. We was rich!" Twenty-five dollars a week for half an hour of air time a day convinced Whitey and Hogan it was time to leave the mill behind. Although the pay was better, the work was still hard. Early mornings or middays in the studio, hours in rehearsal, and long late road trips were the rule.

As gruelling as the schedule of daily radio broadcasts and nightly personal appearances was, the Carolina musicians of the thirties and forties got through the lean times and the good with the support of family, friends, and fans. The understanding and encouragement of family members at home were critical for Carolina musicians who chose the risky, hard road of a musical career. Although the desire to play music was an individual passion, for every individual musician of the thirties who survived by his singing or playing, there seems to have been a father, mother, brother, sister, cousin, uncle, aunt, or wife who shared or respected that passion and encouraged it to grow. The wives and children of the piedmont's travelling radio musicians were especially important to them. Whitey recalls with pride and awe how often he would arrive home after a show date at one or two o'clock in the morning to find his wife Polly sewing clothes for the children while she waited up for him. "I sewed to

Sweeper and doffer boys, Lancaster Cotton Mills, Lancaster SC, December, 1908.

pass the time and stretch the budget," laughs Polly while remembering. "And by the time he'd be home, why I'd have another couple of little dresses for the girls." The strain of long hours in rehearsal, on the air, and on the road were mitigated by hundreds of similar acts of patient dedication or words of encouragement from wives and family over the years.

A spirit of mutual help and good-natured ribbing among the musicians themselves fostered camaraderie and kept them going through discouraging, stressful, or boring times. Claude Casey was on the verge of throwing away his guitar and going back to the Schoolfield cotton mills after his midwestern tour with Fat Sanders' Country Cousins and Effie the Hillbilly Striptease Dancer (who peeled off to reveal a red union suit). The Rouse Brothers encouraged him to give singing another try and asked him to join them on a Miami engagement. Schoolfield lost a potential hand, and later when Claude returned to North Carolina WBT gained a singing star. Friends pitched in, too, when Hank Warren needed a helping hand. Working for a time at WPTF in Raleigh, the home station of the Swingbillies, Warren found himself too broke to get back to his family in Mount Airy for Christmas. Swingbillies Dunk Poole, Harvey Ellington, Sam Pridgen, and Ray Williams took up a collection to get Hank home for Christmas Day.

The musicians' generosity and compassion toward one another were well mixed with pure devilment, especially on road trips. Snuffy Jenkins and Homer Sherrill of the WIS Hillbillies wore out two Lincolns a year touring the small towns of South and North Carolina. The long hours on the road coming back from show dates with five men and a bass fiddle stuffed into one car were golden opportunities for pranks. Sleeping band members might awake to find their shoelaces tied together, or stumble into a restaurant for a late night supper before noticing their clothes had been disarranged while they slept. Even the radio studio was practical joke territory. More than one Briarhopper has glanced down in the midst of a live broadcast to find his script or shoe on fire.

While they enjoyed and helped one another, the Carolina piedmont radio musicians lived on the attention and dedication of their audiences. In the early years, radios were not plentiful in the villages and towns of the piedmont, but radio listeners were everywhere. Bea Smith, Howard Dixon's daughter, recalls the excitement generated all over East Rockingham by the home-town Dixon Brothers' appearance on the Crazy Water Crystals shows: "That was back in the thirties, they'd be on the radio on Saturday nights. And our house would just fill up, people all out in the yard listening to them on the radio. 'Cause everybody didn't have a radio in those days." Those who listened felt close to the music and the performers in ways not familiar to present-day country music fans. Letters came in by the thousands. While at WWNC in Asheville in 1941, Wade Mainer and the Sons of the Mountaineers received over eight thousand pieces of mail in response to a free picture offer. Whitey remembers the kinds of personal requests the Briarhoppers would receive. People would ask what key particular songs were in, so that they could play along at home with the Briarhoppers on the air. Others would ask them to play a certain song on a day when their friend was coming over to listen to their radio. If the Briarhoppers announced a show date in a little town like Enoree, South Carolina, someone would write in and invite them to supper on the night of their appearance.

The musicians knew how close they were to the people who enjoyed their music and came out to their shows. "At that time," recalls Arval Hogan, "you had two classes of people—one that listened to the pop music, which was supposed to be the higher-class people, and then we had the country people that listened to the country music." The Carolina radio musicians of the 1930s and 1940s valued the support of their listeners and the people who came to their shows, because it meant their living; the audience was their bread and butter. They shared with this audience both a dedication to the music which grew out of the region and the experience of a hard-won livelihood in the piedmont. They also shared a knowledge of themselves independent of stereotypes which others might foist upon them. In the words of Homer Sherrill, "Those were hillbillies playing, but they were down-to-earth people, good people. They weren't sots, or tramps, or bums; they were people who worked hard for a living."

Della Coulter

THE
BRIARHOPPERS
UNIT NO 2.
WBT
CHARLOTTE
N.C.

Briarhoppers *(L to R)* Homer Christopher, Shannon Grayson, Claude Casey, Sam Poplin

RECORDING IN CHARLOTTE
1927–1945

Thomas W. Hanchett holds a B.A. in history from Cornell University and came to Charlotte to study the city's historic architecture for the Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission. The study will be published in 1986 as Charlotte's Neighborhoods: the Growth of a New South City, 1850–1930 *by the UNCC Urban Institute. In his spare time, Tom hosts folk and blues programs Saturday evenings on Charlotte's NPR affiliate WFAE FM 91.*

Before the major recording companies set up shop in Nashville in the late 1940s, several southern cities were important centers of the emerging country music industry including Atlanta, Dallas, and Charlotte.

During the decade of the 1930s Charlotte ranked among the nation's most important locations for the recording of country, blues, and gospel music. RCA Victor made numerous trips to the area, and Decca Records came as well, together recording more than 1,500 songs. Many of the best-known country performers of the era recorded in Charlotte, including the legendary Carter Family, bluegrass pioneer Bill Monroe, banjo star Uncle Dave Macon, the influential stringbands of the Mainer family, and many more. Additionally, Charlotte sessions captured on disc a broad range of bluesmen, gospel singers, and amateur folk musicians, preserving a rich slice of Southern culture in the early twentieth century.

Queen City of the Piedmont

It was no accident that Charlotte became a recording center. The city lay at the heart of the southern piedmont, the broad band of rolling, red clay hills between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the flat coastal plain. Since the close of the Civil War, Southerners had waged a campaign to industrialize the piedmont, under the slogan "Bring the Mills to the Cotton Fields!" In the late 1920s, the piedmont overtook New England as the world's major cotton manufacturing area. Charlotte emerged as a trade hub of this mighty new empire. Textile machinery distributors the world over opened Charlotte offices; mill owners and their heirs commissioned mansions in suburban Myers Park and Eastover; downtown skyscrapers rose to hold the banks that financed the region's growth. In 1930 the United States Census declared that Charlotte had become the largest city in North and South Carolina.

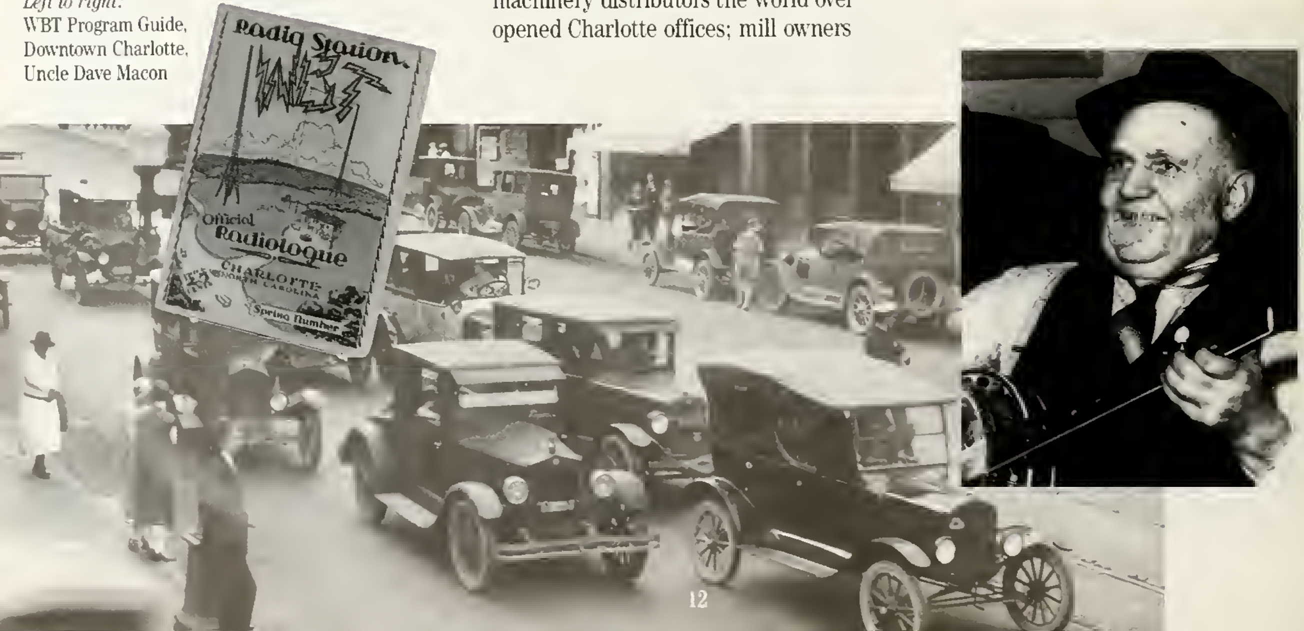
While Charlotte itself had sizable mill districts, most factories were scattered in nearby towns and villages. Within a hundred-mile radius of Charlotte, more than six hundred mills drew thousands of rural families from piedmont or mountain farms. This massive rural-to-urban population shift shaped the South as we know it today.

The move from farm to town also helped give rise to commercial country music. As rural folk moved into new, unfamiliar surroundings, they formed a concentrated audience for professional entertainers who could play the old songs of home. As time passed, these musicians found that listeners were equally hungry for new styles of playing that matched the faster pace of urban life, and for new songs that expressed their loneliness, longing for home, and hope for better times ahead.

Performers traveled an informal circuit of cities across the piedmont: Atlanta, Georgia; Columbia, Greenville and Spartanburg, South Carolina; Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh and Durham, North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; and others in between. They would take up residence in a city for several months until the area had been "played out," and then move on.

For several reasons, Charlotte became a key stop on this circuit. Its very size and central location in the mill region

Left to right:
WBT Program Guide,
Downtown Charlotte,
Uncle Dave Macon



promised a large audience for country musicians. This was aided by a web of paved highways that radiated from the city, a legacy of North Carolina Governor (and not coincidentally Charlotte resident) Cameron Morrison's "Good Roads" program of the 1920s. WBT radio, begun by Charlotte investors in 1922, proved to be another important drawing card. The first station in the Carolinas, it was purchased by CBS in 1929 and boosted to the legal maximum of 50,000 watts in 1933. WBT could be heard all over the Southeast, and in addition CBS soon made the station the linchpin of its regional Dixie Network, feeding programs to sister stations throughout the South.

Before World War II, most radio stations relied on live performers rather than records to entertain their audiences. WBT filled much of its daytime programming with country shows. They seldom paid much, but performers jumped at the chance to plug personal appearances. Entertainers could easily schedule a daily program on WBT (the most desirable times were early morning—before mills opened—or at noon—when farmers came back to the house for lunch), drive to an evening show date at a small-town courthouse or schoolhouse, and be back for the next day's broadcast.

Recording Teams Come South

Meanwhile, the fledgling phonograph industry had discovered country music. Beginning in 1923 and continuing into the 1940s, many country, blues or gospel acts were recorded in "field" sessions throughout the South, as well as in New York or Chicago studios. Customarily, northern executives carried portable equipment by car or shipped it by train to southern music centers. For record firms, this was often cheaper than bringing musicians north; performers liked the system because it meant fewer interruptions in busy radio and touring schedules.

For a typical session an A & R (artists-and-repertory) man lined up talent, selected songs, and oversaw the recording process. One or two engineers usually handled the actual recording. Equipment consisted of microphones (seldom more than two), a small control panel, and a bulky cutting lathe that produced wax "masters." In the days before magnetic tape, songs were literally cut into wax. If a musician botched a take, technicians had to shave a layer off the disc or use a new one. The complete masters, each containing one selection, were carefully shipped back to company headquarters where records were manufactured. The longplaying 33⅓ rpm album and the 45 rpm disc would not be introduced until after World War II; before then, songs were released on 78 rpm discs with one tune per side. (Today, musicians still speak of "cutting a side" or "waxing a side.")

The First Charlotte Sessions

In 1927 Ralph Peer, executive of the Victor Talking Machine Company, began a series of southern recording trips that put his company at the forefront of pre-war country, blues, and gospel recording. Victor teams visited many towns over the years, but tended to concentrate on those where they had corporate contacts. The booming trade city of Charlotte was the distribution headquarters for Victor's products in the Carolinas, and it eventually became one of the company's foremost southern recording locations.

Documents indicate that Peer first set up his equipment in Charlotte August 9, 1927. The visit formed part of the same tour that resulted in Peer's discovery of the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers in Bristol, Tennessee. In Charlotte, six days of hard work produced forty-six sides. Peer found no major stars at this stop,

Seated: Fred Kirby, Hank Warren
Standing: *(l to r)* Roy Grant, Shannon Grason, Arval Hogan

but did record several important musicians including the country duo the Carolina Tar Heels, balladeer Kelly Harrell, the Georgia Yellow Hammers stringband, and bluesman Luke Jordan.

