

TEACHERS

# The Artists & Personalities of the 1927 Bristol Sessions

RESOURCE DOCUMENT





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## INTRODUCTION

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In the 1920s, several record labels were looking for “hillbilly music” to record and sell, and in 1926 Victor Talking Machine Company hired producer Ralph Peer to build their hillbilly catalog. Peer told Victor that it would be worth taking a trip into “Southern territory” to find the music they wanted, and through his friendship and professional relationship with musician Ernest “Pop” Stoneman, Peer soon decided on a “location recording session” in Bristol, Tennessee-Virginia – chosen because it was located in an area known for distinctive music traditions and thus ripe with possibility. And so, in July 1927 Peer, his wife Anita, and two Victor recording engineers named Edward Eckhardt and Fred Lynch traveled down to Bristol from New York, setting up a temporary studio in the Taylor-Christian Hat Company building at 408 State Street on Friday, July 22, 1927.

Peer put a call out for musicians to audition for these recordings, and the Victor team conducted the sessions between July 25 and August 5. The recordings began with Stoneman, an experienced musician who had already recorded numerous hillbilly records, along with his wife Hattie, other family members, and several friends in different musical configurations. The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers were some of the last acts to record during the two-week sessions. In between, a variety of performers made important and interesting recordings at the Bristol Sessions, coming from different rural locations, towns and cities, and states, and arriving by a variety of transportation modes – from bus, horse and buggy, car, and train. All were hoping to walk away from these sessions with a recording or two, the related compensation (\$50 per side – around \$780 in today’s money – and royalties), and perhaps even some level of fame and success – from the Johnson Brothers and Henry Whitter, who knew or had worked with Peer already, to religious singers like Alfred Karnes, a preacher from Kentucky, and the Tennessee Mountaineers, a local congregational choir from Bluff City, Tennessee, to fiddler Blind Alfred Reed, well known in his patch of West Virginia, and El Watson, the sole African American act. Together, they all contributed to the significance and impact of the 1927 Bristol Sessions, leading to those recordings later being called “the big bang of country music.”





## THE PRODUCER AND “STARS” OF THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### RALPH PEER

**Born:** May 22, 1892, Independence, Missouri

**Died:** January 19, 1960

Ralph Peer was a pioneering producer in the recording industry, and he had a wide-ranging career devoted to numerous genres of music.

Peer was instrumental in the first commercial country music recorded in the South – Fiddlin’ John Carson’s “The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane” and “The Old Hen Cackled and the Rooster’s Going to Crow” for Okeh Records in 1923. Due to Peer’s experience with early “hillbilly” music, Victor Talking Machine Company later hired him to develop their catalog, and in 1927, Peer came to Bristol where he recorded 19 different acts, including The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers for the first time, along with Ernest “Pop” Stoneman, El Watson, Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Baker, Alfred G. Karnes, and Blind Alfred Reed, amongst others. Peer continued to work with Jimmie Rodgers throughout his short but highly successful career, along with The Carter Family as they grew in popularity. He remained close with the Carters and Stonemans throughout his life.



Peer was not only an important producer in the “hillbilly” music genre, but he also made significant contributions in “**race records**,” along with Latin, classical, and pop music. In 1920, he worked with Mamie Smith on her blues recording “Crazy Blues,” the first significant hit recording in the blues genre – it sold over 70,000 copies within its first month of release! “Crazy Blues” is also important for being the first commercial recording led by an African American woman, and its success opened up the “race records” market as record companies began developing music aimed at African American audiences. Through his Southern Music Publishing Company (established in 1928), Peer expanded into the Latin American market, including recording songs such as “Tico Tico no Fubá” and “Aquarela do Brasil,” both licensed by Peer’s company and used in Walt Disney’s animated feature *Saludos Amigos*, and working with Agustín Lara, composer of such classics as “Solamente Una Vez” and “Granada.”

Peer also revolutionized the three-part copyright system covering lyrics, music, and performance, a practice still in place today. He worked for Victor without a proper salary, in exchange for copyright control of all new works and administering the **royalties** to artists through his Southern Music Publishing Company. Through his vision and accomplishments, Peer had a huge impact on the music industry, and his legacy lives on today in [peermusic](#), the largest independent music publisher in the world.



### DID YOU KNOW?

Music wasn’t Peer’s only interest. He was also devoted to horticulture, and in the 1950s, he became well known in the field due to his cultivation of camellias and was awarded with a variety of honors for his tireless advocacy for the flower. Peer was appointed as director of the American Horticultural Society in 1958.

## THE PRODUCER AND “STARS” OF THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### ERNEST “POP” STONEMAN

Born: May 25, 1893, Carroll County, Virginia

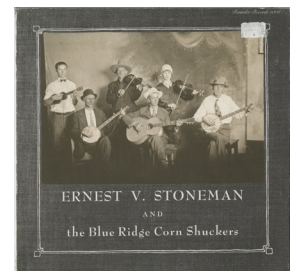
Died: June 14, 1968

In 1924, after hearing a record by Henry Whitter and thinking he could do better, Ernest “Pop” Stoneman – a carpenter by trade – wrote to record producers in New York, including Ralph Peer at Okeh Records, asking for the chance to come record. He was a savvy negotiator and soon had a deal inked with Okeh. He began building a legacy for the Stonemans with his 1924 recording of “The Titanic.” After re-recording it in 1925 as “The Sinking of the Titanic,” Stoneman achieved his first hit song.



From this start, Stoneman became a prolific recording veteran, and by the time he persuaded Ralph Peer to come to Bristol to find the “hillbilly” music wanted by the Victor label, Stoneman had already recorded around 100 sides for the Victor Talking Machine Company and other labels. At the 1927 Bristol Sessions, Stoneman was the first artist to record. He cut several sides alongside various family members and friends, recording under their individual names but also as Ernest Stoneman & His Dixie Mountaineers (Ernest Stoneman, Kahle Brewer, Walter Mooney, Tom Leonard, Hattie Stoneman, Irma Frost, Edna Brewer, and Uncle Eck Dunford) and the Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers (Ernest Stoneman, Kahle Brewer, Iver Edwards, Bolen Frost, George Stoneman, and Uncle Eck Dunford). Stoneman was back in Bristol in 1928, once again recording for Peer with friends and family, this time going by the names The Stoneman Family and Ernest Stoneman’s Dixie Mountaineers.

Despite his early success and the many recordings he made at the 1927 and 1928 Bristol Sessions, Stoneman and his family were hit hard by the Depression in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The family lost their home in Galax, Virginia, and Stoneman travelled far and wide to look for work to support them. These years of hardship took a toll on the Stonemans, but they continued to play music together for pleasure, and in the late 1940s Stoneman and wife Hattie won a talent contest with a prize of six months of local TV time. Soon Stoneman expanded his performances, inviting several family members, including daughters Donna, Roni, and Patsy, to perform with him. They gained acclaim nationally and internationally as The Stoneman Family – on stage, on radio, on record, and on TV – performing on the Grand Ole Opry, along with hosting a television series called “Those Stonemans” and winning “Vocal Group of the Year” in 1967 from the Country Music Association.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

**Ernest Stoneman’s wife Hattie** was instrumental in his first recording in 1924. When the usually modest Stoneman commented on the record by Henry Whitter, saying: “I know that I can out-sing Henry Whitter any time – if I couldn’t, I’d quit.” Hattie encouraged Stoneman to produce his own record when she fatefully replied, “Why don’t you go and make one?” Over their years together – ones of musical success and hardship – she gave birth to 23 children, 13 of whom survived to adulthood.

