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## A & R Men and the Geography of Piedmont Blues Recordings From 1924 - 1941

*Blues is one of the most important forms of African American music to emerge in the 20th century. During the middle 1920s downhome blues began to attract the attention of commercial record companies interested in expanding their base of support among black American consumers. Because most of the record companies were based in the North, they utilized a rather haphazard network of musicians, furniture dealers, and a few of their own employees to scout this southern-based "race" talent. This article examines the relationship between the blues musicians who happen to reside in the Southeastern Piedmont of the United States and the record companies themselves. We found that there is a direct correlation between the recording of these blues musicians and the geographical location of the men who scouted talent for the companies. As Fig. 1 illustrates, most of the blues musicians that recorded between 1924 and 1941 resided within or near the slowly developing urban corridor between Atlanta, Georgia, and Durham, North Carolina.*

American folk and popular music has been studied by historians, sociologists, folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and anthropologists, but with the notable exception of George O. Carney, rarely by geographers. A cultural geographer by academic training, Carney has been especially interested in the spatial aspects of vernacular music in the United States. His research since the early 1970s has resulted in many engaging and groundbreaking publications, as well as the only course on "Geography of American Music" offered in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Of all of the types of American music studied by geographers, African American folk music has been the most obvious form overlooked by cultural geographers. One of the most important styles of black American folk music is blues, which emerged in the southern United States around the turn of the 20th century and is also noteworthy as the foundation for later popular forms such as rock 'n' roll.<sup>2</sup> With its roots in the indigenous "field hollers," work songs, fiddle and banjo tunes, and religious music of rural blacks, blues is distinctly regional and often reflects a sense of place. Blues remains largely an oral tradition and thus provides insights into the environmental as well as the economic and social conditions of a specific people at a particular time and place, a fact that has not escaped the attention of the scholars who have studied blues on a regional and local level.<sup>3</sup>

The Piedmont of middle and northeast Georgia, central and northwest South

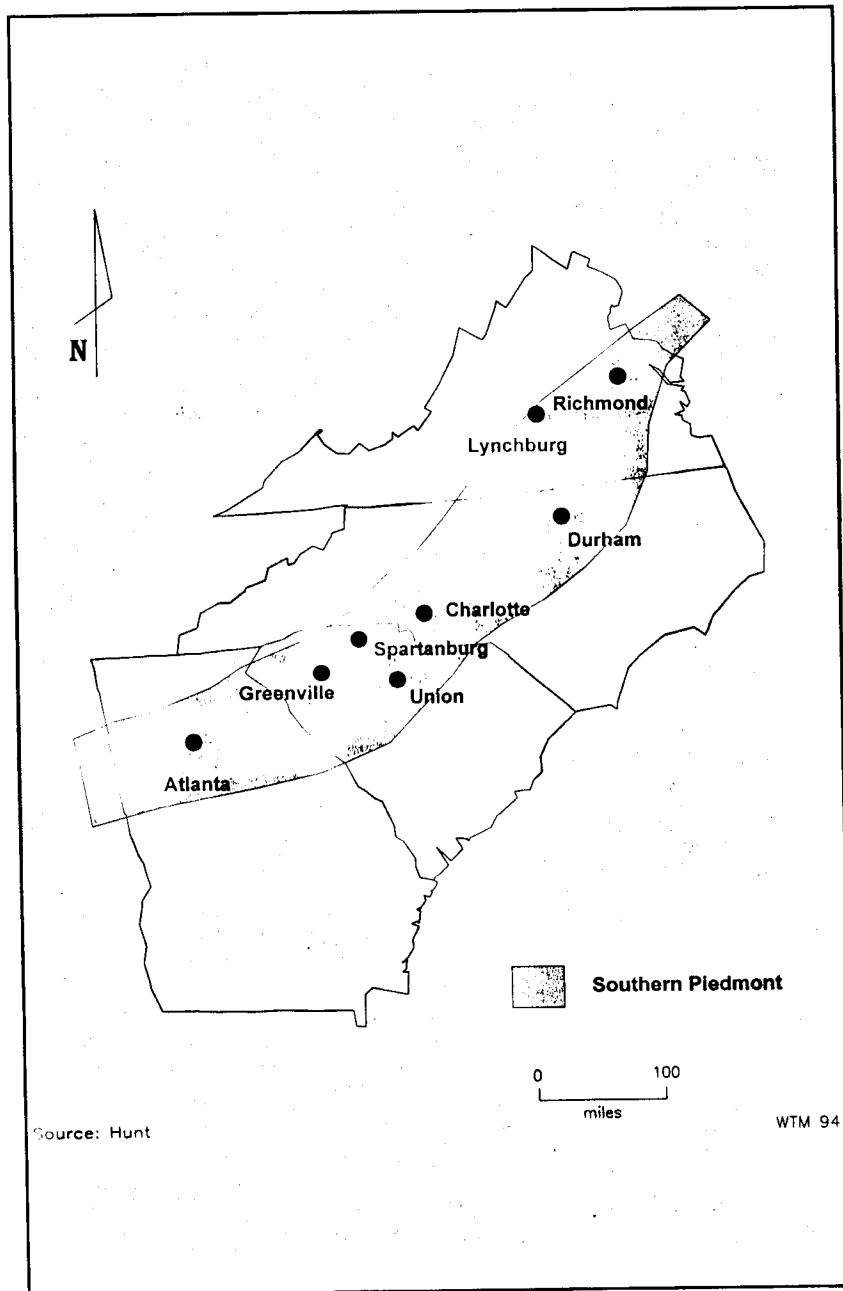


Figure 1: The Southern Piedmont

Carolina, central North Carolina, and central Virginia, along with the Yazoo Basin of Mississippi and the plains of East Texas are three recognized hearth areas from which blues music has been diffused over the past seventy years. Though it began in the Deep South, by the close of World War I blues had been accepted as a viable music form by blacks throughout the South and most of the urban North. In response to what they perceived as a potential market, commercial record companies earnestly began recording folk and ethnic musicians in the early 1920s. The term "race records" was given to those by gospel, jazz, and blues recordings that were targeted primarily for the African American population not only in the South, but also northern urban areas. The initial and most intensive wave of traditional blues recordings by commercial companies in the United States occurred between 1924 and 1941. Research by Bruce Bastin, Glen Hinson, Kip Lornell, Pete Lowry, George Mitchell, and others, summarized and analyzed in Bastin's definitive book, *Red River Blues: The Blues Tradition in the Southeast*, indicates that nearly 700 songs were recorded by blues musicians residing in or adjacent to the Southern Piedmont.<sup>4</sup> While there were dozens of blues performers in the states of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia who gained at least a modicum of local or regional fame, only forty-four individuals from these states are known to have recorded.