Soon after, the Great Depression sharply curtailed record sales. Country, blues and gospel were especially hard hit, for many of the working-class fans who supported these styles lost their jobs. Victor only visited Charlotte once during the early 1930s, in May 1931. By that time, the company had merged with the Radio Corporation of America to become RCA Victor. Locally, the Southern Radio Corporation now held the wholesale franchise to distribute RCA Victor radios, Victrolas, and records to retailers in the Carolinas. Southern Radio's office and warehouse space occupied the top two floors of a handsome three-story building at 208 South Tryon Street, Charlotte's main commercial thoroughfare. There, among boxes of stored records, Peer set up his makeshift studio.

Two six-day weeks yielded an even one hundred sides. Among the artists were two rising stars of country music, Jimmie Davis and the Carter Family. Davis later wrote *You Are My Sunshine* and rode his musical fame to the governorship of Louisiana in the 1940s. In his 1931 Charlotte sessions, he sang not only country tunes, but also several well-delivered blues songs backed by a slide guitar.

The Carter Family had already become major record sellers in the four years since Peer had first signed them. Their 1931 Charlotte sessions produced seven songs. One, *Let the Church Roll On,* later entered the ranks of bluegrass standards through a top-selling album by Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs. Another Carter Charlotte tune is still in print in its original form as the title selection for the RCA Camden album *My Old Cottage Home.* The 1931 session led to a second Charlotte date for the Carters in June of 1938, this time with Decca Records, which produced twenty-two more sides. The Carter Family returned again in the early 1940s to broadcast on WBT radio, and it was then that they made their last performance together as the original trio.

ICK HARTMAN'S
NNES E RAMBLER
W B
WITH
D
Battery Co
Station

Dick Hartman's Tennessee Ramblers with Happy Morris, Elmer Warren, Dick Hartman, Harry Blair, Cecil Campbell and Kenneth Wolfe.

Charlotte Becomes a Major Recording Center

Charlotte recording resumed when the worst of the Depression had passed. Victor representatives visited the Queen City three times in 1936, twice in 1937, and once in 1938. Decca seems to have made one substantial stay in June 1938. In September 1938 and February 1939, Victor set up shop in Rock Hill, South Carolina, a small textile and railroad town some forty miles south of Charlotte (a location convenient both to WBT performers and to singers on smaller South Carolina stations).

Recording conditions were not a great deal more sophisticated than they had been during the early sessions. The 1936 RCA dates took place in the warehouse space at 208 South Tryon Street (now replaced by the BB&T skyscraper). The 1937 and 1938 Charlotte RCA sessions were held in rooms on the top floor of the ten-story Hotel Charlotte (which today stands vacant at West Trade and Poplar Streets), while the Rock Hill sessions took place in the Andrew Jackson Hotel (now the Guarantee Fidelity Building on Main Street). The field teams simply draped the walls of the "recording studio" with heavy curtains and set up their equipment in an adjoining space.

Musicians who waited in the hotel corridors for their turn to record remember the tension. Both new and established artists worried that each session might be their last: if discs did not sell, the musician probably would not be asked back. Once his turn came, an artist had anywhere from an hour and a half to three hours to cut his songs. Most tunes were recorded in one or two takes—a far cry from the weeks of studio time invested in a single pop hit today—and an experienced group could wax a dozen or more numbers in one session.

Financial arrangements varied, but most groups seem to have made twenty-five or fifty dollars a person for each session's labor. Some received a small royalty from each record sold, as well. Meager as it now seems, fifty dollars was a welcome sight for a picker who earned ten or twenty dollars for a whole week's radio work; to those who toiled at even lower-paying jobs in the mills or fields, it was a princely sum.

Charlotte Recording Artists

The Charlotte recording sessions attracted top-flight musicians from across the Southeast. One of the most notable was Bill Monroe, who launched his recording career here February 17, 1936, and is today widely acknowledged as the father of bluegrass music. An expert mandolinist, Monroe and his guitar-playing brother Charlie came to work the radio and personal appearance circuit in the piedmont textile region in the mid-1930s. RCA A&R man Eli Oberstein tried repeatedly to get the Monroes into the studio, but the duo, based in Greenville, South Carolina, did not think that it was worthwhile to disrupt their radio schedule. "I believe we was playing two programs a day," Bill told interviewer Jim Rooney in the book *Bossmen*. "We played one in Charlotte of a morning, say at seven o'clock, then we'd drive to Greenville for a twelve. We had a hundred miles to drive."

When Oberstein's persistence finally brought Bill and Charlie up the stairs at 208 South Tryon Street, he hit pay dirt. Their initial release *What Would You Give In Exchange for Your Soul?* became one of the most popular country songs of the 1930s," according to historian Douglas B. Green. It led RCA to record a total of sixty Monroe Brothers sides in Charlotte from 1936 through 1938.

Bill and Charlie Monroe split in 1938, and Bill went on to shape a hard-driving stringband sound that later became known as bluegrass, in honor of his native Kentucky. Although the style did not gel until the mid-1940s, the Charlotte recordings hint at what was to come, especially numbers like *Roll In My Sweet Baby's Arms,* and *Roll On Buddy, Roll On,* both of which have become bluegrass favorites.

At the same time that Bill Monroe was starting his recording career in Charlotte, a number of established stars of Nashville's Grand Ole Opry visited the Charlotte studios. Fiddling Arthur Smith was one, a major innovator on his instrument who was dubbed "King of the Country Fiddlers" by Roy Acuff. He made the Tennessee-to-Carolina journey on four occasions, waxing a string of impressive instrumentals, including *Bonaparte's Retreat* and *Florida Blues,* as well as vocal compositions that have become lasting favorites. *Walking in My Sleep, There's More Pretty Girls Than One, In the Pines, Beautiful Brown Eyes* (later a pop hit for Rosemary Clooney), and the humorous *Pig at Home in a Pen* were first recorded in Charlotte or Rock Hill.

Accompanying Smith was another soon-to-be-famous duo: the Delmore Brothers, Alton and Rabon. Alton and Rabon Delmore specialized in warm harmonies and dexterous guitar work. Their style, borrowing heavily from the blues, broke new ground in the 1930s and can still be heard today in the playing of Doc Watson, Norman Blake, and others. The Delmores recorded their first hits in Atlanta, Chicago, and New Orleans, but cut nearly half their pre-World War II sides in the Charlotte area in the late 1930s. Among the best known of their seventy-three Charlotte songs is *Nashville Blues.*

Along with Smith and the Delmore Brothers, another Opry star who recorded more in Charlotte than in Nashville was Uncle Dave Macon. Macon had been called the most popular banjo player of the pre-bluegrass era, and he was a fixture on the Grand Ole Opry from the mid-1920s into the 1950s. Born in 1870, Uncle Dave was much older than most other early recording artists, so his discs provide a rare glimpse of folk, minstrel, and vaudeville songs that had been popular in his nineteenth century youth. Macon made his last recordings for RCA Victor at the Hotel Charlotte in August 1937 and January 1938. These range from old-fashioned hymns like *Fame Apart From God's Approval* and *Honest Confession is Good for the Soul* to rollicking tunes about the pleasures of *Country Ham and Red Gravy* or *Travelin' Down the Road.*

Radio and recording opportunities in the Charlotte area not only drew notable musicians from elsewhere, but also helped a number of piedmont players achieve country music stardom. Bill and Earl Bolick of Hickory, North Carolina, formed the close-harmony duo the Blue Sky Boys. They cut their first records for Victor in Charlotte in 1936 while still in their teens, and eventually rivaled the Delmore Brothers in popularity in the Southeast. Another brother duo who debuted on record at the same time was Howard and Dorsey Dixon of Rockingham. Dorsey Dixon is remembered as a composer of cotton mill songs, and of the tragic tale that became a hit for Roy Acuff under the title, *Wreck on the Highway.*

Nearly every WBT performer tried his hand at recording when RCA Victor or Decca came to town. Fred Kirby, Don White, Claude Casey, Bill and Cliff Carlisle, and Arthur Smith's Carolina Crackerjacks (no relation to Fiddling Arthur Smith), are among those who waxed their early sides in the Charlotte and Rock Hill sessions. Two stringband groups, both major WBT acts, deserve special mention: the Tennessee Ramblers and the interlocking organizations led by J. E. and Wade Mainer.

The Tennessee Ramblers were among the longest-running bands in Charlotte. Under the leadership of Dick Hartman (the lone Tennessean of the group) they were brought to Charlotte by Crazy Water Crystals Company in 1934. They cut their first Charlotte sides in 1936, and continued to record in Charlotte and elsewhere into the early 1950s, by that time under the leadership of Cecil "Curley" Campbell, one of Hartman's original sidemen.

More widely remembered are brothers J. E. and Wade Mainer and the influential players they helped bring to record. The Mainers came from the North Carolina mountains in the early 1930s to work in

RCA VICTOR
RCA
RADIO HEADQUARTERS
RCA
CAMDEN, N.J.
RCA VICTOR
MAGIC BRAIN
RADIO
STERCHI'S
X22795

the textile mills near Charlotte, but soon broadcast on WSOC and WBT with J. E. Mainer's Mountaineers. In 1936 Wade Mainer went out on his own as a recording artist, eventually racking up some ninety-four sides in Charlotte and Rock Hill sessions, making him one of the area's most prolific recording stars. J. E.'s Mountaineers also continued to record in Charlotte, and achieved national exposure during a stint on high-wattage "border radio" which broadcast from Mexico across much of North America. Historians point to the Mountaineers' sound as an important link between traditional string-band music and the new bluegrass style.

A number of Mainer sidemen also recorded on their own. Fiddlers Homer Sherrill and Steve Ledford made early RCA records in the Charlotte area and had long and active careers. Brothers Zeke and Wiley Morris gained their first recording experience with the Mainers, and later had a major hit on their own with *Let Me Be Your Salty Dog.* DeWitt "Snuffy" Jenkins brought to radio and records the distinctive three-finger banjo style that eventually became the trademark of bluegrass music. He recorded his first discs in a 1937 RCA date at the Hotel Charlotte as a member of J. E. Mainer's Mountaineers. Both Earl Scruggs and Don Reno have pointed to Jenkins as a key influence on their banjo playing.

Other Musical Styles Recorded in Charlotte

Along with country music, Charlotte recordings preserved other musical styles popular in the area. Bob Pope's Hotel Charlotte Orchestra, the Frankie and Johnny Orchestra, Jimmy Gunn and His Orchestra, and others offered jazz during the opening years of the big-band era. The Hawaiian Pals and the Honolulu Strollers cashed in on the craze for Hawaiian music that swept the nation in the 1920s and 1930s.

After white country artists, the most numerous recording musicians in the Charlotte area were black blues and gospel performers. Few of the bluesmen won the fame during this period that whites enjoyed, partly because the radio stations in the area almost never broadcast blues. One musician who is remembered today is guitarist Luke Jordan, who journeyed from Lynchburg, Virginia to record in 1927. His *Church Bell Blues* and *Cocaine Blues* continue to be played by modern-day folk musicians.

Local radio stations did feature black gospel groups, and several became successful recording artists. The Heavenly Gospel Singers, for example, recorded nearly seventy sides for RCA in Charlotte and Rock Hill, a number greater than the Monroe Brothers. Perhaps most famous were the Golden Gate Quartet. Norfolk natives, the Gates launched their recording career in 1937 in the midst of a broadcasting stint on WBT, and eventually sang in Carnegie Hall and at the White House. Today, they reside in Paris, and enjoy great popularity throughout Europe.

Charlotte recording sessions produced star performers and hit records, but they also left us priceless documents of our cultural heritage. A local preacher,Elder Otis Jones was recorded sermonizing to his congregation. Some of the best comedy routines of Mustard and Gravy ("Dixie's Tastiest Combination"), a vaudeville or minstrel style act, were preserved on record in Charlotte. "We would have made more records, but we didn't bother to go back," said a member of the Blankenship Family stringband of Alexander County, North Carolina who cut a single disc in 1931. Comments researcher Robert Coltman, the Blankenship recording was important not in terms of record sales but as a cultural document, *just engaging homemade music, centering around the gruff singing and rusty, archaic fiddling of a man born shortly after the Civil War, two of his daughters, and a son. . . typical of thousands of amateur musicians, comparatively few of whom reached record, who created entertainment in the days before radio and television.*

Golden Gate Quartet

End of an Era

Recording in the Charlotte area tapered off after 1940. Columbia Records came in June 1941 to record the Rangers Quartet, popular white gospel singers of WBT. RCA held its last major Charlotte session in 1945 and Capitol breezed through town in 1949. Several smaller labels recorded at local stations in the late 1940s and early 1950s. But the era of major label recording in Charlotte was basically over by the war's end. This seems ironic in retrospect, for WBT's CBS network country shows had just entered their heyday.

The explanation for Charlotte's decline as a recording center lies in the broader changes effecting country music as a whole. Material shortages during the war led to cut backs in all field recording. After the war, the large companies decided to establish permanent studios in the South. Nashville, with its highpowered clear-channel WSM which broadcast the Grand Ole Opry, had attracted many of the profession's top stars, so the record companies centered their activities there. In the 1950s,WBT began to move away from country music, and eventually the booming pre-war music era faded from memory.

