

VERNON DALHART: HIS RURAL ROOTS AND THE  
BEGINNINGS OF COMMERCIAL COUNTRY MUSIC\*

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Most country music history fans know of the North American folk songs which launched Vernon Dalhart as the first country music artist of national importance. The Wreck of the Old 97 and The Prisoner's Song were also the beginnings of the commercial country music industry in this country. Before Dalhart recorded these songs, there had been, it is true, an effort to market some country music: Henry Whitter, Riley Puckett, Kelly Harrell, and other country vocalists had begun or were beginning their recording careers. But there had been no country hit songs and no country singing star to record them. Fiddlers like John Carson and other country instrumentalists had recorded, it is true, and some of these musicians had thrown in a vocal chorus or perhaps even a stanza or so of song lyrics. But before Dalhart there had been no country recording of national importance and certainly no hit. Today knowledgeable record collectors and musicologists are making the truth increasingly well known that Dalhart's pairing of The Prisoner's Song with The Wreck of the Old 97 on more than 30 different labels sold over 25,000,000 copies. Victor 19427 alone sold close to 6,000,000 copies of this famous pairing of hits. (1)

In 1924, Dalhart, dropping his current "pop" music career to take up country music, even more native to his upbringing, stepped before an accoustical recording horn at Thomas A. Edison, Inc., and cut the first of the two hit sides. Later in 1924, he recorded both of these sides for the Victor Talking Machine Company. It is noteworthy, I believe, that the year of the first national country hits was a full three years before Victor's discovery of Jimmie Rodgers and the A. P. Carter family. The Carters' August 1 and 2 sessions and Rodgers' August 4, 1927 session with Ralph Peer at Bristol on the Tennessee-Virginia border are often pointed to historically as the beginning of commercial

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(1) Alfred B. Friedman, ed., The Viking Book of Folk Ballads of the English-Speaking World (New York, 1963), p. 318.

country music in this country. (2) Yet before the Carters and Rodgers careers were launched, Dalhart had been enjoying not only a 25,000,000-seller, retailing on records costing from a dime to over a dollar, but also a simultaneous hit to keep his name on the lips of record buyers internationally. The singer's recording of The Death of Floyd Collins was on top of the news and selling in the millions even while his earlier double-sided hit was still a coast-to-coast bestseller. The Prisoner's Song backed with The Wreck of the Old 97 was, in fact, a hit that hung on for close to three years in both country and popular music markets. 'Vernon Dalhart's various recordings of these two songs for over 30 labels sold more records than had any other recording cut by any other recording artist in any category of music up to that time. This, according to Jim Walsh, one of the nation's most responsible and respected discographers and authorities in the area of popular music. (3) I personally do not know of any other pairing of sides since then to surpass or even equal Dalhart's 25,000,000-record hit, short of Bing Crosby's White Christmas, backed as it has been over the years with a succession of seasonal flip-sides.

Between 1927, when the technically improved electrical recordings were beginning to be issued, and 1933--the year of Jimmie Rodgers' death--an estimated 20,000,000 copies of the 11 recorded songs in Jimmie Rodgers' repertoire had been sold on some fifty-odd individual record releases. (4) Long-playing discs issued periodically during the 1950's and '60's will probably account for at least another million or so in album sales for Victor re-releases of these masters (5) No figures are available on Rodgers' singles sales after his death, but it seems unlikely that even his posthumous singles sales combined with the above estimated sales will equal the total sold on Dalhart's 25,000,000 pairing of The Wreck of the Old 97 and The Prisoner's Song.

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- (2) Bill Malone, Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History (Austin, Texas, 1968, p. 63.
  - (3) Jim Walsh, "Favorite Pioneer Recording Artists: Vernon Dalhart," Hobbies Magazine, XXXI (May, 1960), p. 34.
  - (4) Robert Shelton, The Country Music Story (Indianapolis), p. 69.
  - (5) Billboard Music Week, unsigned article, LXXIII (October 30, 1961), p. 18.

Although Carter Family recordings sold well into the millions on the 273 masters of the 250 songs in their repertoire, (6) their total record sales combined with that of Rodgers could hardly be expected to equal the total sales of a recording artist like Dalhart, who had had over 5000 individual releases recorded under more than 80 stage names on over 30 different labels in a recording career only one year short of the combined years of the Rodgers and Carters' careers.

Anyone knowing anything about this largely forgotten pioneer in the establishment of commercial country music should know that it is Dalhart rather than Rodgers or the Carters who has been given short shrift by those who should know his importance. Only within the past decade have those who are contributing to the international proliferation of country music begun to rediscover Dalhart. Country music collectors, musicologists, historians, publishers, disc jockeys, singers, songwriters, and fans are assessing the evidence and drawing conclusions which will soon bring Dalhart the belated recognition he has so long deserved as the indisputable father of commercial country music.

Searching for an opening into grand opera in the New York City of 1910, twenty-seven year-old Marion Try Slaughter made his first and most fortuitous name-change on his own. In fact, after that important year which saw the singer receive minor roles in light opera, it is difficult to think of him as anyone other than Vernon Dalhart. This despite the many other noms de plume he would adopt. Dalhart's total output over a period of twenty-four years averages over 200 releases a year. Even Bing Crosby's total number of individual releases falls short of 3200. (7) Bobby Gregory, a former member of one of the Dalhart back-up groups on recording sessions, recalls that during the singer's heyday in the second half of the 1920's, Dalhart would often be compelled to cut three sessions a day to keep up with the demand for his recordings. Mr. Gregory remembers that his boss would start a session for one company at 8:30 or 9:00 in the morning and finish in time for a late lunch. After his light meal, the singer would set his alarm clock and take a short nap in his suite of offices in the Brill Building just off New York City's "Tin Pan Alley". On awaking, Dalhart would hurry to the nearby studios of another recording firm to cut an afternoon

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(6) Shelton, op. cit., p. 73.