## THE PRODUCER AND “STARS” OF THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### THE CARTER FAMILY

#### A. P. Carter

(b. December 15, 1891, Maces Spring, Virginia; d. November 7, 1960)

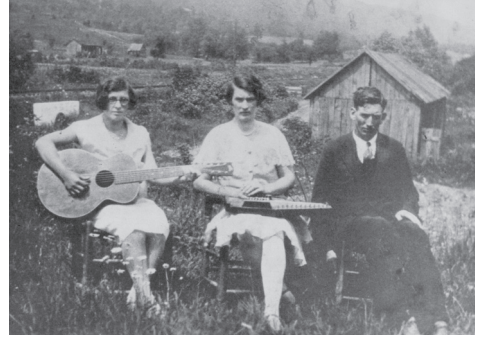
#### Sara Dougherty Carter

(b. July 21, 1898, Copper Creek, Virginia; d. January 8, 1979)

#### Maybelle Addington Carter

(b. May 10, 1909, Nickelsville, Virginia; d. October 23, 1978)

The Carter Family was made up of A. P. Carter, his wife Sara, and Maybelle, Sara’s cousin who was married to A. P.’s brother Ezra (known as Eck). The Carters first recorded at the 1927 Bristol Sessions, and Ralph Peer quickly saw their talent and potential as a “hillbilly” music act, especially with Sara’s clear, strong voice and Maybelle’s guitar playing – a vision borne out by the impact of their first records upon release. Peer invited the Carters to make more records with Victor in the following years, and A. P. worked hard during this time to find songs to record and copyright, often traveling throughout the region with his friend [Lesley Riddle](#) who helped him with the music.



Despite the Depression, The Carter Family continued to find work, and in the late 1930s they traveled out west to become [a regular act on “border radio.”](#) While the Carters found success through their records, it was these radio appearances that cemented their popularity. A. P., Sara, and Maybelle – along with their children – appeared on XERA, a radio station with a high-power antenna on the Mexican side of the border, for three years. The Carter’s one-hour segment was part of the *Good Neighbor Get-Together* and included their theme song, [“Keep on the Sunny Side.”](#) Records and performances of hillbilly music were particularly popular at this time, and the station’s owner knew there was an under-served rural audience just waiting to hear these tunes. Thousands of people heard these broadcasts, creating a strong connection to the Carters and their music.



The Carter Family disbanded in the early 1940s. A. P. and Sara had already separated at this point, with Sara finally moving out to California to remarry, and A. P. going home to southwest Virginia, where he opened up a general store in Hiltons, Virginia, in 1943. Maybelle continued performing with her daughters Helen, June and Anita as Mother Maybelle and The Carter Sisters. Performing on the radio and continually touring for live shows, they developed a repertoire of comedy, traditional Carter Family songs, and newer country and popular music, which proved very successful. They also worked and performed with country artist Chet Atkins during this time. By 1950, the group had been invited to Nashville for a segment on WSM’s *Grand Ole Opry*, which was sponsored by the Martha White Flour Company; they also became regular show performers. This period led to commercial success, public appearances and a host of recordings, and the girls, especially June, began branching out as solo acts. While over time, the group performed together less often, their time touring on the road, individual careers, and music as The Carter Family – so renamed by Maybelle in the 1960s – continued to develop







and impact other performers, and Mother Maybelle became a revered favorite in the folk revival scene.

Those first recording sessions in Bristol in 1927 set the stage for the Carter's later success, leading to nearly 250 further recordings, radio appearances, and numerous paid performances in the years that followed. The Carter Family took familiar songs – hymns and gospel songs, Appalachian ballads, music from the rural work camps and urban factories – and made them their own. Alive with feeling, the songs touched upon personal and private joys and pain. This music spoke to their audiences and kept the demand high for the Carters in both the recording studio and on the performance stage – and has been a huge part of why they are still so important and influential to country music today and why they are known as “the first family of country music.”



### DID YOU KNOW?

XERA, the border radio station on the Texas-Mexico border where the Carters played in the late 1930s, belonged to Dr. John Brinkley, a discredited physician from Kansas. The XERA transmitter had a much higher level of power than was permitted in the United States, and it was able to broadcast music, advertisements, and other programs all the way from Mexico to Canada, reaching most of the United States. The radio signal was so strong it was rumored you could pick it up in Texas by hanging a tin can on a nearby barbed wire fence.





## THE PRODUCER AND “STARS” OF THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS



### JIMMIE RODGERS

**Born:** September 8, 1897, Meridian, Mississippi

**Died:** May 26, 1933

Jimmie Rodgers started entertaining when he was just a teenager, twice starting his own traveling shows until his father brought him back home and got him working on the railroad. His time as a water boy and later as a brakeman brought him into contact with other, often itinerant, musicians, along with the African American railroad workers, which exposed him to different types of music and singing that became influential in his own musical style. In 1924 Rodgers was diagnosed with tuberculosis, making it more difficult for him to continue in the hard work of a railroad job, and he soon turned back to entertainment for his career.

In April 1927 Rodgers was in Asheville, North Carolina, where he performed on local radio station WWNC; a few months later he had a regular spot on the station with a band from Bristol, Tennessee-Virginia, the Tennesse Ramblers – known on the show as The Jimmie Rodgers Entertainers. They traveled together to Bristol to audition for Ralph Peer, but ended up recording as two separate acts: the Tennesse Ramblers as a group and Jimmie Rodgers as a solo performer. One of Rodgers’ recordings in Bristol was **“Sleep Baby Sleep,”** which included his signature stylistic device: the Blue Yodel. Rodgers’ yodel sounded less like the European-style sound made familiar by *The Sound of Music*; rather, it seems to have been influenced by the lonesome **African American field holler**. His Blue Yodel became hugely influential in hillbilly music – Rodgers showcased it on many of his recordings, and it was copied and imitated by contemporary musicians. After the 1927 Bristol Sessions – Rodgers’ first recordings of his career – Peer invited him to Camden, New Jersey, to record more sides, including his first great hit **“Blue Yodel No. 1 (T for Texas).”**



While Rodgers’ career was short – only lasting from 1927 until his death from tuberculosis in 1933 – it was stratospheric in impact and success. He recorded over 100 songs during this short period, appeared in **a film short as “The Singing Brakeman,”** performed for live audiences, and recorded “Blue Yodel No. 9” with Louis Armstrong, amongst other accomplishments. Rodgers is known as “the father of country music,” and many artists who followed him began their careers as Jimmie Rodgers copyists, covered his songs, or produced tribute albums to mark his legacy – including Gene Autry, Merle Haggard, Lefty Frizzell, Dolly Parton, Hank Snow, and Ernest Tubb. However, his impact goes beyond the country music genre – he was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1970 and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986, and his influence has even been recorded in a 1950 field recording from Africa where members of the Kipsigis tribe sang a song inspired by his music called **“Chemirocha III.”**

### DID YOU KNOW?

Jimmie Rodgers has been inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame (1961), the Songwriters Hall of Fame (1970), the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (1986), the Alabama Hall of Fame (1993), the Blues Hall of Fame (2013), and the Blue Ridge Music Hall of Fame (2018). He was the first performer to be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, underlining his “father of country music” status. He also had a **Commemorative Stamp** made in his honor in 1978.