The Piedmont region was established as an agricultural area in the 18th and early 19th centuries and became home to the majority of the African American population of these four states at the end of the War Between the States. At this time, and with the exception of those in North Carolina, all counties on the Piedmont had populations that were more than 30 percent African American and several had populations in excess of 70 percent.<sup>5</sup> After the War, larger cities, such as Atlanta, Charlotte, and Richmond, as well as smaller places such as Lynchburg, Virginia, Durham, North Carolina, and Spartanburg, South Carolina, attracted large numbers of African Americans from rural areas of both the southern Piedmont and the nearby Coastal Plains (Fig. 1). Because the Piedmont was the center of population growth and the dominant political and industrial region of these four states, blues musicians from throughout these states are usually labeled as "Piedmont blues players". The overwhelming majority of blues musicians discussed in this article, in fact, are native to the Piedmont. Although biographical information about several of these artists remains sketchy, it has been clearly documented that of the 44 individuals who are classified as Piedmont blues artists, 41 (93%) were either born or acquired their musical reputation on the Piedmont.

Because of the uncertainty regarding their geographic origins, we excluded approximately twenty musicians who *probably* are from the Piedmont. They sound like down-home Piedmont blues artists and often recorded at sessions populated by other artists from this specific region of the South. However, it is impossible to pinpoint the precise geographical lineage of such likely artists as Sloppy Henry, Seth Richard, George Carter, Spark Plug Smith, Nellie Florence, Willie Baker, Alec Johnson, and Roosevelt Antrim. We have also omitted female vaudeville blues vocalists like Ma Rainey and Trixie Smith, despite the fact that they were born in Georgia. This is because they learned and plied their trade on the professional vaudeville stages and touring tent shows that criss-crossed the South beginning in the teens and continuing until the 1940s. Their instrumental accompaniment, moreover, generally consisted of a solo pianist or a small jazz band, which is also far removed from the indigenous down-home Piedmont blues.

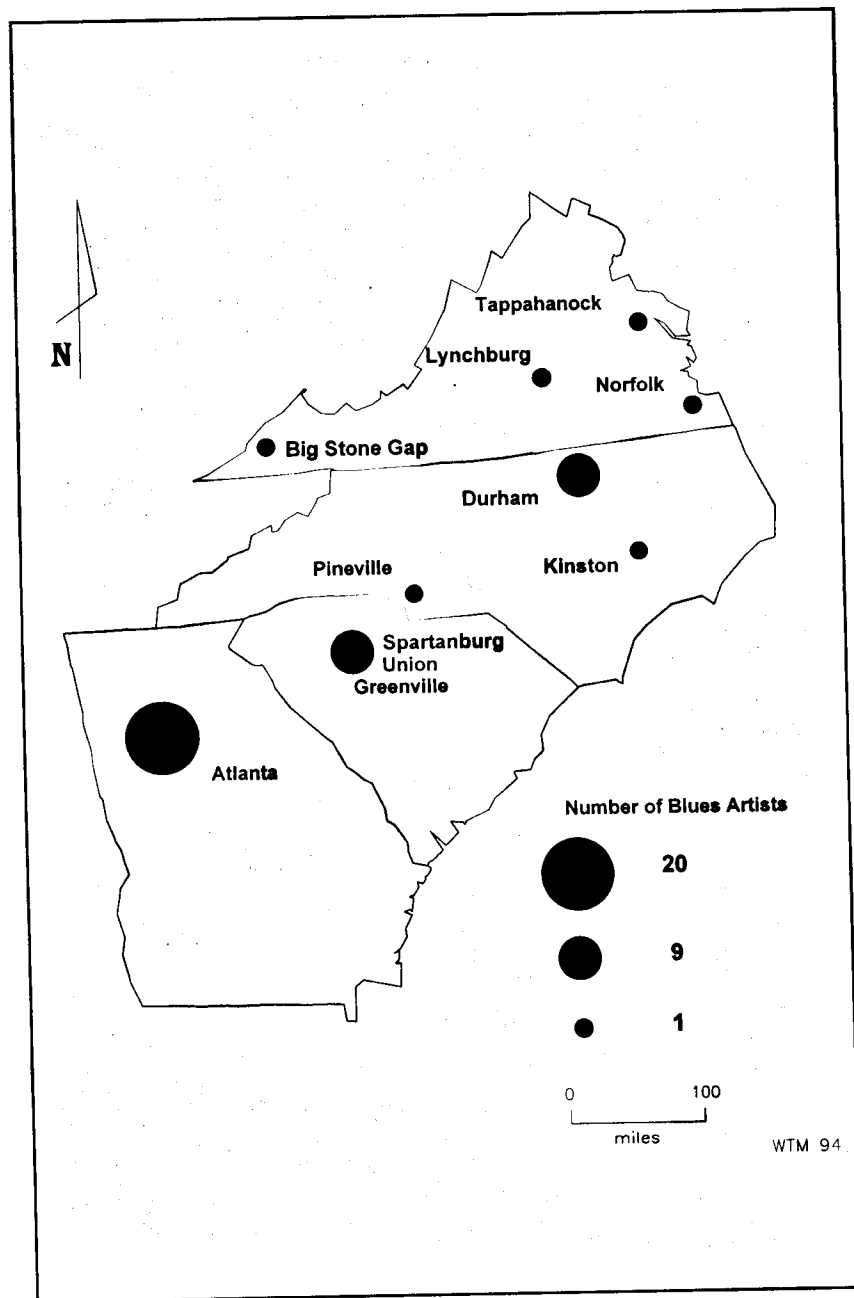


Figure 2: Home of Piedmont Blues Recording Artists 1924-1941

Two other Georgia-born musicians - Amos Easton (a.k.a. Bumble Bee Slim) and Georgia Tom Dorsey - have been eliminated from our sample because both of them left home at a very early age and their music does not reflect their origins. Finally, the handful of guitar evangelists - Gussie Nesbit and Blind Joe Taggart, for example - and the many sacred vocal groups such as the Golden Gate Quartet and the Heavenly Gospel Singers who recorded during this period have also been excluded because of the religious content of their performances. Despite their geographic proximity, these artists clearly do not belong in a study of blues in the Piedmont.

Collectively, this group of blues entertainers from the Piedmont recorded 698 songs on nine record labels in eight different cities during the seventeen-year period covered by this survey.<sup>6</sup> Table 1 graphically delineates this information. The recordings by these artists defined what is generally considered to be a distinctive genre, "Piedmont Blues," which is characterized by complex syncopated ragtime-style guitar playing and laconic, though clearly enunciated, vocals. Small ensembles with a second guitar player or harmonica and washboard accompaniment are often found in the Piedmont. Other stringed instruments - most often a mandolin or fiddle - sometimes augmented these ensembles, which often played on street corners or near the tobacco warehouses during the height of the fall tobacco season when many people came to town to sell their crop and shop. The piano is sometimes used by blues players from this section of the country, but not as commonly as in Texas, for example.