Today, Charlotte is proudly rediscovering its role in the early years of country, blues, and gospel recording. The Charlotte area sessions helped launch the careers of such notables as Bill Monroe, the Golden Gate Quartet and Snuffy Jenkins, and contributed to the recorded legacies of many more. The wax discs captured in song the hopes and feelings of a whole generation of working-class Southerners.

In the early years of recording, musicians seldom considered their records as important to their careers as radio broadcasts or personal appearances. But it is the records that will enable the music to live on. And here and there in quiet rooms, young musicians bend their ears to phonograph speakers, learning the old songs and passing them on to new generations of listeners in the piedmont Carolinas and far beyond.

Tom Hanchett

ARTISTS

Briarhoppers and Charles Crutchfield
Joe and Janette Carter
Claude Casey
Tommy Faile
George Hamilton IV, Emcee
Snuffy Jenkins and Homer "Pappy" Sherrill
Johnson Family Singers and Betty Johnson
Fred Kirby
Roy Lear
Wade Mainer
Bill Monroe
Zeke and Wiley Morris
Sam Poplin
Red Clay Ramblers
Arthur Smith
Tennessee Ramblers with Cecil Campbell and Harry Blair

Briarhoppers and Charles Crutchfield

The Briarhopper show originated about 1935 as a way to pitch patent medicine. Consolidated Drug Trade Products of Chicago asked WBT to create a program to sell its Peruna tonic, Radio Girl perfume, Kolorbak hair dye, and Zymol Trokeys cough drops. WBT decided that stringband music and country humor were the way to reach the rural and working-class audience of the piedmont textile region, and they chose their young, warm-voiced announcer Charles Crutchfield to head up the show.

Crutchfield had started in radio at station WSPA in Spartanburg in 1929. After a stay at WIS in Columbia as announcer, Crutchfield joined the staff of WBT in 1933. He organized the original Briarhopper show, bringing together Johnny McAllister, Jane Bartlett, Bill Davis, Clarence Etters, Thorpe Westerfield, Homer Drye, and Billie Burton as its founding members. Crutchfield's wit contributed greatly to the show's success. His programming and business savvy soon landed him the spot of program director, then station manager for WBT. He eventually became president of WBT's parent company, Jefferson-Pilot Broadcasting.

The name "Briarhopper," says Crutchfield, came to him one day when he was out rabbit hunting with friends. They flushed a rabbit from a thicket and someone exclaimed, "Look at that briarhopper!" Musicians Cecil Campbell and Harry Blair, early Briarhoppers who came to Charlotte in 1934 with the Tennessee Ramblers band, offer another explanation. They remember that the Ramblers had used "Briarhoppers" as a pseudonym whenever they needed to avoid contractual conflicts in their pre-Charlotte days. Scholars point out that the term was also slang for Kentucky migrants at the time. Early stringbands had a penchant for turning such terms—hillbilly, tar heel, fruit jar drinker—to their advantage. However the name came to be, WBT listeners quickly took it to heart.

Over the years,the Briarhopper organization has included dozens of musicians. WBT country artists acted like members of a big club, rather than competing musicians. At various times a musician might play with the Briarhoppers, Tennessee Ramblers, Crazy Bucklebusters, or occasionally two bands at once. At the height of the Briarhoppers' fame there were even two touring versions of the band, dubbed Unit One and Unit Two, crisscrossing the Southeast playing mill villages and courthouse towns.

Many of the early Briarhoppers went on to careers as soloists or group leaders including Fred Kirby, Claude Casey, and Cecil Campbell. One of the most important of the early Briarhoppers is "Big Bill" Davis. Davis is a classically trained violinist who performed with the Charlotte Symphony, but who doubled as a country fiddler and bass player. He formed a stringband called the Cotton Blossoms in the late 1920s which was certainly among the very first country groups to broadcast on WBT. He was a regular on the Briarhopper show for many years.

The Briarhoppers hit their peak of popularity in the 1940s. During the summer of 1945,WBT originated *Carolina Hayride,* a Saturday afternoon barn dance broadcast coast-to-coast via the CBS radio network. It starred the Briarhoppers along with Fred Kirby, guitarist Arthur Smith, and other Charlotte country notables. The *Hayride* was succeeded by *Carolina Calling* and *Dixie Jamboree,* similar programs that were aired throughout the 1940s over much of the Southeast on CBS's Dixie Network. At their height, the Briarhoppers' old-fashioned blend of

Charles Crutchfield

breakdowns, hymns and heart songs could draw up to ten thousand pieces of fan mail in a single week.

The Briarhopper show ended its run on WBT in 1951, a victim of changing public tastes in country music. Many of its alumni retired from performing, but in the 1970s the band regrouped with Whitey and Hogan, Don White, Shannon Grayson and Hank Warren.

Don White was a member of the original band from 1935 to 1939, and also for a second stint in the early 1940s. Born Walden Whytsell in the West Virginia mountains in September of 1909, he learned to sing hymns and play guitar from his mother. He first visited Charlotte in 1933 with the Blue Ridge Mountaineers, but did not settle here until 1935 when he arrived with the Crazy Bucklebusters (a Crazy Water Crystals Barn Dance band) and stayed on to become a Briarhopper. Cowboy tunes and old-fashioned heart songs are his love, and he made his RCA recording debut here on June 19, 1936 singing such songs as *Mexicali Rose, What a Friend We Have in Mother,* and a duet with Fred Kirby *My Old Saddle Horse is Missing.* During the 1940s Don White journeyed to Hollywood with the Tennessee Ramblers to appear in a number of cowboy movies. The high point of his career came in 1946–1952 when powerful WLS Chicago made Don White and the Sage Riders featured performers on its highly popular National Barn Dance heard throughout the Midwest.

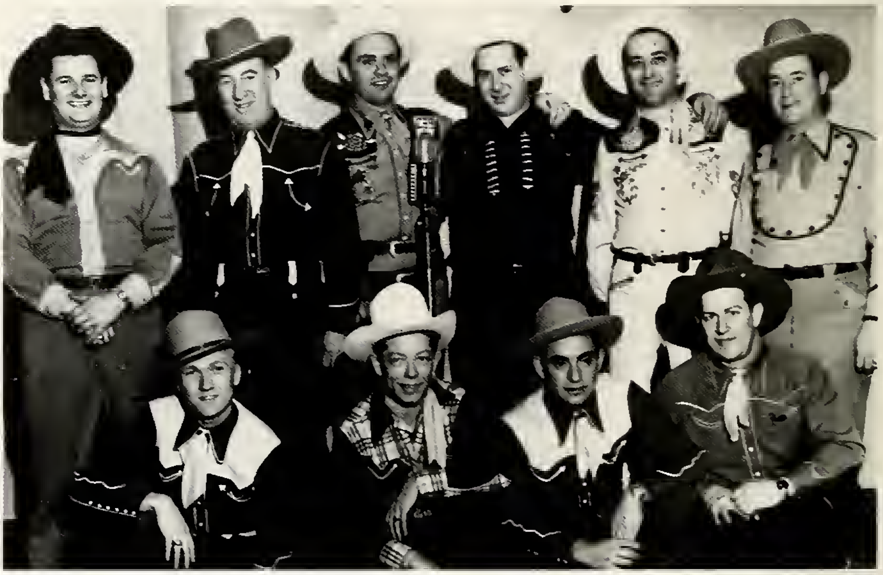
Banjoist Shannon Grayson hails from Sunshine, North Carolina. Born September 30, 1916, he started his career playing mandolin and guitar for Art Mix, brother of cowboy movie star Tom Mix. In 1937 he began working with western singers Bill and Cliff Carlisle. They played on radio in Charlotte, Knoxville, Asheville, and Charleston, West Virginia, and recorded frequently at the RCA sessions in Charlotte. In 1943 he left to join the WBT Briarhoppers and remained with them for most of their network years. At the end of the 1940s he struck off on his own as leader of the Golden Valley Boys, an early bluegrass group which recorded for RCA.

"Fiddlin' Hank" Warren (his first name is really Garnett) has long been one of the most versatile of the Briarhoppers. Born in Mount Airy, North Carolina, April 1, 1909, he got his start winning fiddlers' contests as leader of Warren's Four Aces. Like Don White, he spent time with the Blue Ridge Mountaineers and the Tennessee Ramblers. He recorded with the Ramblers at the Charlotte sessions and appeared with them in the 1936 film, *Ride Ranger Ride* starring Gene Autry. He joined the Briarhoppers in the early 1940s and became not only their fiddler, but also their baggy-pants comedian. Photos of the band from that decade feature Hank—made up with freckles, fake glasses and blacked-out teeth—cutting capers with his fiddle or even standing on his head. Few listeners realized that he had enough formal training to play with the Charlotte Symphony, or that his skill at sight-reading allowed him to act as the Briarhopper musical director during the busy days following World War II when composers deluged the band with song sheets. After the Briarhoppers went off the air, Hank became chief photographer for WBTV, and his work files have proved an important resource both for that corporation and for historians.

Roy Grant and Arval Hogan form the duo "Whitey and Hogan" within the Briarhoppers, and historians at the Country Music Foundation have declared them country music's longest-running duet. Grant was born in Shelby, North Carolina, April 7, 1916, and Hogan was born on July 24, 1911 in Robbinsville, North Carolina. Like many other young men and women raised in the piedmont Carolinas they went to work in the textile mills. It was in 1935 at the massive Firestone Mill in Gastonia that they met and began playing together as the Spindle City Boys. Whitey and Hogan made their radio debut on WSPA Spartanburg, then became regulars on new WGNC Gastonia in 1939 where they broadcast from the main street show-window of a sponsoring furniture store. Decca Records brought them to New York for their first recording session late that year. In 1941, they joined the WBT Briarhoppers in Charlotte, and were featured vocalists with the band until it broke up in the early 1950s.

Today the Briarhoppers are performing once again, and recording for the Lamon and Old Homestead labels. They have a busy schedule of bluegrass festivals all over the Southeast, and recently travelled to St. Paul, Minnesota, for a guest appearance on public radio's hugely popular *Prairie Home Companion.* Since 1978, school children in North Carolina have been treated to the Briarhoppers as part of the "Folk Arts in the Schools" program sponsored by the North Carolina Arts Council. Students who ordinarily listen only to pop idols on a.m. radio are spellbound by the Briarhoppers' music and humor, and clamor for encores and autographs.

The Briarhoppers' enthusiasm and charm combined with finely-honed musicianship make everyone happy to hear the refrain that has been their signature since the 1930s: *"Do y'all know what 'hit is?—Hit's Briarhopper Time!"*



Briarhoppers: *(L to R)* standing, Arthur Smith, Bill Davis, Fred Kirby, Jack Gillette, Claude Casey, Cecil Campbell; seated, Roy "Whitey" Grant, Don White, Arval Hogan, Hank Warren

Joe and Janette Carter

If you were tuned to WBT Charlotte at six a.m. in 1941, you heard the last radio broadcasts of the famous Carter Family trio of A. P., Sara, and Maybelle and the Carter children: Joe, Janette, Gladys, and June.

The Carter Family lived in Maces Spring, Virginia, a tiny mountain hamlet near Bristol and Kingsport, Tennessee. Cousins Sara and Maybelle Addington married brothers A. P. and Ezra Carter, and in the mid-1920s A. P. (which stood for Alvin Pleasant), Sara, and Maybelle began singing together as the Carter Family. In August 1927 an RCA Victor field recording team visited Bristol and captured on wax the Carters' mix of old mountain ballads and original tunes. Their 78s quickly found favor with rural listeners, selling well throughout the United States, Canada and Australia during the years between the wars.

Three Carter recording sessions took place in Charlotte. The first two were arranged by RCA Victor in May of 1931; the final session was undertaken in June of 1938 for Decca Records. Twenty-nine sides were recorded in all.

The year 1938 proved to be especially successful for the Carters. They were hired by Consolidated Drug Trade Products—the Chicago-based maker of Peruna tonic, Kolorbak hair dye, and Radio Girl perfume—and sent to Texas where they broadcast daily over high-wattage border radio stations just inside Mexico. The border stations reached much of North America and introduced the Carters to hundreds of thousands of new fans.

When not broadcasting on border radio, Consolidated Drug brought the Carter Family back to powerful 50,000-watt WBT in Charlotte. A *Charlotte Observer* radio listing for June 1939 indicates that the Carters were then broadcasting a "farm time" show with announcer Grady Cole each weekday morning, and a second half-hour program every afternoon. This schedule seems to have continued into early 1940 when the family returned to Texas for more broadcasts and transcriptions. Historians report that the family returned to Charlotte in late 1941 or early 1942 for a final six months of work for WBT. It was here that A. P. and Sara parted company bringing an end to the famed trio.

In their decade and a half together, the Carter Family earned the right to be called legendary. More than any other group, they brought the time-honored mountain ballad tradition to records. They composed or popularized the now-classic *Will the Circle Be Unbroken, Wildwood Flower, Hello Stranger, Keep On the Sunny Side, Let the Church Roll On, Angel Band, My Old Cottage Home, It Takes a Worried Man, I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes,* and dozens more. Sara helped bring the autoharp into favor as a concert instrument. Maybelle's innovative accompaniment methods are now copied by dozens of accomplished guitarists today. In 1970 the Carter Family became the first group elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

The three original Carters have passed away, but the clan continues to be quite active in music. Perhaps best known are daughter June Carter, the Nashville singer married to Johnny Cash, and granddaughter Carlene Carter, a top-selling rock vocalist. But the favorites of traditional music fans are undoubtedly Joe and Janette Carter. The youngest children of Sara and A. P., Joe and Janette Carter continue to present the classic Carter Family material in its original, unvarnished acoustic form.