## PART 1: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### UNCLE ECK DUNFORD

**Born:** May 30, 1875, Ballard Branch, Virginia

(He actually has two recorded birth dates – 1875 and 1878 – reflecting the challenge of old records, but 1875 is the date on his tombstone.)

**Died:** June 26, 1953

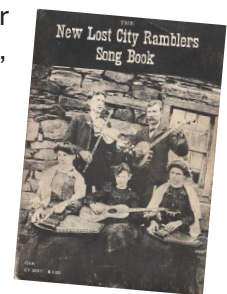
Alex Dunford, often called Uncle Eck Dunford, was known for his skills as a fiddler, guitarist, and storyteller. He married into the Stoneman family and recorded for the first time alongside Ernest and Hattie Stoneman at the 1927 Bristol Sessions. He also recorded individually, most notably performing the first commercially available recording of the well-known children's tune "[Skip to Ma Lou, My Darling.](#)"



He came back to Bristol in 1928, recording with the Stonemans, along with a few more solo performances. His 1928 solo performances are well-known and recognized as important recordings today – “Old Shoes and Leggings” was later featured on Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music*, and “Angeline the Baker” is an Appalachian standard. In the 1920s and 1930s, Uncle Eck also played fiddle and guitar with other local groups, including the Bogtrotters and the Grayson County Railsplitters, and there were probably other instances where he was never listed as one of the band members.

Besides his renown as a musician, Uncle Eck was a man of many eccentricities but also many other talents. It is reported by family and friends that he wore an overcoat and overshoes in all seasons, no matter the weather, and added pink earmuffs when the temperatures turned cold. He also spoke in a distinctive voice, one that has been attributed to a possible Scots-Irish dialect. He was known for his jokes, but he also stood out from others in his corner of Southwest Virginia when he frequently quoted Shakespeare and Robert Burns, pointing to a man who took the time and the interest to read and educate himself.

Uncle Eck was a talented amateur photographer, and photographic equipment and numerous glass negatives were found in his homestead after his death. A photograph he took of several Galax musicians was used by Mike Seeger and John Cohen on the cover of *The New Lost City Ramblers Song Book*. He also worked as a **shoe cobbler** and a farmer.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

After Uncle Eck’s performances at the 1927 Bristol Sessions, Ralph Peer invited him to Atlanta later that year to record four comic monologues, including two that were listed as original compositions. Well-written lyrics obviously make a **song-skit** funny, but Uncle Eck’s language, his timing and delivery, and the emphases he put on certain words underlined their comic value in these recordings. He performed two other skits with Stoneman in February 1928, again in Atlanta. One of these – “Possum Trot School Exhibition” – detailed the misadventures during a Southwest Virginia mountain school’s activity day.



## PART 1: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### JOHNSON BROTHERS

**Born:** Unknown

**Died:** Unknown

Most likely, Paul and Charles Johnson were professional musicians, possibly with a background in vaudeville. Certainly, they had already recorded with Peer on the Victor label earlier in 1927. Due to their professionalism and connection with Peer, he brought them with him to a Kiwanis meeting in Bristol on July 28, 1927, where they played several songs, thus giving the audience of Bristol local luminaries a taste of the Sessions and Peer's work on the "hillbilly music" front.



They recorded six songs in Bristol, representing a variety of different types of songs—from the sentimental favorite "I Want to See My Mother" to British ballad "The Soldier's Poor Little Boy" to the vaudeville tune "A Passing Policeman." They went on to record seven more songs with Peer in Camden, New Jersey, in May 1928, including a train song focused on the story of a railway robbery in 1923 called "The Crime of the D'Autremont Brothers." They also recorded again in 1930 for the [Gennett record label in Richmond, Indiana](#), their last recording session.

Peer liked the Johnson Brothers, and with their music and skills, they offered a lot of the qualities he was looking for: original material and the ability to mix the old and the new in their repertoire and perform all of them well. Despite this recording history, we don't know much about their origins or early lives. In fact, multiple locations have been put forward as their place of birth or hometown – including Boone, North Carolina; East Tennessee (they did sing a song called "[Two Brothers Are We \(From East Tennessee\)](#)"); Johnson City, Tennessee; and Tuco, Kentucky – though none are certain.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The Johnson Brothers were multi-instrumentalists, able to play the guitar, steel guitar, and banjo. Their 1927 Bristol Sessions recordings are the only ones where the steel guitar was used. [Steel guitars are played by running a steel bar or other hard item against the strings while plucking them.](#)



## PART 1: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS



### ALFRED KARNES

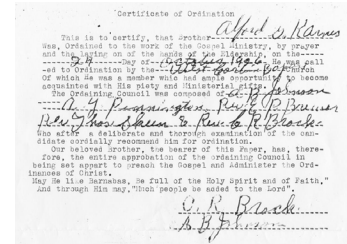
**Born:** February 2, 1891, Bedford County, Virginia

**Died:** May 18, 1958

Though Alfred Grant Karnes was born in Bedford County, Virginia, he later relocated to Corbin, Kentucky, where he was a Baptist preacher and gospel singer. He served in the US Navy as a young man and was later ordained as a Methodist minister. He converted to the Baptist faith soon after. He also turned his hand to **patent medicine**-making, sharing his recipe for “Relax Rub,” a cream for muscle soreness, with a local pharmacist to sell.

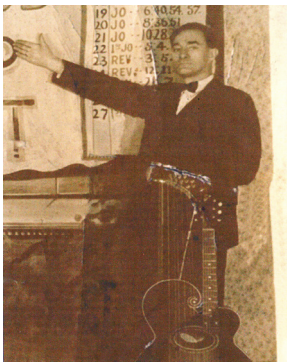
At the age of 36, he responded to an ad by Ralph Peer looking for artists to record on the Victor Talking Machine Company label. He drove to

Bristol, Tennessee, where he auditioned and quickly made his mark at the 1927 Bristol Sessions. Karnes was well known for his distinctive and powerful singing voice and as a skilled rhythm guitarist, and with these talents he became one of Peer’s favorite performers at the Sessions.



With his strong gospel background, Karnes exclusively recorded sacred music, putting down six sides at the 1927 Bristol Sessions, including “Where We’ll Never Grow Old,” **“I Am Bound for the Promised Land,”**

and “To the Work.” His talent and the success of his records led Peer to invite him back to Bristol for another recording session in 1928 where he performed seven more songs, though only three were released in the end.