Like so many widely hailed downhome "bluesmen" - from Mississippi's Charlie Patton and John Hurt to Piedmont artists such as Peg Leg Howell - quite a few of the musicians included here performed not only blues but other closely-related secular material, such as Native American ballads, lyric songs and other brief ditties. Many of them, especially those who attended several sessions, also included sacred material as part of their recorded repertoire. They are called "blues musicians" because they were occasionally so identified on the records themselves, but more importantly because they were classified as such by later researchers. Even the prototypical Piedmont blues musician, Blind Boy Fuller, recorded nearly as many blues-like songs, such as "Step it Up and Go," "Shake It, Baby," and "Careless Love," as he did pure twelve-bar blues performances. Despite their frequent departure from the blues tradition itself, all of the musicians in this study are considered to be blues players by Bastin and others who have closely studied this area of black American music.

Three primary clusters of recorded blues musicians existed on the Piedmont (Fig. 2). Atlanta was home, either by birth or migration, to at least 20 artists, who accounted for slightly over one-half of all Piedmont blues recordings. Nine of the other artists were from the Piedmont of South Carolina-Spartanburg, Greenville, and Union - and were responsible for about 13 percent of Piedmont blues recordings. The Durham, North Carolina, area contained nine musicians who recorded 28 percent of the songs. The six musicians (4 from Virginia and 2 from North Carolina) from outside of the cluster areas contributed a scant eight percent of the Piedmont blues recordings of this era.

Someone in the recording industry obviously believed that these blues artists had the potential to sell records. What is not clear is why the distributional pattern of recorded blues artists from the southeastern United States is so sharply focused on the Piedmont's three clusters. Our primary hypothesis is that this distinctive spatial configuration of recorded blues musicians during the inter-

war years is directly related to the development of the recording industry - with its pattern of Northern headquarters and southern field recording sessions - and that the artists' home location was critical to being discovered and recorded. Also of interest to this study are the locations to which these musicians traveled in order to record. The distribution of recording sites also is related to the development of the record industry and changed over time.

### *The Recording Industry*

The commercial recording industry developed slowly during the final decade of the 19th century. A bewildering array of talent, ranging from vaudeville comedians engaged in comic dialogues to orchestras performing excerpts from the most popular symphonic works, was recorded during the early years as record companies attempted to gauge the public's musical preferences. Though several companies had tried to sell recordings of primarily white interpretations of African American minstrel routines and spirituals as early as the 1890s, the market for true black folk performers was not widely developed until after World War I.

The recordings of traditional American music, including blues, began in earnest in the early 1920s as smaller companies attempted to compete with the giants of the industry, such as the Victor Talking Machine Company and Columbia. The success of the General Phonograph Company's Okeh label largely began when they released "Crazy Blues" and "It's Right Here For You" by black cabaret singer Mamie Smith in August 1920.<sup>7</sup> Smith's record inspired relatively small and struggling companies such as Gennett and Paramount to expand into the "race record" market, especially with recordings by female blues performers or female-male vaudeville duets backed by small jazz groups.

The first recording of a traditional, downhome blues musician was made in 1924, when Okeh Records recorded Ed Andrews of the Atlanta area performing "Barrel House Blues" and "Time Ain't Gonna Make Me Stay." These guitar accompanied folk blues relied heavily on traditional, oral-formulated lyrics. Andrews' performances helped to pave the road for the later recordings of Blind Blake, Barbecue Bob, and other similar performers who introduced an entirely different style for the record companies to offer to the black public. Such musicians were widely recorded until 1942 when changing public tastes, the cessation of field recording sessions, and a nine-month recording ban by the musicians union signaled an important change in the record industry's philosophy towards blues music.<sup>8</sup>

Because there were so few truly professional folk blues musicians, the recording companies were faced with the problem of discovering suitable talent to satisfy public demand. Unfortunately for the record companies, which were based in northern urban areas, the traditional blues talent was found predominantly in the South. Because most of the companies interested in locating and recording folk talent were small, often fledgling operations, few could afford to have full-time employees scout for talent, nor could they afford to establish recording studios in southern cities. To solve this dilemma, the recording companies employed record salesmen, personnel in their southern regional distribution outlets, and local record retailers to scout local musicians.

These talent scouts eventually became known as Artist & Repertoire (A & R)

men - they were not only responsible for locating talent but also for organizing and supervising recording sessions. The early A & R men were pioneers in locating, selecting, and recording talent in such diverse genres as gospel, hillbilly, jazz, and blues. They were charged with the creative burden of the recording industry, for their knowledge of the musical tastes of the people was indispensable to the success of a record or an artist.

### *Distribution of A & R Men*

Because the hand-wound phonographs were part of their regular inventory during the years prior to World War II, the sale of records was a sideline for many furniture companies, particularly in small towns. Although records could be ordered through the mail, furniture stores were important record distributors because many people preferred the immediacy of purchasing 78 rpm discs rather than waiting for their delivery. Proprietors and employees of these stores became familiar not only with the recording companies, through their association with the distributors, but also with the tastes and preferences of their customers, some of whom were local entertainers. Their knowledge of the musical preferences of their customers as well as their contacts with record company personnel made them the logical interface for securing talent. A hierarchy for scouting talent quickly developed with the local retailer of phonograph records, acting as a part-time A & R man, at the heart of the system.

Polk C. Brockman typified these early talent scouts. Brockman worked in the family-owned James K. Polk Furniture Company in Atlanta, where he was responsible for the record and phonograph inventory. On a business trip to New York in 1923 he suggested to Okeh Record Company executive Ralph Peer that they record a few local blues players, but most importantly the popular Atlanta musician, Fiddlin' John Carson. Peer reluctantly agreed to record Carson, mainly because Brockman personally guaranteed to purchase and sell 500 copies of the record. Carson's record was the first "hillbilly" record to be released and it sold briskly, thus inadvertently launching Brockman's career as an A & R man. Brockman worked with all kinds of American vernacular music, including blues, which in his opinion "did the best in the South."<sup>9</sup>

For the next eight years, until the Depression forced the James K. Polk Furniture Company into bankruptcy, Brockman worked at the family business and as a talent scout for the Okeh Record Company and, later, the Victor Record Company. In the early 1930s Brockman became a full-time Victor employee and, like other scouts, relied on a network of record distributors ("jobbers") in major southern cities and retailers in smaller communities to locate entertainers. Record dealers from throughout the Southeast passed information concerning local talent to Brockman who, in turn, arranged to audition the musicians. Brockman observed that: "A lot of it [identifying talent] comes from the dealer, the retail dealer you have in the locality. These boys [musicians] would hear that "so and so" went down there making records and getting a little money. How does he do it and where does he go and so forth? That's the way it came about—he'd come down to the store and play for him [the record salesman, part-time A & R man] and that's the way it'd go."<sup>10</sup>

This system allowed Brockman and others to arrange for scores of musicians to be recorded in field sessions held in several cities across the South, most

notably Atlanta and Memphis, with Dallas as their third most popular choice. Led by the twin industry giants -Victor and Columbia - the record companies would arrange field recording sessions in the localities where the identified talent existed. This was generally less expensive than transporting the artists, particularly those who were untested, to the recording companies' home studios in New York or Chicago. The spatial distributional pattern of recorded musicians was essentially established by this scouting system, which remained in place for nearly twenty years.