Janette Carter was born in 1923 and Joe in 1927. Janette learned autoharp from her mother and at age twelve began appearing with the Family. By the late 1930s she and Joe were regularly adding their voices to the Carter Family broadcasts on border radio and over WBT. Along the way she helped her father gather traditional tunes from rural singers. A. P. would write down the words and Janette would commit the tunes to memory. "She was my tape recorder," A. P. is quoted as saying proudly.

Today Joe plays fiddle, banjo, and piano as well as guitar, and composes hymns. Janette plays autoharp and guitar, and has written her own songs in the old Carter style. Her uncompromising rough-hewn singing style is heard regularly in concerts across the United States,

Best Wishes from the Carter Fam
Sarah, Joe and Jeanette

Janette, Joe, Sara, A.P. Carter

among them a recent pair of appearances on public radio's popular *Prairie Home Companion.*

In 1974, in an effort to encourage the continuance of old-time music traditions Janette reopened A. P.'s general store as the Carter Family Fold, a museum and performance center. Today its simple stage attracts pilgrims from around the world who come to hear old-time acoustic music in the Carter Family tradition. This summer the state of Virginia honored Janette Carter with a Governor's Award for the Arts honoring her efforts to keep alive the folk music heritage of the southern mountains.

Claude Casey

Born in Enoree, South Carolina on September 13, 1912, Claude Casey comes from a long line of Carolina musicians. His grandfather, father, and mother played fiddle and his aunt played banjo. "This is how my mother and father first met, playing for a dance," remembers Claude. "So I was around music back in my younger days; that's what gave me the bug." His first instrument was the harmonica and before long he learned to accompany his father at square dances. When the family moved to nearby Whitmore, Claude met Lawrence and Carl Boling who introduced him to guitar playing.

In his early teens, Claude moved with his family to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and then into Danville. He was impressed by the music around his home. The Danville area in the late 1920s teemed with influential stringband musicians including banjo player Charlie Poole, fiddler Charlie Laprade, and guitarist Elton Biggers. While in Danville, Claude began playing guitar with local stringbands the Piedmont Serenaders and the Schoolfield Woodchoppers and gradually took up singing.

In 1929, at the age of sixteen, he made his first appearance on radio over WBTM in Danville. He landed a fifteen minute program on Saturday mornings billed as the Carolina Hobo and soon began broadcasting on WBTM with friends Jake King, Tex Isley and Marvin Fowler as the Pine State Playboys. Casey was just eighteen and had worked intermittently as a mill hand, apple picker, and plumber's apprentice, but his heart was set on music.

The early thirties were lean times for most Carolina musicians and for Casey as well. The Pine State Playboys broke up and reformed a number of times during the thirties with shifting personnel who included, in addition to Casey, Jake King, Johnny Stafford, Willie Coates, Lawrence and Carl Boling, Jimmy Rouse and Roger Morris. Casey earned his stage name "Carolina Hobo," hitchhiking and playing music as far away as Texas and New York. But when jobs ran out he returned to the Danville area where his family still lived.

Casey set out again with thumb and guitar for New York in 1936. He won an appearance on Major Bowes' Amateur Hour in New York and toured with the Bowes organization throughout the Southeast. When he returned to Danville from his successful debut with Major Bowes, even the mayor came over to greet the hometown boy.

By the late thirties, Casey had realized a major ambition—to make records. He first recorded in New York for Art Satherly of the American Record Corporation in 1937, showing his local roots with such numbers as *Memories of Charlie Poole* and *Moonshine in the North Carolina Hills.* Back in North Carolina, the 1938 ensemble of Claude Casey and his Pine State Playboys recorded for RCA Victor in Charlotte and Rock Hill. Casey's polished vocals and fine yodeling foreshadowed the talent and popular appeal which would mark his radio, songwriting, film, and television careers.

Casey's travelling days were by no means at an end. The next few years saw him in Kinston with the Pine State Playboys, in the Midwest with Fat Sanders' Country Cousins and in Florida with the Rouse brothers. By 1940, Casey had reformed the Pine State Playboys, this time with Kelland Clark, Clinton Collins, and Jimmy Colvard, to record for RCA Victor in Atlanta.

Best Wishes
Claude Casey
Claude Casey

In 1941, Casey walked into Charles Crutchfield's office at WBT one day and asked him for a job. Crutchfield auditioned him, hired him, and put him on the air that day. Casey became a featured singer on the Dixie Farm Club and the Briarhopper show. "Everybody that worked at WBT was a Briarhopper," recalls Casey, who soon joined the Briarhoppers and the Tennessee Ramblers in their schedule of personal appearances throughout the piedmont. He made his first movie with the Tennessee Ramblers, *Swing Your Partner* in 1943, and went on to make ten more films in the coming years.

Casey remained with WBT for twelve years appearing on local and CBS network shows including the *Carolina Hayride, Carolina Calling,* and the *Dixie Jamboree* for which he was host and scriptwriter. His association with WBT became more than just another radio job. "Working at WBT was one of the greatest things that ever happened to me. I made a world of friends and found a beautiful woman that I married." Claude and Ruth Casey married in 1942 and settled down in Charlotte.

After World War II, Casey's increasing success with Western music, led him to form his own band at WBT, Claude Casey and his Sage Dusters. Still closely tied to the WBT family of performers, Casey toured at the same time with Sam Poplin, Homer Christopher and Shannon Grayson as Briarhopper Unit Number Two.

After the breakup of the Briarhopper show in the early 1950s, Casey moved with his Sage Dusters to WGAC in Augusta, Georgia and then to WFBC-TV in Greenville, South Carolina. In the early 1960s, the Caseys moved to Ruth's home town of Johnston, South Carolina where they founded radio station WJES which they continue to own and operate today, with their son Michael acting as general manager.

Tommy Faile

Tommy Faile was born in September of 1928 and raised in Lancaster, South Carolina, a younger generation musician than most of the artists honored at *The*

Charlotte Country Music Story. He remembers getting his first guitar at age ten: "I used to attend a school directly across the street from my house. One day I was looking at the school window and saw the postman deliver a package to my home. I could tell it was a guitar and couldn't wait to get home to start practicing."

At the age of sixteen,Faile had worked in a local mill for a year and a half, but he had his eye on a career in music. In 1945 he was playing with a hometown band when Fisher Hendley invited him to Columbia to join his band the Aristocratic Pigs on WIS. But after a year,Faile tired of the rigorous touring schedule and in 1946 joined the Hired Hands with Snuffy Jenkins, Homer "Pappy" Sherrill, Ira Dimmery, Larry Ruff, and Marion Kyser. His guitar work, beautiful baritone voice, and snappy comedy routines earned him many fans. He remained with the Hired Hands until 1951 and then replaced Roy Lear in the Crackerjacks band which included Ralph, Sonny and Arthur Smith. He appeared on WBTV's *Arthur Smith Show,* beginning in the early 1950s, and in 1969 he launched his own WBTV program called *The Tommy Faile Show,* which ran until 1975.

In addition to his talents as a musician and performer,Faile is a prolific song writer. One of his songs,*Phantom 309,* was recorded by country singer Red Sovine and became a hit in 1967. Today Faile continues to write songs and do freelance radio work, hosting a Sunday-night early country show on WLVK called *Country Gold.* His long career in radio and television makes him a familiar personality to many Charlotteans.

George Hamilton IV (Emcee)

Born and raised in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, George Hamilton IV grew up listening to country music on the Saturday evening Grand Ole Opry broadcasts. Like the performers honored in *The Charlotte Country Music Story,* Hamilton comes from a tradition of "down home" music. He says, "My people were originally farmers from the mountains. Their heritage was mountain music—string bands, fiddles, and the like. It seemed the natural thing to do to learn to play an instrument and sing." He remembers listening to his grandfather's records of Jimmie Rodgers, and watching the cowboy matinees starring Tex Ritter and Gene Autry.

Hamilton belongs to a younger generation of country performers than the WBT radio musicians. By the time he made his 1956 debut, television was rapidly replacing radio as the most popular entertainment medium; he got his start on WMAL-TV in Washington, D.C., on *Jimmy Dean's Country Showcase,* rather than on a radio program. Early in his career, he produced several pop music hits, such as *A Rose and a Baby Ruth* and *Break My Mind,* but soon returned to his North Carolina country roots with the country classic *Abilene* and *She's A Little Bit Country.*

Because of his talent and dedication to country music he became a member of the Grand Ole Opry in 1960. Yet, he found his greatest popularity in Canada, Europe, and Great Britain. He has had a long-running weekly television show in Canada, number one records in England and Australia, and fans as far away as Hong Kong. His extensive overseas touring schedule and a concert in Moscow earned him the title of International Ambassador of Country Music from *Billboard* in 1974.

George Hamilton IV

Hamilton blends the traditional country music of his youth with the gentle sounds of the folk revival musicians of the 1960s and 1970s. With his warm voice and fine musicianship,he has introduced many new songs and song writers to country music audiences. Like the early radio stars of WBT, Hamilton comes from a background rich in gospel music and he has recorded several gospel albums. In the last several years he has worked as a guest soloist on Rev. Billy Graham's Crusades, both here and abroad.

In 1972, after years of extensive touring, Hamilton returned to North Carolina to settle in Matthews, outside Charlotte, and work with Arthur Smith on his syndicated television series. Today he continues to tour, record, and perform and is one of country music's best-loved stars and most articulate spokesmen.

Snuffy Jenkins and Pappy Sherrill

Country music historians point to Dewitt "Snuffy" Jenkins as a pivotal figure in the development of bluegrass-style banjo. He and fiddler Homer "Pappy" Sherrill have been making music together since the 1930s.

Homer Lee Sherrill was born on March 23, 1915, outside Hickory, North Carolina, in the village of Sherrill's Ford some twenty-five miles north of Charlotte. At seven, Homer got a tin Sears & Roebuck fiddle for Christmas. Soon he played well enough to help his father draw a crowd when they went into town to sell watermelons from the family garden.

Homer debuted on WSOC radio (then in Gastonia) at age thirteen, and in 1934 he joined the Crazy Water Barn Dance at WBT Charlotte as leader of Homer Sherrill's East Hickory Stringband. The Crazy Water management soon renamed the band the Crazy Hickory Nuts and sent it to WWNC Asheville. When the band dissolved, Sherrill stayed on as fiddler for Bill and Earl Bolick, brothers who gained fame as the Blue Sky Boys.

About this time Homer began appearing on records. RCA was holding frequent field sessions in Charlotte, and Homer added his talent to several of the dates between 1936 and 1938. The first seems to have been June 22, 1936, when he teemed with the duo Shorty Watkins and Mac McMillen to form the Blue Ridge Hill Billies. In October of that year, he backed Wade Mainer and Zeke Morris as they cut eight tunes, including the delightful nonsense classic, *Hop Along Peter.*

In 1938, Homer broadcast on WPTF Raleigh with the Smiling Rangers, a band which included Zeke and Wiley Morris and at times Wade Mainer. The band broke up in 1939, but not before being captured on wax by RCA at the Hotel Charlotte on January 26, 1938. After the split Homer retired from performing briefly: "I was so tired and I'd been moving about and I already gained a little girl in my family and I wanted to drift around and take it easy."

But before 1939 was out, crack announcer Byron Parker persuaded Homer Sherrill to move his family to Columbia, South Carolina, and join the WIS Hillbillies with Snuffy Jenkins.

Dewitt Jenkins was born on October 27, 1908 in Harris, North Carolina, not far from the city of Shelby. He grew up hearing the distinctive three-finger banjo style played by amateur musicians in that part of the piedmont. Its rolling, bubbling sound, in stark contrast to the more traditional and percussive frailing and clawhammer styles, delighted the young man.

In 1934, Jenkins became the first to use the new style on radio, debuting on WBT's Crazy Water Barn Dance as leader of the Dewitt Jenkins Stringband. Promotional material noted that they were "playing the old-time mountain tunes like very few can, and in that 'peppy' style that is peculiarly their own." After a brief stint as bandleader, Jenkins joined J. E. Mainer's Mountaineers, one of the period's most popular stringbands, and broadcast with them over WSPA Spartanburg and WIS Columbia.

In August 1937 Jenkins put his three-finger banjo style on record. In a drapery-shrouded room on the tenth floor of the Hotel Charlotte, he and the Mountaineers recorded with J. E. on fiddle, George Morris (Zeke and Wiley's brother) on guitar, and Leonard Stokes on mandolin. The sound "came frightfully close to bluegrass," write folklorists Ivan Tribe and John Morris, despite the fact that Bill Monroe was still two years from forming his first organization of the Bluegrass Boys: "Four sides feature the group with Snuffy's three-finger banjo being quite audible and the entire band sounding quite similar to bluegrass on *Don't Go Out Tonight, Don't Get Trouble in Mind,* and *Kiss Me Cindy.*" One cannot help but wonder whether young Monroe was listening.

WIS Hillbillies *(l to r)* Tommy Faile, Ira Dimmery, "Pappy" Sherrill, Dewitt "Snuffy" Jenkins.

In fact, Snuffy Jenkins directly influenced the two men who later brought three-finger banjo playing to Monroe's band. Earl Scruggs grew up near Jenkins and remembers listening closely to the older player. Don Reno, who followed Scruggs in the Bluegrass Boys, took lessons from Jenkins. Reno has written: "Snuffy taught me the basic three-finger roll on the five-string banjo when I was just a little boy. . . That's what turned me on to banjo. Before Snuffy's style, banjo sounded harsh and crude to me."