Karnes was also known for playing the rarely used harp guitar: a large-body guitar that holds an extra set of strings that are unfretted, allowing for the sound of two separate guitarists when played. Karnes often enhanced this two-guitar sound by playing the fretted strings with a slap.

After his stint at recording, Karnes returned to Corbin, Kentucky, where he lived and worked until his death on May 18, 1958. In April 2015, several members of the Karnes family visited the museum as part of their family reunion – they

shared stories of their father and grandfather, sang his songs, and shared photos and other ephemera related to their Bristol Sessions relative. Check out this fun video of the family singing Karnes’ song **“I Am Bound for the Promised Land.”**

### DID YOU KNOW?

Some scholars believe that Alfred Karnes played his Gibson harp guitar on some of the 1927 Bristol Sessions tracks, in particular “Called to the Foreign Field.” However, this claim has been debated – the harp guitar is difficult, if not impossible, to hear when played in an ensemble, and Karnes might have used a traditional guitar instead, or perhaps only played the extra strings on the harp guitar occasionally.





## PART 1: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### ERNEST PHIPPS & HIS HOLINESS QUARTET

Born: May 4, 1900, Kentucky

Died: April 17, 1963

Before coming to Bristol in 1927 to record with Ralph Peer and the Victor Talking Machine Company, [Ernest Phipps](#) was a preacher and gospel singer in Kentucky. He also worked as a coal miner and coal truck driver, and even owned his own small coal operation. But religion – and the expression of his faith through preaching and music – were his life's work.

He recorded several gospel pieces in 1927 with his Holiness Quartet. These gospel tunes were very religious in nature, with Phipps often taking the lead vocals and accompanied by guitar and fiddle. The group's broad mountain accents can be heard in some of the recordings. The six songs put down at these sessions – including [“Do, Lord, Remember Me”](#) and “I Want to Go Where Jesus is” – were very different from other gospel recordings, and they have been recognized as the first-ever recordings of Holiness music. This music is characterized by highly expressive performances full of spiritual emotion; the strong rhythms of the songs are accompanied by instruments and with foot stomping and hand clapping from the singers. Today the Phipps recordings are celebrated as pioneering Southern gospel tunes.



Phipps returned to Bristol in 1928 to record with Peer again, this time with a larger group known as His Holiness Singers. Their recording of “If the Light is Gone Out of Your Soul” and [“Bright Tomorrow”](#) in 1928 sold almost 12,000 copies, and another recording, “Shine on Me,” was later featured on the influential 1952 compilation *Anthology of American Folk Music* by Harry Smith.

After recording music at the 1928 Bristol Sessions, Phipps returned to Kentucky and continued to preach in the area until his death in 1963.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Ernest Phipps was drafted into the 5th Army Corps at the age of 43, and he worked in a hospital stateside during World War II. His family donated his military dog tags to the museum's collections at the 90th anniversary of the 1927 Bristol Sessions in 2017.



## PART 1: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### BLIND ALFRED REED

**Born:** June 15, 1880, Floyd, Virginia

**Died:** January 17, 1956

Blind Alfred Reed was born in Floyd, Virginia, though he spent most of his life in West Virginia, especially around the Princeton area. He was born blind, using a slate and stylus to help him with writing, and he learned fiddle at a young age. He supported his wife and six children by playing music at social gatherings, giving music lessons, selling paper copies of his original compositions, and **busking** on the streets; the family also grew their own food as much as possible. He was well-known in his area as a talented fiddler and songwriter, and Ralph Peer personally invited Reed to record at the 1927 Bristol Sessions because of the regional popularity of ["The Wreck of the Virginian,"](#) a song Reed wrote about a train wreck that occurred in May 1927. This song was one of the more successful sellers from the 1927 Bristol Sessions.



Besides his train wreck song, Reed recorded three others at the 1927 Bristol Sessions – "I Mean to Live for Jesus," "You Must Unload," and "Walking in the Way with Jesus." Soon after, he **recorded several more songs** for Peer and Victor in 1928 and 1929 for a total of 21 sides, including the 1930 release "How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?," a song that outlines the challenges of those living in poverty and thus especially appropriate to the hard times of the Great Depression. This song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 2020. Because of the socio-political commentary in many of his original songs, Reed is considered one of the early protest singers of the 20th century.



After his Victor recording session in December 1929, Blind Alfred Reed didn't record again. He kept playing music locally, though a 1937 statute in his area banning blind street musicians affected his ability to do so. He also worked as a Methodist lay preacher. Reed passed away on January 17, 1956, and his fiddle is still owned by his family.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

While several of Blind Alfred Reed's songs were aimed at social ills and other issues he saw as problematic in the 1920s – such as "Money Cravin' Folks," "The Prayer of the Drunkard's Little Girl," and "Explosion in the Fairmount Mines" – he did inject some humor into his musical observations. For instance, his song "Why Do You Bob Your Hair, Girls?" criticized women's short hair styles in the 1920s, telling them to ask Jesus for forgiveness!



## PART 1: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### THE SHELOR FAMILY / DAD BLACKARD'S MOONSHINERS

**Joe Blackard** (b. 1859, Stuart, Virginia; d. unknown)

**Clarice Blackard Shelor** (b. March 24, 1900; d. August 17, 1989)

**Jesse Shelor** (b. December 27, 1894; d. January 1985)

**Pyrhus Shelor**

This family string band – all from Meadows of Dan, Virginia – consisted of Joe Blackard on banjo and lead vocals, his daughter Clarice on piano and harmony vocals, her husband Jesse on fiddle, and Jesse's brother Pyrhus on fiddle. While Joe Blackard worked as a musician, performing on his own and with the family group at various local events and venues, he also supported his family through farming and being a mail carrier. Both Jesse and Pyrhus worked in the cotton mills of North Carolina for a while; Jesse started working in this trade when he was only 12 years old.



The group came to Bristol by truck, recording four songs on August 3: “Big Bend Gal” and “Billy Grimes” under The Shelor Family name, and [“Suzanna Gal”](#) and “Sandy River Belle” under the name Dad Blackard’s Moonshiners. Clarice contributed to a series of oral histories about the experience of the 1927 Bristol Sessions, and her memories can be heard in the museum at the “I Was There” panel.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

English “songcatcher” Cecil Sharp travelled around the Southern Appalachian region in 1916 and 1918, looking for songs with roots going back to ballads and songs from the United Kingdom. Many Appalachian musicians and singers shared songs with Sharp during that time, including Joe Blackard who contributed lyrics to five traditional songs that appear in Sharp’s book *English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians*.