A description of the October, 1929 Okeh field session held in Richmond, Virginia, may serve as an example of how talent was selected for recording. Okeh's Richmond distributor, Charles Rey's, vast territory included Virginia, West Virginia, eastern North Carolina, and Washington DC. Through the dealer network in his territory and his knowledge of local popular radio performers from Norfolk, Richmond, and Roanoke, Rey identified hillbilly, blues, and gospel performers that he thought were worthy of recording. Rey reported to Polk Brockman, who then arranged for auditions in Richmond. Using this referral system, the Okeh Company recorded more than 100 selections during a week long session. The hillbilly talent came from as far away as Greene and Roanoke Counties, Virginia, while all of the "race" (blues and gospel) musicians were from Richmond or Norfolk.<sup>11</sup>

The most successful talent scouts utilized more than their network of record dealers to locate talent. Ralph Peer, for example, advertised in local newspapers a week or so before the July-August, 1927 Victor Record Company session was conducted in Bristol, Tennessee.<sup>12</sup> Others sought the advice of radio station managers concerning their most popular performers. A & R men also sometimes lured musicians from other labels. Another of the more prevalent means of securing talent involved popular, previously recorded artists who were asked by A & R men to bring fellow musicians to a recording session. The success of recording activities in a field session was directly related to the ability of the A & R man to select appropriate talent; in other words, they placed commercial potential above all other criteria. The reputation of successful regional A & R men spread among the musicians themselves who were eager to be recorded.

J. B. Long, the manager of United Dollar Stores in Kinston and Durham, North Carolina, and a part-time A & R man for ARC, observed that "we didn't do a whole lot of musical auditions [in diverse locations]. . . wherever I was located, they began to come to me".<sup>13</sup>

Two men who worked for the American Record Corporation in the 1930s, W.R. Calaway and Art Satherley, were often involved with the recording (though not the recruiting) of Piedmont blues musicians. Both Calaway and Satherley came to ARC as veteran A & R men about 1930. By the time J.B. Long contacted ARC in 1934, they had (often jointly) conducted dozens of successful recording sessions that included not only blues, such as the Willie McTell, Fred McMullen, and Curley Weaver session in 1933, but many other types of musicians. But the key point is this: they arranged the logistics of the session - location, date, and issues: related to payment - but these northerners basically left the scouting of talent to the men who actually lived in the South and were more familiar with local musical traditions.

As the Depression deepened, A & R men became increasingly unwilling to expend limited funds for recording new talent. The price to conduct field

sessions involved paying the expenses for several employees to travel from city to city for approximately one month, as well as their normal salaries. While the cost of travel to a field session was borne by the artists, the cost of transporting them to the permanent studio became the company's responsibility. Thus the record companies decreased the number of their field sessions, while the A & R men grew increasingly reluctant to transport untried talent to their permanent studios in New York City and Chicago.

Even close proximity to one of the handful of A & R men did not guarantee that a blues musician would be discovered and recorded. Furthermore, the A & R men could not possibly locate every worthy blues singer within their geographical range. Field research conducted since the late 1960s clearly demonstrates that not all of the best bluesmen from this era were recorded. During the 1970s Pete Lowry, owner of Trix Records and a dedicated field researcher, recorded and released fine long playing recordings by Henry "Rufe" Johnson, Pernel Charity, and Roy Dunn. Each of these men was a fine Piedmont bluesman active as early as the late 1930s. Glen Hinson and Kip Lornell located and recorded other bluesmen in central North Carolina - most notably John Dee Holeman and James "Guitar Slim" Stephenson - who could well have been part of the earlier wave.

Stories about now obscure musicians, such as "Blind Log's" recollections of Blind Willie McTell in Savannah, or the awe with which Joe Walker (Blind Willie Walker's brother) is still held in Greenville, South Carolina, underscore that the recorded musicians themselves knew other fine bluesmen. No less than Gary Davis - himself an expert of the Piedmont style of guitar picking and an unrelentingly judgmental man - flatly stated that Joe Walker was "a master guitar player." Willie Trice echoed his words with the observation that Walker was "the playest man he ever saw!"<sup>14</sup> Further south the never-recorded Star Band (a black string band from the late 1920s that included two members, Frank Edwards and Guitar Slim, who went on to record later) enjoyed immense local fame and entertained for many parties throughout Atlanta. Perhaps some of these musicians did not wish to record. Others may not have been available at the time of the session or simply failed to show at the appointed day.

The scattered locations of field recordings began in the middle 1930s is perhaps the strongest evidence for the existence of fine bluesmen unrecorded by the commercial companies. Many of these recordings were done under the auspices of the Archive of Folksong of the Library of Congress, which most conspicuously supported the work of John and Alan Lomax. This father-son duo often visited Southern prisons in search of musical talent and many of their recordings include striking examples of blues. Their sojourns provide indisputable evidence that good bluesmen were going unrecognized by the commercial companies. In 1935, after his father stopped traveling so much, Alan Lomax teamed up with other field researchers, such as Zora Neale Hurston and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle. Several of their most talented discoveries lived in Florida, a state unvisited by the early A & R men in search of blues artists. Directly south of Lake Okeechobee, deep in southcentral Florida, they recorded what Bruce Bastin has called "one of the finest small jook bands ever to be documented, comprising harmonica players Booker T. Sapps and Roger Matthews and guitarist Willy Flowers."<sup>15</sup> The Lomax trips resulted in other genuine and satisfying recordings from near Richmond, Virginia, and Frederica, Georgia. Lawrence