After Mainer moved on from Columbia, Byron Parker (affectionately known as "The Old Hired Hand") kept the band together as the WIS Hillbillies, recruiting Homer Sherrill, the late comic "Greasy" Medlin, and others as needed. The group broadcast daily over WIS and played the "kerosene circuit" of schoolhouses and courthouses. Shows included both music and comedy. Snuffy (his nickname resulted from some now-forgotten skit), clad in immense baggy pants and size twelve shoes, played the washboard and acted the fool in such bits as "Hookeyville School" and "Snuffy Cures a Snakebite."

During the 1940s, the group recorded for RCA in Atlanta, DeLuxe Records in Columbia, and Capitol Records in Charlotte. By the end of the decade, Homer had gained his nickname of "Pappy" (part of an on-the-air contest to name his second child), and the band had taken the name the Hired Hands

During the 1950s the Hired Hands hosted a weekly television show on WIS-TV called *Carolina in the Morning.* They found a new audience during the 1960s folk music revival and began recording anew and touring festivals across America. Recently they performed at Carnegie Hall.

Today, Pappy Sherrill's limber-wristed fiddling is still in fine form. Snuffy's baggy pants and washboard are just as corny, and his banjo just as loud and clear as in the 1930s, even as he approaches his seventy-seventh birthday.

Johnson Family Singers and Betty Johnson

The singing of hymns and gospel songs was a staple of country music performances in the 1930s and '40s. One of WBT's best-loved groups, the Johnson Family Singers, specialized in sacred music and were known to many as "radio's sweetest singing family."

Lydia and Jesse Johnson, known affectionately as Ma and Pa, lived in the White Oak community of Greensboro, North Carolina and worked at Cone Mills. They raised four children, each of whom had musical talent: Kenneth, Betty, and the twins, Bob and Jim.

In 1937, Pa Johnson attended the Stamps-Baxter Music School in Dallas, Texas and learned the shape-note system of musical notation. After his return he taught his family the shape-note method and led singing schools in the community. Soon the family began performing at church programs and family reunions. In 1940 they were invited to sing on WBT radio. They were so well received that the station offered them a contract to broadcast five times a week. Their success persuaded them to try to make a living with their music and they took to the road to supplement the income provided by WBT.

With the encouragement of WBT pianist Larry Walker, they added popular songs to their repertory. Walker was a classically trained musician and greatly influenced the family's musical style and development. Under his direction they produced the "sweet, mellow, and blended sound" that, along with Pa Johnson's guitar accompaniment, became Johnson Family trademarks.

Their signature song on WBT was *There's a Little Pine Log Cabin;* favorite hymns included *The Old Rugged Cross* and *Precious Memories.* Veteran WBT listeners may also fondly recall their renditions of popular songs such as *Goodnight Irene, Moonlight on the Bay* and *Carolina Moon.*

In the early 1940s, Betty Johnson appeared as a soloist on the Briarhopper show with Whitey and Hogan, Hank Warren and Claude Casey. She sang popular numbers of the day with the accompaniment of the Briarhopper musicians and regularly joined Claude and Whitey and Hogan for duets and trios.

During the 1940s, the Johnsons toured with Bill Monroe and Arthur Smith and appeared with the Carter Family on WBT. In 1947 they made their first appearance on Nashville's Grand Ole Opry. They remained regulars on WBT for over ten years, receiving carloads of fan mail. Their broadcasting career came to a close in 1951 when sponsors chose to invest their advertising budgets in newspapers rather than radio.

Betty Johnson

But by then, the Johnson children had grown up and were ready to pursue careers of their own. Kenneth attended Dickenson College and prepared to enter the ministry. Betty began a highly successful career as an actress and professional singer which eventually carried her to Broadway. The twins became Charlotte businessmen. Ma and Pa Johnson retired to Orangeburg, South Carolina where they continued to sing in the family tradition.

In 1958, the Johnson Family Singers reunited for two appearances on the Ed Sullivan Show and a year later they recorded an album in Nashville.

It has been many years now since the Johnsons have been heard in public, but they are well remembered by thousands of Carolinians who listened to WBT four decades ago.

Fred Kirby

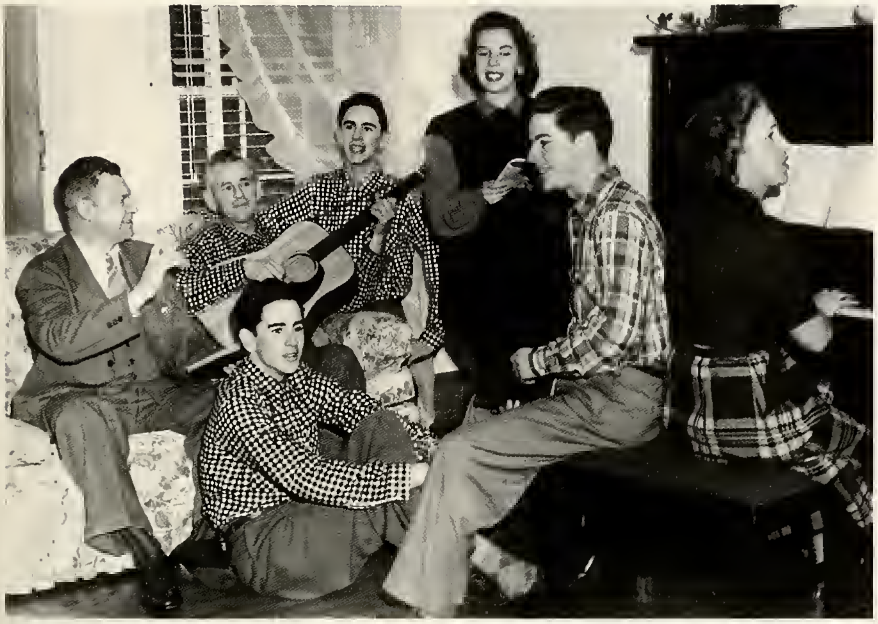
To generations of youngsters growing up in the Charlotte area, Fred Kirby has been the friendly cowboy on a series of WBTV children's shows. But his early success came in the 1930s and 1940s when he was one of the area's most romantic radio and recording stars.

Fred Kirby is a native Charlottean, born July 19, 1910 the son of an itinerant Methodist minister. He learned to play guitar and sing hymns from his mother, but says his professional career started by accident. When Fred was seventeen, his family was living in Florence, South Carolina. While visiting his uncle in Columbia, Fred went with a cousin to a music store across the street from station WIS to buy a new set of strings for his guitar. They decided to first stop in at WIS where his cousin had friends and Fred was left alone for a few minutes in the station's lobby. Thrilled with the chance to see the inside of a radio station, Fred walked into an empty studio, stepped up to the microphone with his guitar and started singing, pretending that he was making a live broadcast. Unbeknownst to Fred, announcer Charles Crutchfield, overheard the complete performance! Surprising the embarassed young singer, Crutchfield offered him a job on the spot. "You'll do," he told Kirby, "you can start tomorrow."

The next year, at age eighteen, Fred Kirby moved to WBT Charlotte. He spent ten years there, perfecting a cowboy singing style inspired by blue yodeller Jimmie Rodgers and influenced over the years by Gene Autry, Ernest Tubb and Eddie Arnold. He teamed with Bob Phillips during the early 1930s, but more often sang solo, billed as "The Hillbilly Cavalier." During one brief period on the Crazy Water Barn Dance the billing was changed to "The Crazy Cavalier," in keeping with the sponsor's wishes. The new name somehow didn't fit the handsome young man in the promotional pictures, dressed like a young Bing Crosby in smart white pants, dark blazer and tie and seated in a swing shaped like a crescent moon.

In 1939, Fred Kirby and Don White struck off for the Midwest as a cowboy singing duo. They broadcast together on WLW Cincinnati and WLS Chicago before their paths parted, Don's to Nebraska and Fred's to St. Louis. By now World War II was on, and Kirby earned a special citation from Secretary of the Treasurer Henry Morganthau for his work selling war bonds over St. Louis radio as "The Victory Cowboy." It was in St. Louis, Kirby remembers, that he began his transition to an entertainer of children. "It was at a benefit at the St. Louis Shriners Hospital—I simply fell in love with the kids."

Nonetheless, he was happy to return to Charlotte in 1943 when Charles Crutchfield called and urged him to come back to WBT. Kirby returned as a featured soloist with the Briarhoppers in their local show and on the CBS network programs *Carolina Hayride* and *Carolina Calling.* In addition, he hosted one of WBT's first disc-jockey shows and began his first Saturday children's show, *Cowboy Roundup Time.*



The Johnson Family Singers and Grady Cole: *(L to R)* Grady Cole, Pa, the twins Bob and Jim, Betty, Kenneth, Ma

Fred Kirby

It was during this busy period of the mid-1940s that Fred Kirby had his biggest hit as a composer and recording star. He had begun recording for RCA Victor in Charlotte in February of 1936 and had become a prolific songwriter. The morning after the bomb dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945, he rushed down to WBT's Wilder Building studios and composed a new song entitled *Atomic Power.* Today historians say the gospel-influenced lyric was the first ever written about the atom bomb. Kirby performed it on his radio shows and recorded it for Sonora Records. By the end of 1946 more than half a dozen other artists had recorded it, and Kirby knew he had a hit on his hands.

In 1951, WBTV signed on the air, and Fred Kirby was there with the third live show on the new station, a children's program called *Fred Kirby's Junior Rancho.* Since that time he has been a fixture at WBTV with his horse Calico and sidekick "Uncle Jim" Patterson. Currently you can see him each Saturday morning on Channel 3 at 7:30 with *Fred Kirby's Cartoon Corral.* Kirby is in his thirty-fourth year on television, one of the most enduring children's stars in the medium. "I'm now on my fourth generation of bringin' up little ones to big ones," he says, "and I am very proud of all of them."

Roy Lear

A native of Pineville, North Carolina, Roy Lear first learned guitar from his father, David Lear, who played banjo in the WOW (Woodsmen of the World) Stringband over WBT's Crazy Water Crystals Barn Dance in 1934 and 1935. By the age of seven, the younger Lear was seconding his father on guitar at local dances.

In the late 1930s, fiddler Sam Poplin was broadcasting on WIS in Columbia, South Carolina and needed two musicians for his band. Lear hitchhiked to Columbia with his neighbor Lonnie Smith to audition, and won a spot in the group singing and playing guitar. Lear worked the early morning and noon time radio shows with Poplin's group and played hundreds of schoolhouse dates and dances until the band broke up at the start of World War II.

In 1943, after his discharge from the army, Lear joined the Tennessee Ramblers who had just left WBT and were touring theatres on the T. D. Kemp circuit throughout the Southeast and as far away as New York and New Jersey. Lear recorded with Ramblers Cecil Campbell, Don White and Jack Gillette in 1945 for Super Disc in Washington, D.C.

Roy Lear

After leaving the Tennessee Ramblers when that group split up in 1946, Lear became a member of Arthur Smith's band, the Crackerjacks, playing bass fiddle. From 1946 to 1951 he appeared with Smith on WBT's *Carolina Hayride* and *Carolina Calling* radio programs and in a host of personal appearances all over the Carolinas. Though he was never an official Briarhopper, Lear often played with them on barn dances. He also recorded with Betty Johnson of the Johnson Family Singers.

In 1951, Lear rejoined Cecil Campbell and the Tennessee Ramblers whose line-up now featured Campbell on steel guitar, Jimmy Lunsford on fiddle, Millard Pressley on mandolin and Lear on guitar and bass. The band appeared on WBTV's *The Hitching Post* for a year and continued to tour locally.

Although Lear continued to play regularly with the Tennessee Ramblers, by the mid-1950s he needed to supplement his performing income and started work at Cone Mills. He later switched to a job in a sheet metal factory where he stayed for thirteen years before retiring.

Lear was an active member of the Tennessee Ramblers up through the 1970s when the band stopped playing out regularly. His interest in music, however, has not stopped or been limited to his country and western background. He is active today writing sheet music for aspiring songwriters and helping young people who are trying to break into the music business.

Wade Mainer

During the late 1930s, Wade Mainer was probably the most-recorded country musician in Charlotte. Today his distinctive two-finger banjo style and old-time music continue to make him popular at festivals across the United States.

Wade Mainer was born on April 21, 1907, near Weaverville, North Carolina, in the Blue Ridge Mountains above Asheville. In the mid-1920s, he moved to Concord to join older brother J. E. who had found work in the cotton mills there. Both young men had learned music from a fiddle-playing uncle in the mountains. They formed a band called Mainer's Mountaineers to play at social events and fiddlers' contests. J. E. played fiddle, Wade picked banjo, and John

Wade Mainer

Love and Zeke Morris joined in on guitars.

The Mountaineers made their first radio appearance on WSOC (then a Gastonia station) and caught the attention of Crazy Water Crystals distributor J. W. Fincher of Charlotte. He hired them for WBT's Saturday-night Crazy Water Barn Dance in 1934, and later sent them out to broadcast daily shows on stations in New Orleans, Asheville, and Raleigh. Along the way they stopped at an RCA field session in Atlanta to record their first records. The initial release, *Maple On the Hill,* became one of the 1930s major sellers and remains a country classic. Wade estimates that the disc earned the band $18,000—at a royalty rate of one-half cent per record sold. Today, historians point to Mainer's Mountaineers as one of the most influential stringbands of the pre-WWII era, "an important link in the evolution from the older stringband sounds of the 1920s to the new bluegrass style of the 1940s," one scholar says.