## PART 1: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### B. F. SHELTON

Born: 1901, Clay County, Kentucky

Died: February 28, 1963

Benjamin Frank Shelton was a talented banjo player, who also played guitar and harmonica. Living in Corbin, Shelton knew another Bristol Sessions musician, Alfred Karnes, and it is thought that they traveled to Bristol together to audition for Ralph Peer and the Victor label. Shelton put down four songs on record at the 1927 Bristol Sessions: “Pretty Polly” and **“Darling Cora,”** both **murder ballads**, and “Oh Molly Dear” and **“Cold Penitentiary Blues,”** both described as “stark mountain blues” songs. Shelton’s skilled banjo playing and singing made a real impression on Peer, so much so that he decided to record the two ballads within a lengthier format more commonly used for classical records – therefore, these two pieces were given 4½ minutes of song time rather than the usual 3¼ minutes. A musician named Frank Shelton recorded two songs for the Columbia label in Johnson City, Tennessee, in 1928, and it is probable that this was B. F. Shelton. Sadly, neither of those recordings were released.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

When not playing and singing, Shelton worked as a barber in Corbin, Kentucky. Community spaces often provided a place where music was made and songs were shared. Furniture stores, general stores, and even barbershops played a role in the development of early traditional music. Furniture stores were places where early recordings and the machines to play them on were sold, along with musical instruments and sheet music. Interestingly, some of the earliest talent scouts for recording companies happened to also be furniture store owners. General stores and barbershops were places where people gathered to tell stories, discuss the news, and often to play tunes. In Bristol, the Star Barbershop served this function for years – if you dropped by on a Thursday morning, you could get a trim as you listened to some great bluegrass music played by the friends who met there to jam every week!



## PART 1: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### TENNESSEE MOUNTAINEERS

**George Massengill**

(b. January 7, 1891; d. December 24, 1979)

**Georgia Warren**

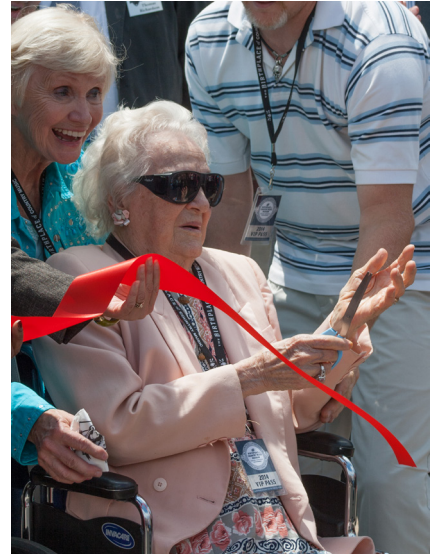
(b. November 8, 1915, Bluff City, Tennessee; d. March 6, 2016)

**Roy Hobbs**

(b. unknown; d. unknown)

**And others**

The Tennessee Mountaineers came from Bluff City, Tennessee, to audition for the 1927 Bristol Sessions on August 5. Made up of 20 singers and musicians from a congregational choir, the group – which was named by Ralph Peer on the day – was led by George Massengill and included A. P. Carter’s brother-in-law Roy Hobbs and Massengill’s young daughter **Georgia Warren**, only 12 years old at the time. The group recorded two songs: “Standing on the Promises” and **“Shall We Gather at the River.”**



Georgia Warren later provided an oral history recounting her memory of that day in August. She said that she was really nervous as they came to the makeshift studio in the Taylor-Christian Hat Company building – it was dark and hot inside, with blankets and old rugs hung around the space to muffle outside sound during the recordings. These also blocked the singers’ view of the recording equipment, an effort made by Peer and the engineers in order to keep it hidden and secret from those who might want to illegitimately benefit from the record label’s work.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Georgia Warren was the last surviving artist who recorded at the 1927 Bristol Sessions. She was recognized for her part in these historic recordings in later life, with articles in the local paper about her experience and her life, as an honoree in 2009 when the state of Tennessee erected a historical marker about the Sessions on State Street in Bristol, and as one of the official ribbon cutters at the grand opening of the Birthplace of Country Music Museum in August 2014.

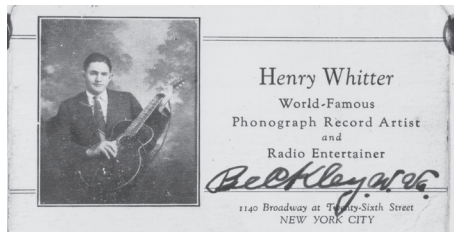
## PART 1: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### HENRY WHITTER

**Born:** April 6, 1892, Fries, Virginia

**Died:** November 17, 1941

Henry Whitter worked in a textile mill, but in a search for a more enjoyable life, he switched his vocational focus to music and started playing guitar and harmonica in Fries at social gatherings such as barn dances. In 1923 Whitter traveled to the General Phonograph Corporation in New York for an audition, and soon he released his first song, "[The Wreck on the Southern Old 97](#)," an early "hillbilly" success that is considered one of the most influential recordings in early country music history.



Whitter was already an experienced performer when he came to Bristol in 1927, having recorded over 60 numbers, primarily for Okeh Records where he met Ralph Peer before Peer's move to Victor Talking Machine Company. This association resulted in Peer inviting Whitter to come to Bristol in 1927 where he recorded two harmonica solos – "Rain Crow Bill" and "[Henry Whitter's Fox Chase](#)."

Whitter recorded and performed with many musicians and singers over the years, but his most notable collaboration was with Appalachian fiddler G. B. Grayson. They met at a fiddlers' convention in 1927 and made over 40 recordings together, including Appalachian standards like "[Tom Dooley](#)," "Handsome Molly," "Nine Pound Hammer," and "Banks of the Ohio." Many of their recordings have influenced a variety of country and bluegrass musicians.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

Henry Whitter often used a harmonica rack so that he could play guitar and harmonica at the same time.





## PART 2: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS



### ALCOA QUARTET

**John Edgar Thomas** (b. November, 17, 1886, Sevier County, Tennessee; d. unknown)

**James Herbert Thomas** (b. May 5, 1891, Sevier County, Tennessee; d. unknown)

**William Burrell Hitch** (b. April 10, 1890, Maryville/Alcoa, Tennessee; d. January 1972)

**John Leonard "Lennie" Wells** (b. January 3 or 5, 1889, Maryville/Alcoa, Tennessee; d. March 1974)

The Alcoa Quartet was a white gospel singing group who performed **a capella**, in other words, without instrument accompaniment. They took their name from Alcoa, Tennessee, where a large aluminum smelting plant was located and near to where they all lived. The four singers performed professionally, recording with Columbia in 1925, appearing at funerals and other religious gatherings, and even singing with Roy Acuff on a Knoxville radio station. The Alcoa Quartet recorded two songs in Bristol in 1927: **"I'm Redeemed"** and "Remember Me, O Mighty One," both of which came out of popular **shape note** songbooks of the period.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Shape note singing is way to teach singing to those who can't read music – it uses squares, triangles, and other shapes instead of the traditional music notes. This type of singing has been popular in the Southern Appalachians since the early 19th century, with shape note singing teachers traveling around to the mountain communities to teach the method and singing conventions serving as regular gatherings for shape note singers to share songs and sing together. One of the oldest continual conventions is the Tri-State Singing Convention in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, which has been an annual gathering since 1920.