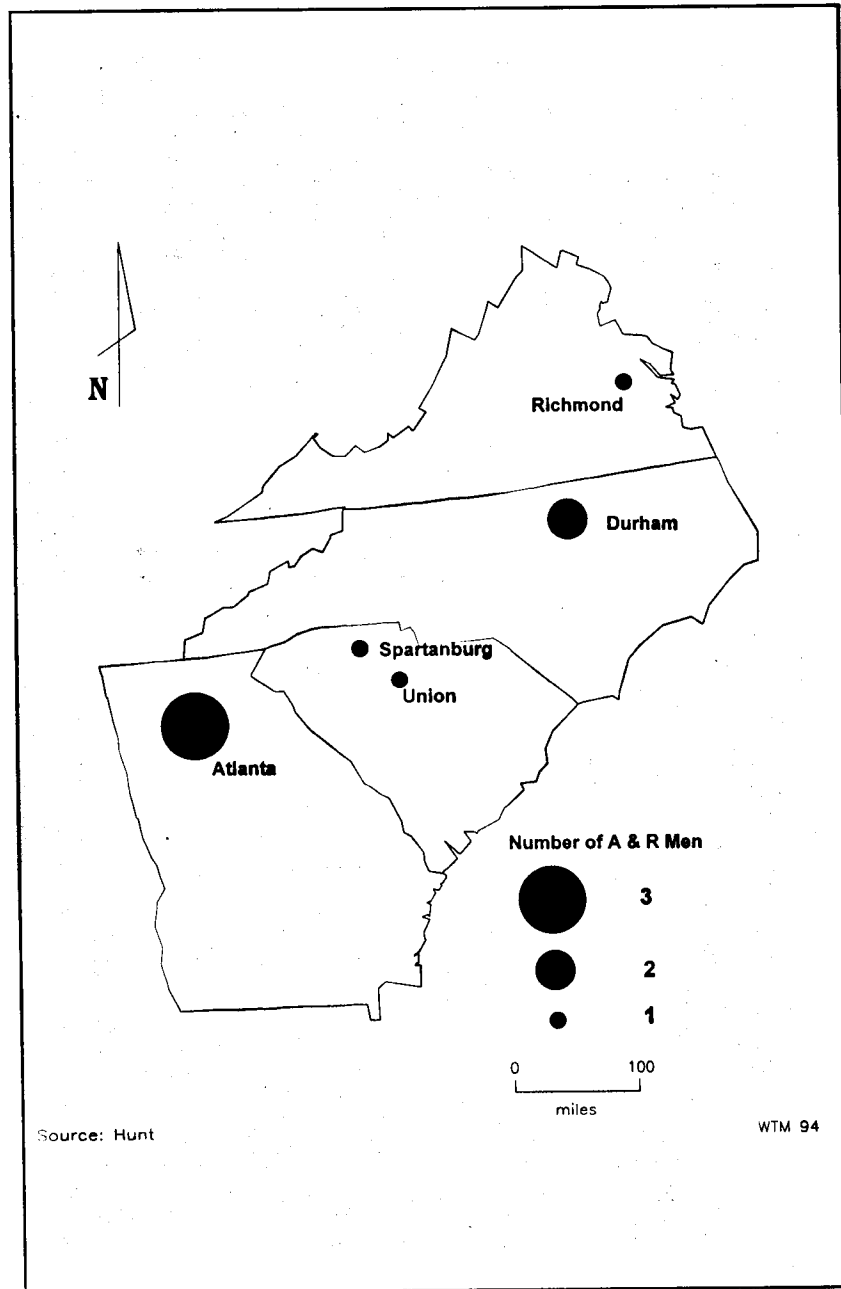


Figure 3: Location of A & R Men on the Southern Piedmont

Gellert, an outspoken social activist and progressive anti-segregationist, also documented about fifteen fine blues performances in South Carolina and Georgia between 1924 and 1932, which were finally issued on record in England in 1984.<sup>16</sup> None of these singers recorded commercially, even though some of them clearly possessed enough ability. Finally, folklorist Edwin Kirkland recorded several blues musicians just north of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in December, 1937.<sup>17</sup>

The only non-performing black American talent scout involved with recording Piedmont blues musicians was J. Mayo Williams. After an early career that included employment with Paramount and Black Swan, Williams worked for Decca during the 1930s and remained based in New York City. Like many of the northern-based record company supervisors, Williams did little work scouting for new talent. Sometime in the spring of 1937 Williams wrote to Fuller in answer to the blind artist's question about leaving the American Record Corporation and possibly recording for Decca. On July 9, Williams traveled down to Durham to speak directly with Fuller and to listen to two of his local musician friends, Richard and Willie Trice. The result was a trip to New York City, where all three artists recorded.<sup>18</sup> In the fall of the same year he contacted Blind Willie McTell by mail, inquiring about a possible October recording session. As with Fuller, Williams was responding to an artist's letter.<sup>19</sup>

In reality, the Southern-based A & R men did little traveling for talent scouting. Once the initial hierarchy was established by the late 1920s, based on the place of residence of the A & R men, inertia set in and little changed in the existing system. Moreover, after the beginning of the Depression, there was little demand for new A & R men because the companies developed a conservative attitude towards investing in new talent. This attitude limited the spatial distribution of recorded musical talent to those areas where the established scouts lived. Musicians residing in areas outside of the spatial hierarchy of the A & R men seldom had the opportunity to be "discovered" unless they moved or traveled to the location where an established A & R man lived.

Although a handful of northern record industry mavens were involved in the actual sessions, eight men - all of them from the South - regularly recruited blues musicians on the Piedmont and were responsible for the discovery and recording of most of the Piedmont blues artists (Fig. 3). Of these, three were from Atlanta, two were from Durham, and one each were from Richmond, Spartanburg, and Union, South Carolina. Three of the A & R men (Pink Anderson, Barbecue Bob, and Blind Boy Fuller) were themselves blues performers, two others (J. B. Long and Burm Lawson) were part-time scouts, while three men (Polk Brockman, Charles Rey, and Dan Hornsby) were full-time record company employees. None of these full-time employees limited their activities to blues, each of them worked with hillbilly, dance bands, and gospel musicians as well.

### Recording of Piedmont Blues Musicians

Atlanta had become the major southeastern center for commerce during the early 20th century. Although OKeh began visiting in 1923, by 1927 the Victor and Columbia record companies, too, had recognized Atlanta's central location and its focus for rural migrants with musical skills, and visited the city regularly in search of recording talent. Although Polk Brockman developed a network of part-time scouts from San Antonio to Richmond, Brockman favored Atlanta as