Wade began a recording career as a band leader in his own right in 1936, though he continued to play with J. E. off and on. His first session took place at 208 South Tryon Street on February 14, 1936, and almost all of his pre-World War II records were waxed in Charlotte or Rock Hill. By 1939, he had recorded nearly one hundred sides. This number far surpassed the sixty songs cut by the popular Monroe Brothers, for instance, and it indicates that Wade Mainer was one of the best selling artists of his day.

Mainer's most frequent partner in his Charlotte area sessions was guitarist Zeke Morris. On several occasions the duo expanded to a trio with the addition of Steve Ledford or Homer Sherrill on fiddle. When Zeke married, Wade replaced him with Clyde Moody, who soon went on to become a member of the very first line-up of Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys. The voice of young Julia Brown was featured in one Charlotte session in January 1938, in the song *When Romance Calls.* The title was apt, for Julia was to become Wade's wife, and she still sings with him in concerts today.

A high point of Wade Mainer's career came in February 1941 when he received an invitation to perform at the White House for President and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt. "His most vivid recollection of the event came when he spilled some ice cream on the First Lady's dress," say historians Ivan Tribe and John W. Morris. "Fortunately she didn't seem to mind, and helped to put the embarrassed mountaineer at ease."

After World War II, country music veered from the old-time sounds of the 1930s, and in 1951 Wade Mainer hung up his banjo. He moved to Flint, Michigan, to work in a General Motors plant and became active in an area church. He remains a resident of Michigan.

During the 1960s folk music revival, a new generation of old-time music enthusiasts sought Mainer out and persuaded him to take up banjo once again. Some of them founded Michigan-based Old Homestead Records—now a major folk music label—in part to rerelease his early recordings. Wade became something of a celebrity as one of the few old-time southern musicians easily accessible to northern audiences. When he retired from General Motors in 1973, he began performing more often at folk festivals, and today he and Julia spend part of each year crisscrossing the United States in their camper and playing music.

Bill Monroe

Most people think of bluegrass as mountain music, old as the hills. But in truth the hard-driving mix of fiddle, mandolin, guitar, three-finger banjo, and bass first came together in the 1940s and reflects varied musical influences. Bill Monroe introduced it on the Grand Ole Opry, and because he named his band the Bluegrass Boys, his style of music

Bill Monroe

eventually came to be known as "bluegrass." Monroe launched his recording career during the years 1936 to 1938 in Charlotte.

Born the son of a Kentucky farmer on September 13, 1911, Bill Monroe was the youngest of a musical family. He ended up playing mandolin because the more glamorous instruments—fiddle and guitar—were already taken. When Bill was in his teens his brothers Birch and Charlie joined the regional movement from farm to factory. They journeyed to the Chicago area to work as laborers for Standard Oil, and Bill joined them about 1929. They played music together in their spare hours and won a part-time role as exhibition square dancers with the WLS radio barn dance roadshow.

In 1934 Bill and Charlie quit Standard Oil for full-time careers as a country music duo. Charlie Monroe, then thirty-one, played guitar, sang lead, and worked hard to get the audience to enjoy itself. Bill, just twenty-three, was by contrast quiet and inner-directed. He concentrated on picking out melody lines on the mandolin—a task usually left to the fiddle in mountain music—and developing high, lonesome-sounding vocal harmonies.

The Monroe Brothers started singing daily on the radio for the patent medicine Texas Crystals in Shenandoah, Iowa, and then Omaha, Nebraska. After only a few months, the company sent them east to the piedmont textile region where they appeared on WIS in Columbia, South Carolina. There, sales of Texas Crystals "gave out," recalls Bill, and the brothers moved to a stronger competitor, the Crazy Water Crystals company, which maintained its regional office in Charlotte.

By 1936 they were doing two Crazy Water radio shows a day with popular announcer Byron Parker—one in Greenville, South Carolina, where they lived, and the other over WBT Charlotte.

The Monroe Brothers' popularity attracted the attention of RCA Victor executive Eli Oberstein when he visited Charlotte for a week of recording in February, 1936. It took a telegram and persuasive phone call from Oberstein before the busy duo consented to record. RCA's initial release from that session, the hymn *What Would You Give In Exchange for Your Soul*, proved to be one of the biggest-selling records in the South in the 1930s. By the time of their last Charlotte session in January, 1938, the Monroes had left Greenville for Raleigh and a daily slot on WPTF there.

The Monroe Brothers' sixty sides constitute their entire recorded output as a duo. Among the discs are versions of *Roll On Buddy, Nine Pound Hammer, On Some Foggy Mountain Top,* and *Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms,* whose popularity helped make those tunes become standards in bluegrass and country music.

The earliest Charlotte recordings sound very little like bluegrass, particularly the many hymns with their slow pace and plaintive vocals. "Our music then didn't have no drive," says Bill Monroe today. But even on the very first tune of that Feburary 1936 session, *My Long Journey Home,* one can hear the unmistakeable mandolin style he was soon to make famous. On later recordings it becomes more insistent. Monroe credits his improving sound in large part to his constant work on WBT and the other Crazy Water stations: "Oh, yes, radio was very important. You knew people were listening to you close every day so you worked to play right."

As time passed, Bill became dissatisfied with the old-time sound of the duet. Charlie, on the other hand, had no wish to alter what so obviously pleased the crowds. In the summer of 1938, while in Raleigh, Bill Monroe left to form the stringband that would gain fame as the Bluegrass Boys. Charlie spent much of the rest of his career in the Carolinas, working from a home base in Greensboro and recording for RCA at the 1938 and 1939 Rock Hill field sessions. His band, the Kentucky Pardners, became an important training ground for future bluegrass stars, including Lester Flatt, Curly Seckler, Dave "Stringbean" Akeman, Red Rector, and Ira Louvin. Among the numerous stations where the Kentucky Pardners spent periods doing daily radio shows was WBT Charlotte, where they joined announcer Grady Cole for a 5:45 a.m. "farm time" program during early 1946. Charlie retired to Kentucky in the late 1950s but returned to the Charlotte area for a last performance at the Lake Norman Opry House.

While Charlie continued as a much-loved entertainer in the Southeast, Bill Monroe went on to forge the new sound of bluegrass. The first organization of the Bluegrass Boys played in Atlanta and Asheville in 1939 before joining the Grand Ole Opry in October 1939 and cutting its first records in Atlanta on October 7, 1940. By the end of the forties the South was wrapped up in a craze for the music it appreciatively called "bluegrass" after Bill Monroe's band.

Scholars today argue over the forces that shaped bluegrass. Monroe will be the first to tell you that its roots are in his Kentucky upbringing. But historians point out that the new sound came to life not in the mountains but in the industrial towns where country people had migrated to find work. You may find, influences of the musicians that Bill Monroe heard during his first years in the Carolinas—J. E. Mainer's Mountaineers String band, the revolutionary three finger banjo style of Snuffy Jenkins, the hot style of Fiddlin' Arthur Smith.

In fact Monroe drew many, if not most, of his early Bluegrass Boys from the Carolina piedmont around Charlotte. Earl Scruggs and Don Reno, who gave the band its trademark three-finger banjo style, grew up within the sound of WBT. So too did guitarist/vocalists Carl Story and Clyde Moody, and fiddlers Jim Shumate and Art Wooten.

Today the tight, crisp stringband sound that Bill Monroe fashioned "with the farmer in mind" is enjoyed across America and in Europe and Japan. Nearly fifty years after those first Charlotte sessions, Bill Monroe continues his performing and recording career, richly deserving of his title, the "Father of Bluegrass."

Zeke and Wiley Morris

As a brother duet or as members of other ensembles, Wiley and Zeke Morris were among the most active performers in Charlotte's country music heyday in the 1930s and '40s.

Claude was born on May 9, 1916 at Old Fort, North Carolina, a few miles east of Asheville and learned to play the mandolin as a young man. Wiley, born February 1, 1919, became proficient on guitar. In 1933, Claude left his mountain home for the mill villages at Concord near Charlotte. He came at the urging of former neighbors J. E. and Wade Mainer who had taken jobs in the mill but soon found they could earn money by playing the old mountain music for appreciative fellow workers. J. E. gave Claude the hayseed nickname Zeke, in keeping with the music's rural image, and together with Concord resident John Love they formed the stringband Mainer's Mountaineers.

J. E. Mainer's Mountaineers debuted on WSOC and WBT radio stations in Charlotte and quickly became one of the most popular stringbands of the day. Crazy Water Crystals patent medicine company sent them on a tour of radio stations throughout the Carolinas and as far south as New Orleans. In 1935,the Mountaineers recorded their biggest selling song, *Maple on the Hill,* for RCA Victor. The recording featured the vocal duet of Wade Mainer and Zeke Morris.

Wade and Zeke made their first records on their own in Charlotte February 15, 1936. Included were *Maple on the Hill, Part 2,* and *Going to Georgie,* still a favorite with old-time stringbands. The duo remained with the Mountaineers until later that year. A dispute with their radio sponsor in Raleigh caused Wade and Zeke to go out on their own while J. E. and the rest of the Mountaineers continued to play for Crazy Water Crystals. (An older brother, guitarist George "Sambo" Morris, did a later stint with the Mountaineers.) Wade and Zeke added fiddler Homer Sherrill to their line-up, performing on radio as the Smiling Rangers, and recording as a trio for RCA in Charlotte on October 12, 1936. When Wade left in late 1937 to form a new band, the Rangers brought brother Wiley down from the mountains.

Zeke and Wiley Morris *(on right)*

For the remainder of the 1930s and into the mid-1940s, Zeke and Wiley Morris broadcast and recorded in a variety of settings. Together they recorded for RCA in Charlotte on Jaunary 26, 1938 and on November 14, 1945, and in nearby Rock Hill, South Carolina on September 29, 1938 and on February 5, 1939. Zeke also worked as a sideman on some Charlie Monroe recordings during the two Rock Hill sessions. Separately the Morrises spent periods on radio in Raleigh, Danville, Asheville and Johnson City. Together they appeared on WBT Charlotte for BC Headache Powders, and in Knoxville and Spartanburg. While in Spartanburg they hired an unknown, young banjo player named Earl Scruggs, and helped launch the career of one of the giants of bluegrass.

In all, Zeke and/or Wiley Morris contributed to well over one hundred of the more than fifteen hundred songs recorded in the Charlotte area by RCA up through 1945. Of the thirty-three sides that featured the Morris Brothers as band leaders, the most famous is *Let Me Be Your Salty Dog.* They first recorded the tune on September 29, 1939 in the Andrew Jackson Hotel in downtown Rock Hill. The song was released on an RCA Bluebird disc, the budget label on which all of that company's country recordings were issued. In the early 1940s,RCA discontinued its Bluebird line, but asked the Morris Brothers to record the song again for their main label. The second recording, entitled *Salty Dog Blues,* was cut at the Hotel Charlotte in November of 1945, and proved to be a major seller. The new arrangement featured Zeke's rapid-fire mandolin and sounds very much like Bill Monroe's instrumental style of a few years earlier.

Shortly after the 1945 session,Zeke and Wiley gave up the lives of professional musicians. Both were now in their late twenties and were ready to settle down to a more stable home life. Since the late 1940s,they have lived in Black Mountain, North Carolina, a few miles from their birthplace, and worked as auto body repairmen. They continue to enjoy playing, having appeared at the prestigious Newport Folk Festival in the early 1960s and recently on the Nashville Network's highly rated *Fire on the Mountain* television show.

Sam Poplin

Sam Poplin's grandfather was an old-time fiddle player in his seventies when Sam first started stealing a lick on his fiddle while the old man was out at work. Sam kept on trying to learn *Redwing* as his grandfather had played it and soon he had traded a hard-earned ten dollars for a fiddle of his own. His grandfather began to take Sam's interest in music seriously and sat down with him to teach him the old tunes like *Arkansas Traveller, Hook and Line,* and *Old Jimmy Sutton.*

While still a youngster in his hometown of Albemarle, Sam learned to read music and play a bit of clarinet in the local mill brass band. But the fiddle landed Sam his first musical job with Fisher Hendley's Carolina Tar Heels. At seventeen Poplin travelled to New York with Hendley's group, broadcasting over the radio by day and playing in a New York club by night. By the time he returned to North Carolina, he had recorded square dance tunes for Brunswick and had begun writing songs of his own.

In the early 1930s,Poplin divided his time between music and carpentry work with his father in Albemarle. Around 1934 he appeared with Fred Russell's Hillbillies on the WBT Crazy Water Crystals Barn Dance. When the Russell's Hillbillies job played out, Poplin returned to Albemarle. There Fisher Hendley called on him again, this time for a fiddling job in Greenville, South Carolina with the Aristocratic Pigs.

In 1938,Fisher Hendley moved to WIS in Columbia and Poplin pulled out of the group shortly afterward to front his own band. He formed a four member group and approached the Allen brothers of Columbia, auditioning for them in their Adluh flour mill and convincing them to sponsor his band on WIS. Sam Poplin and his Adluh Musical Millers proved so popular that Royal Crown Cola sponsored the band for a second daily show on WIS as the Royal Crown Rangers. While at WIS, Poplin's group toured extensively through the Carolinas. Booked for most every night in the week, their show combined Poplin's popular songs and trick fiddling with acrobatics, comedy, magic and even a dog show.

When military service and the tire shortage broke up Poplin's music and comedy group in the early 1940s, he left show business for a time and entered the shipyards. After the war, he resettled in Albemarle, buying a small farm and working as a machinist at Badin's aluminum plant.