## PART 2: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS



### MR. AND MRS. J. W. BAKER

Mr. James Wiley Baker (b. 1893, d. 1956)

Mrs. Flora Baker (b. 1895, d. 1986)

The Bakers were from Coeburn, Virginia, and were cousins of the Carters. J. W. Baker played the fiddle and guitar, while Flora was adept on the autoharp. They recorded two songs at the 1927 Bristol Sessions: [“The Newmarket Wreck”](#) and “On the Banks of the Sunny Tennessee.” The first song told the true story of a train wreck at New Market, Tennessee, which happened in 1904 and resulted from a switching error by a Southern Railway employee – contemporary accounts record different totals of those who died in the tragedy, but the number was high.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Songs about real historical events or local and national tragedies are a common thread in early hillbilly tunes and folk songs. For instance, Ernest Stoneman’s first recording in 1924 was about the sinking of the Titanic, “White House Blues” told the story of President William McKinley’s 1901 assassination, and “Battleship of Maine” recounted a naval disaster related to the Spanish-American War. Train wreck songs were particularly common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reflecting the reality of this danger on the railways. “Engine 143” is a song about a West Virginia train wreck in October 1890, and according to family lore, Sara was singing this song when she first met A. P. Carter. Blind Alfred Reed recorded a train wreck song at the 1927 Bristol Sessions – “The Wreck of the Virginian” – as did Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Baker with “The Newmarket Wreck.” Other disasters, from mining explosions or collapses to natural disasters were also memorialized in song. In 1929 The Carter Family’s “The Cyclone of Rye Cove” told the tale of a tornado that hit a local school, killing 12 students and their teacher.



## PART 2: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### BULL MOUNTAIN MOONSHINERS

**Charles M. McReynolds** (b. February 19, 1873; d. 1952)

**William McReynolds** (b. September 18, 1898; d. unknown)

**Howard Greear** (b. July 18, 1908; d. December 28, 2000)

**Charles Greear** (b. unknown, d. unknown)

**Bill Deane** (b. May 25, 1883; d. unknown)

The Bull Mountain Moonshiners were a square dance band who hailed from Wise, Virginia. Bill Deane heard about the Victor recordings in Bristol, and a friend then drove the band to Bristol so that they could audition. They came up with their band name on the drive down to Bristol – according to Howard Greear, the trip ended up taking two days due to bad roads and getting stuck behind an unmotorized wagon hauling pigs for many miles!



On August 1, they recorded two songs – “**Johnny Goodwin**” and “Sweet Marie” – though only the former was released in the end (perhaps because the wax master version of “Sweet Marie” got damaged in transit back to the Camden pressing plant). Their session illustrates some of the challenges faced by the Victor recording engineers when dealing with musicians in a makeshift studio – for instance, Howard Greear was asked to move back from the microphone since he played his guitar quite loudly and Charles McReynolds wouldn’t stop tapping his foot while playing and so a pillow was brought in to muffle his stomps!



#### DID YOU KNOW?

Charles McReynolds was the grandfather of Jim and Jesse McReynolds, two later bluegrass stars who got their start on WCYB Radio’s *Farm and Fun Time* show in Bristol. Jesse McReynolds has played his grandfather’s fiddle – the same one used on the 1927 Bristol Sessions recordings – at the museum for various shows and events, including Radio Bristol’s revival of *Farm and Fun Time* recorded live at the museum!





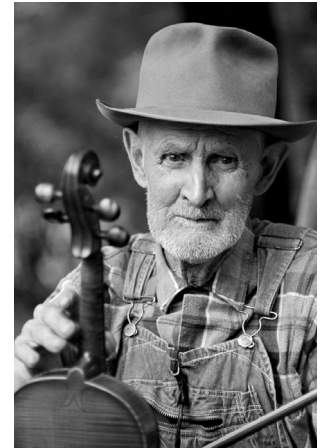
## PART 2: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### J. P. NESTER AND NORMAN EDMONDS

**J. P. Nester** (b. November 27, 1876, Laurel Fork or Hillsville, Virginia; d. April 1967)

**Norman Edmonds** (b. February 9, 1889, Wythe County, Virginia; d. November 1976)

J. P. Nester and Norman Edmonds played banjo and fiddle together, recording four songs at the 1927 Bristol Sessions: **“Train on the Island”** and “Black-Eyed Susie,” along with “Georgia” and “John My Lover,” both of which were never released. These first two recordings exemplify typical early Appalachian string band music, which consisted only of banjo and fiddle in the time before the guitar had made its mark on hillbilly music. Edmonds also played fiddle in the “old-time” way where he held it against his chest rather than underneath his chin. Peer was impressed with the duo’s talent and knew their old string band sound would sell, and so he invited them up to New York City to record, all expenses paid, but Nester refused to leave his Blue Ridge Mountains home.



With the 1927 Bristol Sessions as his only foray into the music industry, Nester continued to farm and later worked as a switchboard operator. However, while Edmonds may not have gotten another chance to record in the 1920s and 1930s, his fame as a fiddler saw him become a local star in his later years. He performed at the Galax Old Fiddler’s Convention (amongst others), played on several LPs made in Galax and also one for independent label Davis Unlimited, and had his very own radio show called *The Old Timers*.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Norman Edmonds came from a long line of musicians, learning fiddle from his father who had in turn learned from his own father. **That musical tradition continued down the generations,** and today Edmonds’ grandson, Jimmy Edmonds, is a well-known and talented luthier, building guitars in his shop in Galax, Virginia, and playing fiddle in a band called the Virginia Luthiers.



## **PART 2: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS**

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### **RED SNODGRASS & HIS ALABAMIANS**

**Thomas P. Snodgrass** (b. unknown; d. unknown)

**Ralph Campbell Snodgrass** (b. unknown; d. unknown)

**And others**

Red Snodgrass & His Alabamians, a dance band, was working at the Bristol Hotel at the time of the Bristol Sessions, and it is thought that Peer and his wife may have stayed there during the recording sessions in July and August 1927. They recorded one song – “Weary Blues,” a jazz number with several instruments not seen on any other Bristol Sessions recording, including cornet, clarinets, trombone, and trap drums – though it was never released. In all probability, this recording was done as a favor or for the sake of vanity. The band was led by Thomas P. Snodgrass, who came from a wealthy Bristol family, and included his brother Ralph Campbell Snodgrass.

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

From newspaper advertisements, we know that Red Snodgrass & His Alabamians played around the region in West Virginia, Tennessee, and Virginia, along with traveling further afield to Texas, between 1925 and 1930. They also sometimes broadcast their music from local radio station WOPI, which was located in the Bristol Hotel for a while. WOPI's call letters stood for “Watch Our Popularity Increase,” and it served as Bristol's first radio station when it went on the air on June 15, 1929.



## PART 2: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS



### TENNEVA RAMBLERS

**Jack Pierce** (b. 1908; d. March 1950)

**Claude Grant** (b. April 17, 1906; d. October 1975)

**James R. "Jack" Grant** (b. June 14, 1904; d. October 1967?)

**Claude T. Slagle** (b. May 1895; d. unknown)

Jack Pierce and brothers Claude and Jack Grant were from Bristol, though they came with Jimmie Rodgers from Asheville, North Carolina to audition for Ralph Peer in 1927. They had been playing with Rodgers on an Asheville radio station as the Jimmie Rodgers' Entertainers, and all four originally planned to record together in Bristol. However, in the end, Rodgers recorded as a solo act, and Pierce (on fiddle) and the two Grant brothers (on guitar and mandolin), along with banjoist Slagle, recorded three songs as the Tenneva Ramblers. Peer invited them to record again

in Atlanta in February 1928, and the group also recorded in Johnson City in October 1928 for Columbia Records.