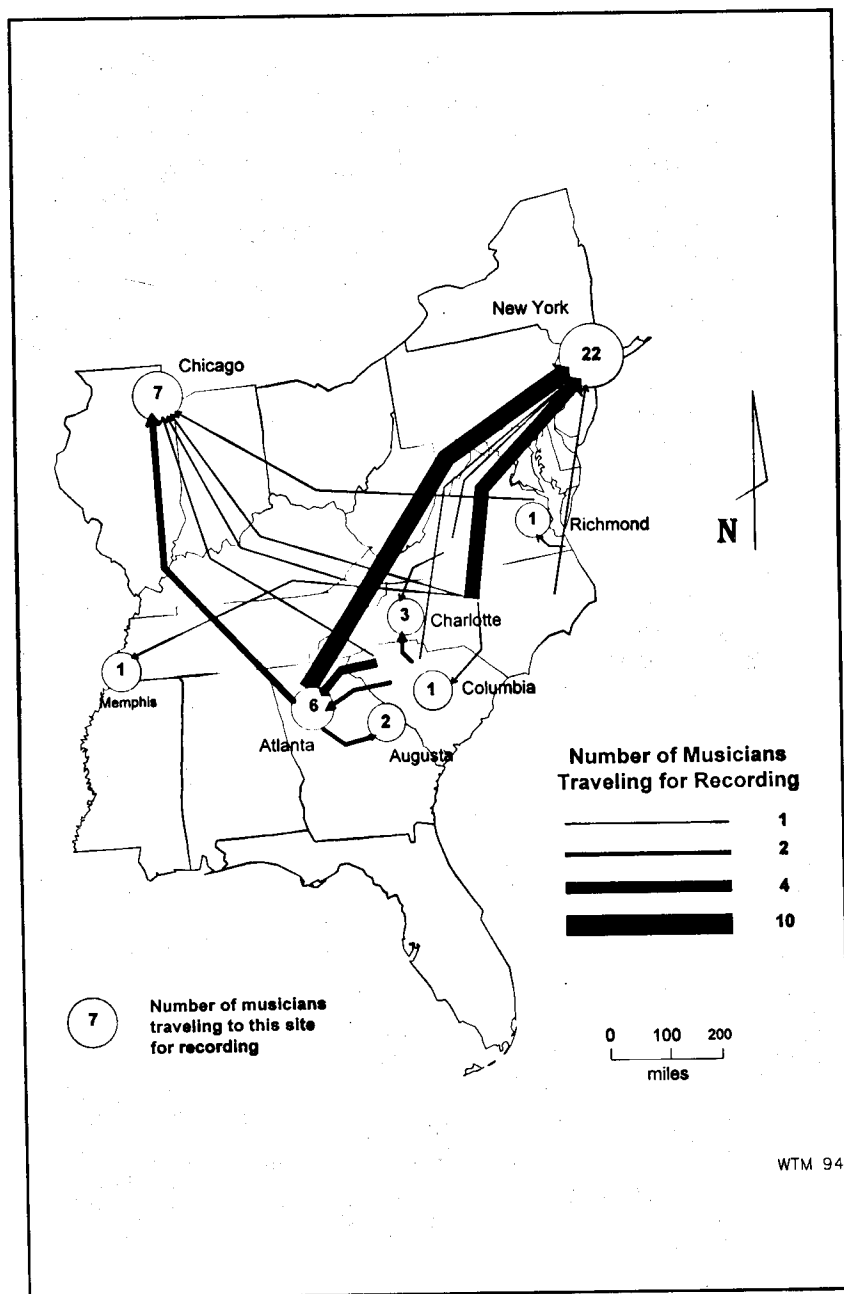


Figure 4: Travel of Piedmont Blues Artists for Recording

his primary field scouting location. Record salesman Dan Hornsby, blues artist Barbecue Bob, and members of the hillbilly band "Gid Tanner and his Skillet-Lickers" were the other part-time A & R men who scouted around metropolitan Atlanta for Columbia, but Brockman emerged as the area's primary conduit for talent and most of his artist's went to Okeh. Atlanta's hillbilly, blues, and gospel talent was so rich that Brockman recalled that one of his favorite means of searching for musicians was simply to walk the streets of the city listening to musicians performing on the sidewalk!<sup>20</sup> Because Atlanta presented rural migrants with job opportunities it became rich in hillbilly, blues, and gospel talent. With a cluster of A & R men, the city very quickly became a focal point for scouting and recording of a variety of musical talent. The most successful of the City's twenty recorded blues musicians were Blind Willie McTell, Buddy Moss, the Hicks Brothers (Barbecue Bob and Laughing Charley), and Peg Leg Howell. Their commercial achievements are reflected in the fact that Atlanta artists recorded 377 blues songs, more than one-half of the total for all Piedmont singers, for eight different labels.

The Piedmont of South Carolina was home to nine blues performers who recorded eighty-eight songs for four recording companies. Unlike Atlanta, only once was South Carolina's Piedmont the site for a field recording session nor were any of its residents full-time A & R men. Centered on Union, Spartanburg, and Greenville, the importance of this section as a source area for recording blues musicians can be largely attributed to the activities of two local, part-time A & R men: Union-based record retailer Burm Lawson, and Spartanburg blues musician Pink Anderson. Lawson managed Cooper's Furniture Store and recommended talent to the Columbia organization, though none of records by the musicians that he scouted sold very well and his calling to be an A & R man did not last very long. Anderson, on the other hand, enjoyed a decades-long occupation as a professional and semi-professional musician, who worked locally and with traveling medicine shows. He remained active enough to be recording and touring into the 1970s! Blind Willie Walker, Simmie Dooley, and Lil McClintock were among the artists Lawson and Anderson knew and with whom they worked.

The nine recorded blues musicians from Durham, North Carolina, and adjoining Orange County, recorded 196 songs for three companies. As in the Piedmont of South Carolina, there were no full-time A & R men nor were any field recording sessions held in Durham. The discovery of local blues musicians can be attributed almost entirely to retail store manager, J. B. Long and entertainer Blind Boy Fuller. These two part-time A & R men worked together and recommended blues singers such as Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, Floyd Council, and Willie Trice to ARC and Decca officials. Later, J.B. Long helped to get Buddy Moss back into the recording studio for Okeh after a rather serious brush with the law. Often, they arranged for the musicians' transportation to the site of the field recordings or up to New York City.

Thirty-six Piedmont blues musicians (eighty-two percent) journeyed to a total of eight cities - Atlanta, Augusta, Charlotte, Chicago, Columbia, Memphis, New York City, and Richmond - for recording sessions (Fig. 4). Only eight musicians, all from Atlanta, did not travel to be recorded. The sites for recording blues artists were determined by which A & R man discovered them, their own home location, and the time of year they were recorded. Relatively few field sessions were held during the winter months because of potentially hazardous traveling

conditions. Likewise, record companies avoided field sessions in the summer because the intense heat could damage the fragile portable equipment. Although the general interest of commercial record companies in blues performers continued until 1941, no pioneer Piedmont blues artist was recorded in a Piedmont location after November, 1938.