He soon took up music again, playing fiddle with Curly Williams and the Georgia Peach Pickers at the Barn in Venice, California in 1945. There they shared the stage with Spade Cooley and his band and Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. Back in Carolina by 1946, he joined the WBT family of musicians. At WBT Poplin appeared with Claude Casey and the Sage Dusters and the Briarhopper Unit Number Two, who toured with the car and trailer from Poplin's Columbia days.

Poplin's mechanical skills vied with his musical interests and eventually he turned to his engineering talents for his livelihood. From an engineering job at Queens College, he got into the clock business. He retired in 1980, but is stilled called on today to repair and set up grandfather clocks. Although Poplin's major interest these days is composing, his talent for fiddle playing remains undiminished.

Red Clay Ramblers

The old-time stringband music and country songs celebrated at *The Charlotte Country Music Story* remain vital thanks to many talented young musicians (often of urban upbringing) who draw inspiration from older generations of rural folk and country artists. One of the most accomplished, creative, and influential of the younger bands who has helped to rekindle interest in traditional forms of country music is the Red Clay Ramblers.

The Ramblers got their start in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in 1972, deriving their name from the rolling red clay hills of the North Carolina piedmont. Founders Tommy Thompson, who plays banjo and guitar, and mandolinist Jim Watson learned tunes in the 1960s from master Carolina fiddlers, and desired to form a band that would bring this infectious old-time dance music to younger urban audiences. They were joined in the early 1970s by Mike Craver, Bill Hicks, and Jack Herrick. Craver plays piano and guitar. Herrick provides support on a multitude of instruments including bass, tin whistle, trumpet, and harmonica. Fiddler Bill Hicks left the band in 1981 and was replaced by Clay Buckner.

The band immersed itself in the pre-bluegrass stringband tradition, not only studying with living musicians but learning fiddle tunes and novelty numbers from old 78 recordings. Before long they were composing their own songs and tunes borrowing from the idioms of early jazz, vintage gospel, Irish music, western swing, and more: in short, creating their own performing style much the way the 1930s Carolina radio bands did.

The Red Clay Ramblers' music has proved widely popular. They have released six albums and appeared on stage in the 1975 off-Broadway musical *Diamond Studs,* and more recently with Roger Miller in a production based on Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* Tommy Thompson has recently written and starred in a one man show named *The Last Song of John Profitt.* They spend over half of each year touring North America, with occasional forays into Europe and Africa.

In their concert and workshops at Spirit Square, the Red Clay Ramblers will share the music of some of the early Carolina musicians who are no longer with us. Banjoist Thompson believes that the music is not merely good entertainment but a uniquely American cultural achievement: "Two musical traditions collided in America—the European (especially English and Irish) and the African. The first stringband was when a fiddle and banjo played together. The banjo was a product of Africa and the fiddle a product of Europe. It was a 'coming together' of literally global proportions."

Among the vintage Charlotte recording or performing artists whose music the Red Clay Ramblers feature from time to time are the Delmore Brothers, Uncle Dave Macon, Fiddling Arthur Smith, and the Carolina Tar Heels. No Rambler performance is complete without a superbly harmonized rendition of a Carter Family song or two. Mike Craver, Jim Watson, and Tommy Thompson have collaborated on an all-Carter LP entitled *Meeting in the Air,* and their strong voices fully realize the potential of this classic material.

Arthur Smith

Arthur Smith, nationally known for his recording of *Dueling Banjos* and *Guitar Boogie,* has been an important part of the Charlotte-area music scene from the early days of field recording up to the present.

Born April 1, 1921, Arthur Smith (no relation to Fiddling Arthur Smith) grew up in the cotton mill town of Kershaw, South Carolina, some sixty miles south of Charlotte. His father worked as a loom fixer in the Springs Mills plant there and in his spare time directed the town's brass band, a familiar part of village life in many Southern mill communities then. Arthur's first instrument was trumpet, and he still counts jazzmen Louis Armstrong, Stephane Grappelli, and Django Reinhart among his major influences. Soon he picked up fiddle and guitar and before long, he remembers, "could get around on most any stringed instrument."

The Red Clay Ramblers: *(L to R)* Jack Herrick, Tommy Thompson, Clay Buckner, Mike Craver, Jim Watson

Mill children in the 1920s went to work early. Before Arthur Smith reached his teens he had a job in the Springs card room. Music offered a welcome alternative to mill labor, and at thirteen Smith won his first regular spot on radio. The Arthur Smith Quartet didn't play stringband music at first: they played Dixieland jazz. In a 1977 article in *Bluegrass Unlimited,* Smith told interviewer Don Rhodes:

> *We nearly starved to death until one day we changed our style: we had been doing a daily radio show over WSPA Radio in Spartanburg, South Carolina, as the Arthur Smith Quartet. One Friday we threw down our trumpet, clarinet, and trombone and picked up the fiddle, accordian, and guitar. . . The next Monday we came back on the radio program as Arthur Smith and the Carolina Crackerjacks.*

Smith recalls the Crackerjacks made their first records at an RCA Victor field session at the Andrew Jackson Hotel in Rock Hill, South Carolina: "Our best song from that was one called *Going Back to Old Carolina.* RCA session sheets indicate that the date was September 29, 1938.

During the 1940s, country music changed dramatically. The major recording companies fixed their gaze on Nashville and its top-selling recording stars. Independent studios arose to record less commercially viable artists, either leasing the masters to larger companies or marketing records themselves on new small labels. The country sound began to absorb commercial pop and jazz influences. Most noticeably of all, musicians began to use electric instruments.

These changes adversely affected the careers of many pre-World War II entertainers, but Arthur Smith turned these developments to his advantage. He had always loved jazz, and he had begun featuring electric guitar on the radio as early as 1938: "One time the guy at a pawnshop had an amp and guitar. He got me to play the thing, and when its owner didn't come back to claim it, I ended up buying it." In 1945 he recorded a jazzy guitar instrumental called *Guitar Boogie* for the small label Super Disc Records. *Guitar Boogie,* which was based on a classic blues chordal progression, rocketed to the top of the country charts—the first instrumental to do so—then crossed over to rise to number one on the pop lists.

Today Arthur Smith is best remembered by Carolinians for his quarter of a century as a regular on WBT radio and television. He joined WBT radio about 1943 and in 1945 became a featured performer on *Carolina Hayride* (later *Carolina Calling*) which aired nationally on CBS from Charlotte each Saturday afternoon. Smith also broadcast a daily local program for years called *The Corner Store.* In the early 1950s, the program featured Arthur and his brothers Sonny and Ralph with announcer Clyde McLean in a mixture of music and cornball comedy.

When WBTV signed on in 1951, Arthur Smith took part in the first live telecast in the Carolinas. During the 1950s and 1960s he broadcast a live morning show and a weekly evening program that was syndicated on over a hundred TV stations at its peak. In the process he aided the careers of popular Carolina musician Tommy Faile and bluegrass banjo star Don Reno, both of whom spent extended periods as Smith sidemen.

While at the WBT/WBTV studios in the now-demolished Wilder Building in downtown Charlotte, Arthur Smith worked up *Dueling Banjos.* One day in 1955, Smith picked up his tenor banjo and motioned Don Reno to strap on a 5-string banjo, saying, "You just follow me." Monument Records released the result as *Feuding Banjos.* In 1973, Warner Brothers used the melody for the movie *Deliverance* and released a hit record version entitled *Dueling Banjos.* Smith sued to be acknowledged as composer, and continues to collect royalties to this day.

Over the years, Arthur Smith has been successful at numerous business ventures outside performing. Among the earliest was a grocery chain, which he sold to the Red & White Company with the agreement that he produce their commercials. Long-time Charlotteans still grin remembering the jingle in which Smith's down home drawl rhymed "buy it" with "White." In 1959 Smith opened his own independent recording studio. The two-story brick building at 5457 Monroe Road became a leading producer of syndicated radio shows for performers, including Johnny Cash. Hundreds of country albums and advertising jingles were recorded there, and even a 1965 hit for soul singer James Brown, called *Papa's Got a Brand New Bag.* In 1977, Smith and partner Christian M. Haerle founded CMH Records, a major bluegrass label which made many of its albums in Charlotte.

Today, Arthur Smith is largely retired from performing and has sold his studio. He keeps as busy as ever, though, with diverse business interests from music publishing (he has written nearly one hundred hymns including *Acres of Diamonds* and controls rights to more than five hundred songs) to a series of fishing tournaments. He remains a prolific producer of television and radio ads, and a leading citizen of the Charlotte community.

Arthur Smith

Tennessee Ramblers with Cecil Campbell and Harry Blair

Organized by Dick Hartman in the late 1920s, the Tennessee Ramblers transferred to Charlotte from Rochester, New York in 1934 under the sponsorship of Crazy Water Crystals. At that time, the band featured Hartman, "Horse Thief Harry" Blair, Kenneth "Pappy" Wolfe, Jack Gillette and native North Carolinian Cecil Campbell. The ensemble quickly established themselves as WBT's most popular stringband, receiving over one hundred thousand pieces of fan mail by the end of their first seven months of broadcasting here.

After a stint of about a year at WBT, the Ramblers moved on to Atlanta to work at stations WSB and WGST. They returned to Charlotte the following year to perform again on WBT for the Southern Radio Corporation.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Ramblers were in and out of Charlotte, visiting Pittsburgh, Cincinatti, and Louisville for radio work. (Dick Hartman left the band in 1937.) Also during this period the group was beckoned to Hollywood to make several successful western films with cowboy singing stars such as Gene Autry and Tex Ritter. Titles included *Ride Ranger Ride, Ridin' the Cherokee Trail, Swing Your Partner,* with Dale Evans and *Oh My Darling Clementine,* featuring a young Roy Acuff.

In the mid-1940s, Cecil Campbell took the reins of the band and led various organizations of the Tennessee Ramblers up into the 1970s.

Born in 1911, Campbell was raised on a tobacco farm in Stokes County, North Carolina near Belews Creek and took an early interest in the folk music which surrounded him as a child. He learned hundreds of songs and became a skillful player of several stringed instruments.

As a young man he determined that he would try to make a living as a country musician and songwriter. He was given his first opportunity to perform on radio by station WSJS in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Seeking new opportunities, Campbell hitchhiked in 1932 to Pittsburgh where he lived with his brother. He soon auditioned for Dick Hartman who was looking for a guitar player to join his Crazy Tennessee Ramblers. Campbell was given the job and followed the band up to Rochester and then back home to North Carolina. He has remained based in Charlotte ever since.

Campbell has stayed close to home for the past thirty years or so, but has been an active composer and performer. He is a prolific songwriter with dozens of published songs to his credit. He has also recorded a number of albums, several of which feature him on Hawaiian steel guitar. Every year, Campbell, along with other veterans of the old western films including Claude Casey, will perform a favorite number or two at the popular western film festivals held in Charlotte and Raleigh.

William Blair who came to be known as "Horse Thief Harry" is another original Tennessee Rambler participating in *The Charlotte Country Music Story.* Like Cecil Campbell, Blair joined the group in Pittsburgh in the early 1930s.

Blair was born in August of 1912 in New Martinsville, West Virginia. He went to work for Wierton Steel as a young teenager and picked up guitar from an uncle who also worked in the plant. Around the beginning of the Great Depression, he travelled to Pittsburgh to audition for Hartman's band. He wasn't offered a job and returned to West Virginia. But soon thereafter, he heard Hartman dedicate a song to him on the radio and then announce that he wanted the young musician to come back to Pittsburgh to join the band! Blair recalls with mixed emotions the countless dances the group played for in depressed coal mining towns. "We were lucky to earn seventy-five cents to a dollar for our services back then," he remembers.

Blair remained with the Ramblers until 1943 when he entered the service. He returned to the group following his discharge in 1945 and performed often on the Briarhopper show with Tex Martin (Martin Shope), Cecil Campbell, Jack Gillette, and Claude Casey. Also during the 1940s, he toured with the Grand Ole Opry Tent Show with some of Nashville's biggest stars. At the end of the decade he worked for a time as a solo act in Newport News, Virginia and Nashville, Tennessee.

In 1949, Blair married and moved to Columbus, Ohio. Here the couple gave birth to a son and Blair decided to quit the road to raise his family. Eventually he returned to work at Wierton Steel where he stayed until 1968. Blair and his wife then retired to Murrell's Inlet, near Myrtle Beach, South Carolina where they reside today.

Harry Blair and Cecil Campbell

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

EVENING CONCERTS

Friday
October 25, 1985
8:15 PM

The Briarhopper Show *featuring* Charles Crutchfield, *Announcer,* Whitey and Hogan, Shannon Grayson, Hank Warren, Don White, Claude Casey, Fred Kirby, Betty Johnson, The Tennessee Ramblers with Cecil Campbell and Harry Blair, and The Johnson Family Singers.

INTERMISSION

George Hamilton IV, *Emcee,* Arthur Smith, Joe and Jannette Carter and The Red Clay Ramblers.

Saturday
October 26, 1985
8:15 PM

The Briarhopper Show *featuring* Charles Crutchfield, *Announcer,* Whitey and Hogan, Shannon Grayson, Hank Warren, Don White, Claude Casey, Betty Johnson and The Johnson Family Singers.

INTERMISSION

George Hamilton IV, *Emcee,* Wade Mainer, Wiley and Zeke Morris, Snuffy Jenkins, Pappy Sherrill and the Hired Hands and Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys.