There are a few theories as to why Jimmie Rodgers didn't end up rrecording with Pierce and the Grant brothers in August 1927. Some think that the three musicians fought with Rodgers over his desire to take top billing in their group and thus decided to record separately from him, while others speculate that the division might have been suggested by Ralph Peer when he saw Rodgers' potential as a solo artist.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

The Tenneva Ramblers' 1927 song "[The Longest Train I Ever Saw](#)" has been recorded by numerous artists under various titles – for example, Lead Belly's "In the Pines," "Where Did You Sleep Last Night?" by Nirvana, and Dolly Parton's "In the Pines." Different versions were also used in the soundtrack to a *Walking Dead* video game series and for the trailer to the recent TV show *American Gods*, amongst others.





## PART 2: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

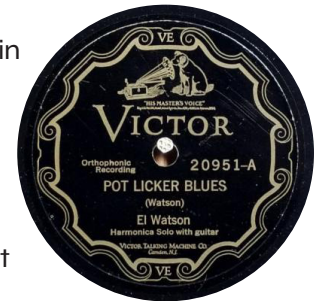
### EL WATSON

**Born:** unknown

**Died:** unknown

On July 28, 1927 Victor Talking Machine Company producer Ralph Peer recorded two sides with harmonica player El Watson, the only African American to record on the 1927 Bristol Sessions. Unfortunately, little is known about Watson himself – there are no known photographs or records of him beyond what we have access to related to his Victor recordings. A laborer with a similar name was noted in the 1927 Johnson City directory, and so some scholars speculate that this is the same man, but it is difficult to confirm.

Music-wise, however, we do know that he recorded two harmonica solos in Bristol in 1927 – **“Narrow Gauge Blues,”** a tune meant to sound like a train, and the bluesy “Pot Licker Blues” – both of which were distributed as “race records” rather than “hillbilly” records. He also played the harmonica, along with the bones, on several Johnson Brothers tunes – including “Two Brothers Are We” and “The Soldier’s Poor Little Boy” – while Charles Johnson played guitar on Watson’s recordings. These records are among the very first integrated country or blues recordings.



Peer liked what he heard in Watson’s recordings and invited him to record in Victor’s New York City studio in May 1928. This resulted in four more sides: “Fox Chase,” “Sweet Bunch of Daisies,” “Bay Rum Blues,” and “One Sock Blues.”

#### DID YOU KNOW?

There was one African American musician – Ellis Williams – recorded at the Johnson City Sessions in 1929, and scholar Tony Russell believes that he is the same man as El Watson due to very close similarities in the harmonica and bones playing on both recording sessions. Russell thinks that Watson might have used a different name on the Columbia label recordings in Johnson City because he was still under contract to Victor (a not uncommon practice for musicians recording with different labels). Unfortunately, we don’t have photographs of Ellis Williams either, but we do know more possible facts about his life, including his birth and death dates (b. June 18, 1895; d. April 23, 1951); some of the jobs he worked, including restaurant porter, grocery store clerk and delivery man, railroad switchman and private cook; and that he was drafted in World War I.



## PART 2: MUSICIANS & ACTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### WEST VIRGINIA COON HUNTERS

W. B. (Wesley “Bane”) Boyles (b. August 8, 1905; d. April 1975)

Joe Stephens

Fred Belcher

Vernal Vest (b. December 8, 1898; d. January 1953)

Clyde S. Meadows

At the 1927 Bristol Sessions, the [West Virginia Coon Hunters](#) string band was made up of five musicians, though this Bluefield, West Virginia-based group sometimes included several other players including Fred Pendleton. With Boyles on fiddle, Stephens on banjo, Belcher on guitar, Vest on ukulele, and Meadows singing, the group recorded two songs: [“Greasy String”](#) and “Your Blues Eyes Run Me Crazy.”



#### DID YOU KNOW?

Most of the musicians who recorded at the 1927 Bristol Sessions had other occupations that helped them make a living and support their families. For instance, the railways were major employers in the early 20th century: Clyde Meadows was an engine cleaner for the Norfolk & Western Railway, Vernal Vest worked on the railroad as a fireman, and Fred Pendleton was a railroad repairman on steam trains. However, not all occupations were legal – family members remember Wesley “Bane” Boyles as a moonshiner, and he was arrested for making and transporting illegal liquor soon after he recorded in Bristol. Sadly, this transgression ended his career as a West Virginia Coon Hunter though he did continue to make music throughout his life. After he got out of prison, he worked a variety of jobs, including as a barber, an electrical worker, and a mechanic.



## CONCLUSION

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The people who came to Bristol in 1927 made an impact on the history of country music – whether they were producer Ralph Peer; one of the “star” acts like Ernest Stoneman, The Carter Family, or Jimmie Rodgers; or a less widely known musician or group like Alfred Karnes or the Tenneva Ramblers. While there had been earlier recording sessions of “hillbilly music” and there would be many later ones, those made in Bristol that summer were particularly significant as 19 acts came together to produce records characterized by musical vitality and far-reaching influence. Not only did the 1927 Bristol Sessions launch the careers of The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers, and further cement the career of Ernest Stoneman, but it also saw the first recordings of Holiness music – an important facet of Southern gospel music – with Ernest Phipps & His Holiness Quartet; some of the first integrated country music recordings with El Watson and the Johnson Brothers; excellent examples of traditional Appalachian music with B. F. Shelton and J. P. Nester and Norman Edmonds; an influential original “disaster song” composition by Blind Alfred Reed; the beginnings of Ralph Peer’s independent music publishing company that still stands – and influences music – today; and so much more.

Despite the impact on early commercial country music, most of the musicians who recorded in Bristol went back to their everyday lives as farmers, **sawmill** workers, preachers, railroad employees, homemakers, etc. Some recorded again, some did not, but most continued to make music in and around their communities and region. And that local impact and the musicians’ local stories are as interesting as the larger one made through the 1927 Bristol Sessions. These musicians are often remembered within their communities, and frequently their legacy is carried on by their families – through their own music making, the oral histories they have shared with scholars, and with the wonderful photographs and artifacts that they’ve chosen to share with the museum.