Nine recording companies actively scouted blues musicians on the Piedmont. However, only five companies - ARC (American Record Company), Columbia, OKeh, Victor (the parent company for the inexpensive Bluebird label), and Vocalion - actually held field sessions on the Piedmont. The first Piedmont session was held in Atlanta by the OKeh Record Company during March of 1924. Between that date and November, 1938, 25 field sessions were held in Atlanta, Augusta, Charlotte, Columbia, and Richmond, involving 26 Piedmont blues singers (fifty-eight percent of all blues artists) who recorded 235 selections (thirty-four percent of all sides recorded). Table Two graphically illustrates this information. When compared with blues recordings made in other Piedmont cities, the dominance of Atlanta is overwhelming. Eighteen of the thirty-four sessions were held in Atlanta - these involved twenty Piedmont blues singers who recorded more than 200 songs. Of the blues artists who recorded in Atlanta, only six (thirty percent) were from places other than Atlanta, and all but one of these were from Upper South Carolina. The other seven field sessions held on the Piedmont produced only thirty-four songs and involved seven artists, one of whom also had recorded in Atlanta.

During the mid-1930s, after the spatial patterns of A & R men and musicians were set, recording companies increasingly brought the musicians to their studios in New York City or Chicago. Seven companies recorded twenty two artists, accounting for 340 sides (forty-nine percent) in New York City, while six companies recorded 105 selections (fifteen percent) by ten artists in Chicago. Eight of the more popular blues artists were recorded in more than one locality. The pattern of bringing the talent to the permanent studios for recording was based upon the need to supply records to the market on a regular basis. This was done more expediently by bringing the best talent to either New York City or Chicago on a regular basis.

### Discussion

The location of the southern A & R men working for the early record companies interested in Piedmont blues musicians strongly influenced the spatial patterns for recording blues singers. The fact that only six blues artists - Blues Birdhead, Julius Daniels, Luke Jordan, Carl Martin, William Moore, and Willie Moore - from outside the three cluster areas of Atlanta, the Upper Piedmont of South Carolina, and the Durham, North Carolina area, can be documented as having been recorded during this 17 year period attests to the importance of performers being located near A & R men. Significantly, these six artists accounted for a mere eight percent of all the songs recorded by Piedmont blues artists prior to World War II. A comparison of Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 highlights the undeniable correlation between the spatial distribution of the recorded Piedmont blues singers and the location of A & R men.

The spatial patterns displayed in Fig. 4 are also clearly related to the ways that the record companies operated their field recording sessions and their

permanent recording studios. The logistics of organizing field sessions restricted their locations to places where the recording companies had established contacts - the A & R men. Since field sessions were limited to relatively short periods of time and required intensive management, the companies were reluctant to visit many cities. They preferred to conduct field sessions in locations where managerial skills and talent existed and where suitable facilities were available. Because of these requirements, recording companies tended to hold field session in only a few cities.

The fact remains that the system of A & R men that developed to record Piedmont blues musicians between 1924 and 1941 was fundamentally haphazard. A similar observation could be made about the A & R men - among them were Brockman and Peer - who worked with African American gospel and jazz performers from the same era, for they, too, seemed to approach the recording of these related genres in similar ways. To be fair, it was not designed with any long-term planning or goals in mind. The system for scouting blues talent simply evolved along with the recording industry itself. However, locating and developing blues talent proved more difficult for an industry that was utterly dominated by white males, most of whom lived in the urban North. Fortunately for the record companies themselves, men like Brockman, Long, and Satherley obviously had an affinity and feeling for blues. Even though they were wise enough to utilize Blind Boy Fuller and other musicians to assist them, these A & R men tended to play it safe. They used musicians with whom they were already familiar or were known to their established contacts and only occasionally actually left the confines of their business to find new musicians. In retrospect American music scholars are fortunate that these men helped to preserve even this small cross-section of the talent from the Piedmont.

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Table I Piedmont Blues Artists by Place Of Residence

Name	Location of Recordings	Company	Number of Sides
<b>Atlanta</b>			
1) Ed Andrews	Atlanta	OKeh	2
2) Eddie Anthony(a) (a.k.a. Macon Ed)	Atlanta	OKeh	8
3) Barbecue Bob	Atlanta & New York	Columbia	82
4) Frank Edwards	Chicago	OKeh	8
5) Emory Glenn	Atlanta	Columbia	4
6) Eddie Hill(a)	Atlanta	Columbia	-
7) Peg Leg Howell	Atlanta	Columbia	28
8) Charley Lincoln (a.k.a. Laughing Charley)	Atlanta	Columbia	14
9) Guy Lumpkin	New York	QRS	1
10) Fred McMullen	New York	ARC	9
11) Blind Willie McTell	Atlanta, New York, Chicago & Augusta	Columbia, Decca, Victor & Vocalion	84
12) Kate McTell(a) (a.k.a. Ruby Glaze)	Atlanta	Victor	-
13) Eddie Mapp	New York	QRS	1
14) Buddy Moss	New York	ARC & OKeh	76
15) Piano Red	Augusta	ARC	8
16) Ben Quillian(a)	New York & Atlanta	Paramount & Columbia	18
17) Rufus Quillian(a)	New York & Atlanta	Paramount & Columbia	-
18) Curley Weaver	Atlanta, New York, & Chicago	Columbia, QRS, ARC & Decca	38
19) Henry Williams	Atlanta	Columbia	2
20) Ruth Willis	Atlanta & New York	OKeh & ARC	14
<b>Total</b>			<b>377 (54%)</b>

(a) Includes duets with other Atlanta artists listed in both names or a group name

(Table continued on next page)

## Durham

1) Bull City Red	New York	ARC	6
2) Floyd Council	New York	ARC	8
3) Blind Gary Davis	New York	ARC	2
4) Blind Boy Fuller	Columbia, New York, Chicago, & Memphis	ARC & Decca	129
5) Brownie McGhee	New York & Chicago	OKeh/Columbia	43
6) Richard Trice	New York	Decca	6
7) Willie Trice	New York	Decca	6
8) Jordan Webb	[Recorded as a harmonica player with Brownie McGhee]		-
9) Robert Young	[Recorded as a washboard player with Brownie McGhee]		-
<b>Total</b>			<b>196 (28%)</b>

## Upper South Carolina (Spartanburg, Greenville, Union)

1) Pink Anderson(b)	Atlanta	Columbia	4
2) Ted Bogan	Chicago	Bluebird	4
3) Sam Brooks	[Recorded as second guitarist with Blind Willie Walker]		-
4) Simmie Dooley(b)	Atlanta	Columbia	-
5) Jack Gowdlock	Charlotte	Victor	4
6) Lii McClintock	Atlanta	Columbia	4
7) Gussie Nesbit	[Recorded as second guitarist with Jack Gowdlock]		-
8) Blind Willie Walker	Atlanta	Columbia	4
9) Josh White	New York	ARC & Columbia	68
<b>Total</b>			<b>88 (13%)</b>

(b) Includes duets with other South Carolina artists released under both names.