NCNB/Performance Place

SATURDAY WORKSHOPS

Saturday
October 26, 1985
1:00–5:15 PM
Entertainment Place
Rehearsal Place
Spirit Square
Arts Center

All workshops are free and open to the public. Entertainment Place is located on the ground floor, directly opposite the Seventh Street entrance to Spirit Square Arts Center. Rehearsal Place is located on the second floor. From the ground floor, take the Tunnel Gallery elevator up one floor. Rehearsal Place is straight ahead from the elevator.

Entertainment Place

1:00 **The Piedmont in Transition, 1880–1940**
Molly Davis, Glenn Hinson, James Leloudis, Allen Tullos

2:00 **Mill Hands and Musicians: Country Music in the Piedmont**
with Whitey and Hogan, and Pappy Sherrill

2:30 **Kent Revisited: Perspectives in Culture and Society in the Carolina Piedmont**
Hylan Lewis and John Kenneth Morland

3:15 **Old-time Music in the Carolinas**
with Wade Mainer and Friends

3:45 **Masters of the Banjo**
Shannon Grayson, Snuffy Jenkins and Wade Mainer

4:30 **The Johnson Family Singers**
featuring Betty Johnson

Rehearsal Place

1:00 **It's Briarhopper Time**
with Shannon Grayson, Hank Warren, Don White, Whitey and Hogan

2:00 **Western Music Eastern Style**
Claude Casey with Kelland Clark, The Tennessee Ramblers with Cecil Campbell and Harry Blair, Don White, Sam Poplin

3:00 **Country Music and Comedy**
with Snuffy Jenkins, Pappy Sherrill and the Hired Hands

3:45 **Country Music Comes of Age**
Arthur Smith with Clay Smith, Tommy Faile, Roy Lear

4:30 **The Red Clay Ramblers**

These workshops and the accompanying exhibits The Charlotte Country Music Story *and* Weave and Spin *have been funded by a grant from the North Carolina Humanities Committee.*

FORUMS AND EXHIBITS

Charlotte's role as an early music and recording center was in large part a function of its status as the hub of the piedmont industrial region. Many of the artists, radio listeners and buyers of new recordings made in Charlotte lived and worked in the surrounding mill villages and towns. Many mill workers and town dwellers had only recently moved from the farm and were part of a massive rural-to-urban shift that transformed the Carolina piedmont in the first half of this century. Textile mills of that era provided jobs for whites only. Blacks in the piedmont took part in the economic transformation of the region through other industries, most notably tobacco processing, and in services and small businesses in the urban centers.

This history of country, blues and gospel music in the piedmont and its relation to the people who lived there can best be appreciated in context with the larger economic, social and cultural forces of the times. With a grant from the North Carolina Humanities Committee, *The Charlotte Country Music Story* will present two public forums and two exhibits examining the development of country music in light of the changing environment.

Forum
Saturday,
October 26, 1985
1:00–2:00 PM
Entertainment Place
Spirit Square
Arts Center
Free

The Piedmont in Transition, 1880–1940

Four scholars will discuss economic and social change in the piedmont Carolinas beginning with the rise of Southern textile mills in the latter part of the nineteenth century and will suggest how industrialization influenced the music and culture of the people. A discussion with the audience will follow presentations by:

Molly Davis, Professor of American history, Queens College; Director of North Carolina Humanities Committee project, "Traditions in Transition: The Impact of Urbanization in the Charlotte Community."

James Leloudis, PhD candidate at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; staff member of the Southern Oral History Program; co-author of the forthcoming book, *Like a Family: An Oral History of the Textile South, 1880–1940.*

Glenn Hinson, Folklorist; PhD candidate at the University of Pennsylvania; specialist in medicine shows and Afro-American traditional music.

Allen Tullos, Editor, *Southern Changes*, bimonthly journal of the Southern Regional Council; recently completed dissertation on industrialization in the Carolina piedmont, American Studies, Yale University.

Forum
Saturday,
October 26, 1985
2:30–3:15 PM
Entertainment Place
Spirit Square
Arts Center
Free

Kent Revisited: *Perspectives on Culture and Society in the Carolina Piedmont.*

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, sponsored a series of field studies in the modern culture of the South. Anthropologist John Kenneth Morland and sociologist Hylan Lewis lived and conducted research in a town they called "Kent." "Kent," a pseudonym for York, South Carolina, was the base of their study because it seemed to epitomize the piedmont subculture of the South. Using the experiences and stories gained from living in the community, Lewis and Morland produced scholarly analyses of the culture of Kent which were filled with the voices and insights of the people themselves.

In an informal discussion, Drs. Lewis and Morland will share with the audience perspectives on culture and society in the Carolina piedmont.

Hylan Lewis, Professor Emeritus, Brooklyn College; Visiting Professor, Graduate Center of the City University of New York; author of *Blackways of Kent; Culture, Class and Poverty.*

John Kenneth Morland, Chairman, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Randolph Macon Woman's College; author of *Millways of Kent, Social Problems in the United States; Race, Color and the Young Child.*

Exhibit
Spirit Square
Arts Center

The Charlotte Country Music Story

A photographic exhibit on the history of early country music radio and recording in Charlotte from the 1920s to the 1940s displayed at Spirit Square will be available for schools, libraries, and other public spaces beginning November 1, 1985. Contact Paul Hultburg, Director of Development, Spirit Square Arts Center, for information on borrowing the exhibit.

This exhibit is made possible through funds and materials provided by the North Carolina Humanities Committee, the Country Music Foundation, Southern Radio Corporation, the Mint Museum of History, and Spirit Square Arts Center.

Exhibit
October 5–31, 1985
Tunnel Gallery
Spirit Square
Arts Center

November 16, 1985–
January 20, 1986
Hezekiah Alexander Homesite
3500 Shamrock Dr. Charlotte, NC

Weave and Spin

A photographic exhibit on textile mills and mill village life in the Charlotte area from the 1900s to the 1940s will illustrate Charlotte's key place in the piedmont textile region and celebrate the workers who made the mills hum.

This exhibit is made possible with funds and assistance from the North Carolina Humanities Committee, the Southern Oral History Program, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, the Mint Museum of History and Spirits Square Arts Center.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Most of the albums below are reissues of early recordings and are available in some libraries as well as for purchase. The original recordings are not listed as they are generally collectors items. However, even the reissues cannot be found at most record stores. They are most easily purchased by mail, directly from the distributors listed at the end of the discography. These companies deal extensively in both reissues of early country and bluegrass and current recordings of these same musicians.

General

The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Country Music Selected and annotated by Bill Malone. (Smithsonian Institution)
The Early Days of Bluegrass, Vols. 1-9 (Rounder 1013-1020, 1022)

Afro-American Piedmont Musicians

Blind Boy Fuller *Truckin' My Blues Away* (Yazoo 1060)
Anthology *Play My Juke Box—East Coast Blues* (Flyright 4711)
Henry Johnson *Union County Flash* (Trix 3304)
Blind Gary Davis *Blind Gary Davis, Vol. 1 & 2* (Biograph 12030, 12034)

Blue Sky Boys

Blue Sky Boys: A Treasury of Rare Song Gems from the Past (Pine Mountain Records 305)
The Sunny Side of Life (Rounder 1006)
The Blue Sky Boys (RCA AXM2-5525)
Presenting the Blue Sky Boys (JEMF 104)

Briarhoppers

Hit's Briarhopper Time (Lamon 10017)
Hit's Briarhopper Time Again (Lamon 10039)
Whitey and Hogan with the Briarhoppers, Vols. 1 and 2 (Old Homestead 90089, 90169)

Carlisle Brothers

Cliff Carlisle, Vols. 1 and 2 (Old Timey 103, 104)

Carolina Tar Heels

Can't You Remember the Carolina Tar Heels (Bear Family Records 15507)
The Carolina Tar Heels (Old Homestead 113)

The Carter Family

The Original and Great Carter Family (RCA Camden CAL 586)
The Carter Family on Border Radio (JEMF 101)
The Country Sounds of the Original Carter Family (Harmony 7422)
More Golden Gems from the Original Carter Family (RCA Camden CAS 2554)

Joe and Jannette Carter

Carter Family Favorites (County 706)

Delmore Brothers

The Delmore Brothers, 1933–1941 (County 402)
The Delmore Brothers, Vols. 1–4 (Old Homestead 153, 154, 160, 161)

Dixon Brothers

Beyond Black Smoke: The Dixon Brothers Original Recordings (Country Turtle 6000)
The Dixon Brothers, Vols. 1 and 2 (Old Homestead 151, 164)

Fiddlin' Arthur Smith

Fiddlin' Arthur Smith, Vols. 1 and 2 (County 546, 547)

Gwen Foster and Dave Fletcher

Old-Time Mountain Guitar (County 523)
Singers of the Piedmont (Bear Family Records FV 12505)

The Golden Gate Quartet

The Gospel Sound, Vol. 1 (CBS 88172)
The Best of the Golden Gate Quartet (Pathe Marconi 72153)
All Over This World (Pathe Marconi 14953)
Thirty-five Historic Recordings of the Golden Gate Quartet (German RCA CL 42111)

Snuffy Jenkins and Pappy Sherrill

Crazy Water Barn Dance (Rounder 0059)
Thirty-Three Years of Pickin' and Pluckin' (Rounder 0005)
Carolina Bluegrass Snuffy Jenkins and the Hired Hands (Arhoolie 5011)

Uncle Dave Macon

Early Recordings (County 521)
Go Long Mule (County 545)
Laugh Your Blues Away (Rounder 1028)

J. E. Mainer

J. E. Mainer's Crazy Mountaineers, Vols. 1 and 2 (Old Timey 106, 107)

Wade Mainer

Wade Mainer and the Sons of the Mountaineers, Early Radio, Vols. 1 and 2 (Old Homestead 124–125)
Sacred Songs of Mother and Home (Old Homestead 135)
Wade Mainer and the Sons of the Mountaineers (County 404)

Bill Monroe

Feast Here Tonight Bill and Charlie Monroe (RCA, Bluebird AXM2-5510)
Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys Classic Recordings, Vol. 1 and 2 (County 104, 105)
The Early Bluegrass Sound (Camden CAL 774)
Bill Monroe with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs (Rounder 06)

Morris Brothers

Early Bluegrass (RCA LVP-569)
Wiley, Zeke and Homer The Morris Brothers and Homer Sherrill (Rounder 0022)

Dave McCarn

Singers of the Piedmont (Bear Family Records FV 12505)
Poor Man, Rich Man: American Country Songs of Protest (Rounder 1026)

Red Clay Ramblers

Meeting in the Air (Flying Fish 219)
Hard Times (Flying Fish 246)

Arthur Smith

Jumping Guitar (Electric Muse) (forthcoming)
Guitarists Galore (with Clay Smith) (Monument 6643)

Tennessee Ramblers
Hartman's Heartbreakers (Rambler 104)

The Tobacco Tags
Songs of the Tobacco Tags (Old Homestead 156)

Wilmer Watts and the Lonely Eagles
Paramount Old Time Tunes (JEMF 103)

No reissue for the following artists:
Fred Kirby
Roy Lear
Tommy Faile
Johnson Family
Claude Casey and His Pine State Playboys

Selected Record Distributors:

County Sales
Box 191
Floyd, Virginia 24091
(703) 745-2001

Down Home Music Company
1031 San Pablo Avenue
El Cerrito, California 94530
(415) 525-1494

Round Up Records
P. O. Box 154
North Cambridge, Mass. 02140
(617) 354-0700

Rounder Records
186 Willow Ave.
Somerville, Mass. 02144

RECOMMENDED READING

Crying for the Carolines. Bastin, Bruce. *The Paul Oliver Blues Series. New York: Legacy Books, 1984*

Bluegrass Breakdown. Cantwell, Robert. *Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1984.*

Country Roots: The Origins of Country Music. Green, Douglas B. *New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1976.*

Country Music, U.S.A. Malone, Bill. *2nd ed. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1985.*

Southern Music, American Music. *Malone, Bill. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1979.*

Stars of Country Music. Malone, Bill and Judith McCulloh, eds. *Urbana: Univ. or Illinois Press, 1979.*

The Listener's Guide to Country Music. Oermann, Robert K. with Douglas B. Green. *New York: Facts on File, 1983.*

Bossmen: Bill Monroe and Muddy Waters. Rooney, Jim. *New York: Dial Press, 1971.*

Rambling Blues: The Life and Songs of Charlie Poole. Rorrer, Kinney. *London: Old Time Music, 1982.*

Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys: An Illustrated Discography. Rosenberg, Neil V. *Nashville: Country Music Foundation Press, 1971.*

Blacks, Whites and Blues. Russell, Tony. *New York: Stein and Day, 1970.*

The Country Music Story: A Picture History of Country Music. Shelton, Robert, and Burt Goldblatt. *New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1971.*

Country: The Biggest Music in America. Toshes, Nick. *New York: Stein and Day, 1984.*

Mountaineer Jamboree: Country Music In West Virginia. Tribe, Ivan M. *Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1984.*

Country Music: Tradition and the Individual Talent. Winchell, Mark Royden, ed. *Special Issue of the* Southern Quarterly Journal. *Hattiesburg, MS:* The Southern Quarterly Journal.

Kentucky Country. Wolfe, Charles K. *Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1982.*

Tennessee Strings. Wolfe, Charles K. *Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1977.*

The Grand Ole Opry: The Early Years. Wolfe, Charles K. *London: Old Time Music, 1975*

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