## VOCABULARY LIST

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*\*Most definitions taken from Merriam-Webster*

### A Capella

Without musical accompaniment

### African American Field Holler

Vocal music sung in the fields by enslaved African Americans and later by forced laborers

### Border Radio

Radio stations found on the Texas-Mexico border in the 1930s; these stations had much larger transmitters than were allowed in the United States and thus could broadcast much further

### Busking

To entertain in a public place for donations

### Grand Ole Opry

Radio show that started as the WSM *National Barn Dance* in Nashville in 1925; the show continues today from its own venue in Nashville

### “Hillbilly music”

Term used for early country music, especially by record labels for marketing the records to white rural audiences

### Murder Ballad

A type of ballad that focuses on a crime or an often gruesome death

### Patent Medicine

A product (such as an elixir, tonic, or liniment) that was marketed as a medicine in the U.S. during the 1800s and early 1900s but was typically of unproven effectiveness and questionable safety

### “Race Records”

Term used for music made by and for African Americans in the early 20th century; especially used in marketing and distribution of these records

### Royalties

A payment to an author or composer for each copy of a work sold OR to an inventor for each item sold under a patent

### Sawmill

A mill or machine for sawing logs

### Shape Notes

A system of seven notes showing the musical scale degree by the shape of the note head

### Shoe Cobbler

A mender or maker of shoes and often of other leather goods

### Song-Skit

A story-song that combines music and narrated elements



## CAPTIONS AND CREDITS TO IMAGES

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### Page 4

**Top:** Ralph Peer in the 1950s. Credit: Courtesy of peermusic, Peer Family Archives

**Bottom:** Ralph Peer with a horticultural drawing of his other passion: camellias. Credit: Courtesy of the Charles K. Wolfe Collection

### Page 5

**Top:** Hattie and Ernest Stoneman in their later years; he is holding his autoharp. Credit: From the [Mike Seeger Collection](#), #20009, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Middle:** Record labels for Ernest Stoneman's two Titanic-themed songs, one on the Okeh label and the other released by Edison.

**Bottom:** This later LP, released by Rounder Records in 1975, is labelled as "Ernest V. Stoneman and the Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers," though most of the songs were released under other band names used by Stoneman. Credit: From the Birthplace of Country Music Collection

### Page 6

**Top:** The Carter Family. Credit: From the [John Edwards Memorial Foundation Records](#), #20001, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Middle:** The record label for The Carter Family's border radio favorite, "Keep on the Sunny Side."

**Bottom:** The Carter Family Museum, once A. P. Carter's general store. Credit: Photograph by Amy C. Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance

### Page 7

**Top:** Promotional photograph of Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters. Credit: Courtesy of the Grand Ole Opry Archives

**Bottom:** A photograph of the border radio station XERA in the late 1930s. The base of the massive transmitter can be seen behind the building.

Credit: From [www.theradiohistorian.org](http://www.theradiohistorian.org)

### Page 8

**Top:** Portrait of Jimmie Rodgers. Credit: Courtesy of Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum

**Middle:** Jimmie Rodgers with The Carter Family in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1931. Credit: Courtesy of Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum

### Page 9

**Top:** A possible self-portrait of Uncle Eck Dunford. Credit: Courtesy of Doris Brown

**Middle:** Uncle Eck Dunford's guitar on display in the *Hometown Stars* special exhibit. Credit: © Birthplace of Country Music

**Bottom:** A photograph of Galax musicians by Uncle Eck Dunford is on the cover of *The New Lost City Ramblers Song Book*.



## Page 10

The Johnson Brothers. Credit: From the [John Edwards Memorial Foundation Records](#), #20001, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

## Page 11

**Top:** A portrait of Alfred Karnes as a young man in the U.S. Navy, along with another sailor. Credit: Courtesy of Debbie O'Shea

**Middle:** This card records Alfred Karnes's ordination as a minister. Credit: Courtesy of Debbie O'Shea

**Bottom:** Alfred Karnes with his harp guitar and standing in front of signage listing out different Biblical verses. Credit: Image from the *Hometown Stars* special exhibit, courtesy of the Blue Ridge Institute and Museum at Ferrum College

## Page 12

Ernest Phipps with his second wife Zola, possibly a wedding photograph. Credit: Donated to the Birthplace of Country Music Museum by Teresa Phipps Patierno in the memory of her grandfather, Ernest Phipps, a coal miner & Holiness preacher from Kentucky, a simple man who loved his Lord

## Page 13

**Top:** Blind Alfred Reed holding his fiddle and standing before a sign advertising his music performance. Credit: Courtesy of Goldenseal Magazine

**Bottom:** This is the fiddle played by Blind Alfred Reed at the 1927 Bristol Sessions, brought to the museum one day by his relatives. Credit: © Birthplace of Country Music

## Page 14

The Shelor Family. Credit: From the liner notes by Ted Olson and Tony Russell, *The Bristol Sessions, 1927–28: The Big Bang of Country Music*, 2011

## Page 15

B. F. Shelton after a successful day of fishing. Credit: Courtesy of the Charles K. Wolfe Collection

## Page 16

Georgia Warren cuts the ribbon at the grand opening of the Birthplace of Country Music Museum on August 1, 2014. Roni Stoneman, daughter of Ernest Stoneman, stands behind her. Credit: © Birthplace of Country Music; photographer: Angela Freese





## Page 17

**Top:** This promotional photograph of Henry Whitter underlines his identity as a recording “star” as he formally poses with some of his records and his guitar. Credit: From the [John Edwards Memorial Foundation Records](#), #20001, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Middle:** Henry Whitter further emphasized his professional musician status with this card identifying him as a “world-famous phonograph record artist and radio entertainer.” Credit: From the [John Edwards Memorial Foundation Records](#), #20001, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Bottom:** G. B. Grayson and Henry Whitter. Credit: From the [John Edwards Memorial Foundation Records](#), #20001, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

## Page 18

The Alcoa Quartet. Credit: From the liner notes by Ted Olson and Tony Russell, *The Bristol Sessions, 1927–28: The Big Bang of Country Music*, 2011

## Page 19

J. W. and Flora Baker with their sons. Credit: From the liner notes by Ted Olson and Tony Russell, *The Bristol Sessions, 1927–28: The Big Bang of Country Music*, 2011

## Page 20

**Top:** Charles McReynolds of the Bull Mountain Moonshiners and his daughter Maggie. Credit: From the liner notes by Ted Olson and Tony Russell, *The Bristol Sessions, 1927–28: The Big Bang of Country Music*, 2011

**Bottom:** Jesse McReynolds playing his grandfather Charles McReynolds’ fiddle at a 2017 *Farm and Fun Time* live radio show at the museum. Credit: © Birthplace of Country Music; photographer: Billie Wheeler

## Page 21

Norman Edmonds. Credit: Courtesy of Mark Sanderford

## Page 23

Jimmie Rodgers (standing with banjo) is seen here with Jack Pierce and Claude and Jack Grant of the Tenneva Ramblers. Credit: From the [John Edwards Memorial Foundation Records](#), #20001, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

## Page 24

The Victor record label for El Watson’s “Pot Licker Blues.



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**Page 25**

The West Virginia Coon Hunters, standing left to right: Fred Belcher, Clyde S. Meadows, Jim Brown, and Vernal Vest; seated left to right: Dutch Stewart, Wesley “Bane” Boyles, Regal Mooney, Fred Pendleton, and Joe Stephens. Only five of the musicians here were present at the 1927 Bristol Sessions. Credit: From the Birthplace of Country Music Museum Collection, gift of Denise Smith