(Table continued on next page)

## Other Locations

1)	Blues Birdhead (Norfolk, Virginia)	Richmond	OKeh	2
2)	Julius Daniels (Pineville, North Carolina)	Atlanta	Victor	9
3)	Luke Jordan (Lynchburg, Virginia)	Charlotte & New York	Victor	10
4)	Carl Martin (Big Stone Gap, Virginia)	Chicago	ARC, Bluebird & Decca	12
5)	William Moore (Tappahanock, Virginia)	Chicago	Paramount	16
6)	Willie Moore (Kingston, North Carolina)	New York	ARC	4
<b>Total</b>				<b>53 (8%)</b>

Table 2 Recordings Made in (City) by Artists From (Hometown)

	Number of Artists	Number of Sides
In Atlanta from:		
Atlanta	14	177
Piedmont of South Carolina	5	16
Pineville	1	8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>20 (44%)</b>	<b>201 (29%)</b>
In New York from:		
Atlanta	10	124
Piedmont of South Carolina	1	84
Durham	9	122
Lynchburg	1	6
Kinston, N.C.	1	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>22 (50%)</b>	<b>340 (49%)</b>

(Table continued on next page)

## In New York from:

Atlanta	3	30
Piedmont of South Carolina	1	4
Durham	4	43
Tappahanock, Virginia	1	16
Big Stone Gap, Virginia	1	12
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10 (18%)</b>	<b>105 (15%)</b>

## In Augusta from:

Atlanta	2 (4%)	12 (2%)
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## In Charlotte from:

Piedmont of South Carolina	2	4
Lynchburg	1	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3 (4%)</b>	<b>8 (1%)</b>

## In Columbia from:

Durham	1 (1%)	12 (2%)
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## In Memphis from:

Durham	1 (1%)	18 (3%)
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## In Richmond from:

Norfolk	1 (1%)	2 (.5%)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>60*</b>	<b>698</b>

\*Thirty-three artists recorded in one city, eight in two cities, one in three cities, and two in four cities, total of 44 individuals.

[This information is largely derived from John Godrich and Robert Dixon. *Blues and Gospel Records, 1902-1943* (3rd ed.) Essex, England: Storyville Publications, 1983.]

## Endnotes

1. The most comprehensive collection of articles related to the geography of music can be found in George O. Carney, ed. 3rd ed. *The Sounds of People and Places: Readings in the Geography of American Folk and Popular Places* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994).
2. This important sociocultural aspect of blues is discussed in William Ferris, Jr., *Blues from the Delta* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985); Alan Lomax, *Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1993); Paul Oliver, *Conversation with the Blues* (London: Cassell Press, 1965); Barry Lee Pearson, *Virginia Piedmont Blues: The Lives and Art of Two Virginia Blues Men* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); and Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).
3. Bruce Bastin, *Red River Blues: The Blues Tradition in the Southeast* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986), describes this tradition in the Piedmont; both David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), and Stephen Calt and Gayle Dean Wardlow, *King of the Delta Blues: The Life and Music of Charlie Patton* (Newton, New Jersey: Rock Chapel Press, 1988), for example, focus on blues from the Mississippi Delta. Steve Tracy describes the history and development of blues in the Queen City *Goin' to Cincinnati* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).
4. Bastin, *Red River Blues*.
5. Sam B. Hillard, *Atlas of Antebellum Southern Agriculture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), p. 34.
6. The primary source for this information is Robert Dixon and John Godrich, *Blues and Gospel Records 1902-1943*, 3rd ed. (Essex, England: Storyville Publications, 1983).
7. More information on the roots of the blues can be found in Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and Paul Oliver, *The Story of the Blues* (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Books, 1969).
8. Robert Dixon and John Godrich discuss this transition in *Recording the Blues* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972).
9. Polk Brockman interviewed by Kip Lornell, Winter Park, Florida, March 16, 1980.
10. Ibid.
11. See the "Introduction" to Kip Lornell, *Virginia's Blues, Country, and Gospel Records, 1902-1943: An Annotated Discography* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1988) for further information regarding the relationship between record companies and early recording artists in Virginia.
12. Charles Wolfe, "Ralph Peer at Work: The 1927 Victor Bristol Sessions," *Old Time Music*, No. 5, Summer, 1972, pp. 10-15.
13. Bastin, *Red River Blues*, p. 225.
14. Ibid. pg. 171. Chapter 4, "Noncommercial Recordings: The 1920s and 1930s," discusses these recordings in greater detail.
15. Ibid. p. 59.
16. These recordings can be heard on "Nobody Knows My Name: Blues from South Carolina and Georgia 1924-1932." Heritage Records HT 304. Other related Gellert recordings were included on "Cap'n You're So Mean: Negro Songs of Protest," Rounder 4004.
17. The monograph that accompanies the long playing record album, Tennessee Folklore Society 005 "The Kirkland Recordings," by Kip Lornell, Willie

Smyth, and Charles K. Wolfe, includes information about these recordings and artists.

18. Ibid. 113.

19. Kip Lornell, "J. B. Long," *Living Blues* 29 (September-October, 1976), pp. 12-18.  
20. Brockman interview.

BOB ARNOLD

## Jack Miller: A Biography

*Some record collectors and discographers have been uncertain as to the identity of singer Jack Miller, who recorded for Columbia and its affiliates from 1928 to 1933. He was the same Jack Miller who served as accompanist, and later as orchestra leader, for Kate Smith, from 1931 until 1954. Miller was born in Boston in 1895, and died in Los Angeles in 1985. His voice can be heard on at least 89 sides made during his singing career.*

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*It is a delightful record; soft baritone voice with sensitive piano accompaniment, recorded much closer to the microphone than had been the custom... The tones are sure, deep and expressive, with scarcely a token nod in the direction of the shallow voices of the day.*

So wrote the late record researcher John McAndrew, in *Record Research* No. 55, September, 1963, describing Jack Miller's first two sides for Velvet Tone and its affiliated Columbia subsidiary labels. He then went on to say:

*Since his name appeared on none other than Columbia labels, it seems safe to consider him a figment of Columbia's imagination that dissolved when the old Columbia went under.*

In that, John McAndrew could not have been more mistaken.

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John Joseph Miller was born September 4, 1895, in Boston, Massachusetts. His parents were William Miller and Katherine Glynn Miller. School records show that in 1905 he was attending Mather School, and living at 47 Kimball Street in Dorchester. Young Jack had a straight "A" record at Mather. In 1906 he transferred to another school, and that is the last we know of his schooling. There is no record of his transfer destination, but it is possible that the transfer was occasioned by the family moving to 98 Draper Street, which would be Jack's address for many years, and the house where his first daughter, Dorothea, would grow up with her mother, father, and paternal grandmother.

Efforts to find a high school record for Jack have not been successful. Dorothea is not sure that her father ever went to high school. Mary Miller, the oldest of two daughters from Miller's second marriage, states flatly that he "did