(7) F. C. Price, "Bing Records Break Record," The Christian Science Monitor, LXL (January 15, 1969), p. 17.

session. After dinner and another brief nap, the recording artist would cut yet another session for a third studio, the session running often until midnight, according to Gregory. (8)

On this sort of schedule, it seems a miracle that Dalhart recordings maintained their consistency of quality and that the labels producing him did not run out of recording names for him. These entertainment aliases would run from A through X with only the letters G, I, Q, U, and Z slighted as last name starters. These were the names which would enable Dalhart to play the field and avoid the encumbrances of exclusive contracts. Under these names he would freelance on all the major and on most of the minor recording labels in the eastern portion of this country and on many abroad as probably the busiest recording artist in the industry between 1924 and 1929.

"Mack Allen" and "Al Craver" vie with Vernon Dalhart as the names most often used on the singer's recordings, but none of the artist's many other names was so popular as the first he chose for himself. For thirty-eight years this enigmatical figure would cast a long shadow, briefly in classical, next in popular, and finally in country music. For the first thirty years of Dalhart's phenomenal career, the shadow grew to towering dimensions as Dalhart became something of a one-man recording industry. But during the last eight years of the singer's active career, this shadow would wane and become almost lost in the anonymity that the man who was Marion Try Slaughter seemed to covet. Whether at the peak of his career or finding, as he did during the lean years of the '30's, that doors formerly open to him no longer welcomed him, the singer seems never to have forgotten that Vernon Dalhart was only Try Slaughter, small-town boy from northeast Texas' backwater bayou country.

It appears that Dalhart has been neglected these many years, in part at least, because of his formal training and professional background in classical, semi-classical, and popular music. That country music's first great singing star had also been a successful operatic tenor and then a rather well-known singer of popular music seems not to set too well with country fans once they learn the truth. Admittedly, Dalhart's country music career appears to be an anomaly unless his country credentials are considered, as they will be here.

Many persons feel, however, that Vernon Dalhart has been shirt-tail relation of country music long enough. One of the chief aims of this paper is to destroy the myth that

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(8) Bobby Gregory, Interview, Nashville, Tennessee, February 2, 1969.

Dalhart was an uptown slick playing down to the hicks in the hinterlands. I believe I can prove satisfactorily Dalhart's genuine country origins. His early grounding in folk traditions of his native section of Texas, it is not difficult to show, made his orientation to a singer of commercial country music an easy and natural transition. A study of his early years further documents Dalhart's position as the singer who gave country music its first national exposure and initial commercial impetus.

Very few present-day residents of Jefferson, Texas, remember Vernon Dalhart. While over 50 of the town's homes bear historical markers, only a few loose bricks remain of the house where Dalhart grew up. While the local museum has been helpful to me in collecting information on the singer's Jefferson origins, it had no information about him before I began my investigation. The public library had only the singer's birth and death dates.

Some Jeffersonians say Dalhart was born on "a ranch just outside Jefferson." Others declare he was born in Jefferson. His Bridgeport, Connecticut death certificate of September 15, 1948, lists his birthdate as April 6, 1883, at Jefferson, Texas.

Growing up in this timber town on the sluggish Cypress Bayou River, Try Slaughter is remembered as being "a likely youth." Athletic with dark good looks, the boy seems to have been quite popular, not only with his peers, but also with his younger acquaintances and those older than he.

Eighty-five-year-old Elbert A. Wise of Jefferson attended the public schools with young Slaughter. Mr. Wise remembered Try as

a normal boy like the rest of us and well-liked by his classmates. One or two years older than I, he was well-built physically and I would say real nice looking. He was active in all school activities and especially where music was concerned.

He started singing here as a boy and had a friend that sang with him lots, W. T. (Will Turk) Adams, now dead. Miss Mary Douglas Adams...a sister to W. T. ...and also now dead, helped Try with his music as he would sing at her house. He also got some help from a music teacher here, Miss Holer. Try sang all popular songs of that era (the 1890's) and some religious ones. (9)

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(9) Elbert A. Wise, letter, dated March 4, 1969, Jefferson, Texas.

Another of the singer's younger friends, James E. Hale of Jefferson, wrote me in February, 1969, that Try Slaughter was "a handsome young man with beautiful black wavy hair. I thought he was very smart, and he was always nice to me." Mr. Hale's sister May Belle, a Jefferson music teacher, sometimes accompanied Try at the piano when he visited at the Hales'. Miss Hale, according to her brother, also gave the future recording artist some informal instruction in music.

Miss Eva Eberstadt, living in Jefferson's Magnolia Manor Rest Home in early 1969, was another young pianist willing to play accompaniments for the aspiring teenage tenor. Try's senior by only a few years, Miss Eva remembered him as "certainly most handsome, dark and handsome." Instructing in private music lessons for several years before the turn of the century, she recalled playing piano accompaniment for Try at a number of musical entertainments in Jefferson and in other nearby communities.

Miss Eberstadt recalled that whether the young singer was performing black dialect songs or classical and light classical music, his singing in Jefferson and in nearby towns was "always well received." Apparently, young Slaughter's voice and personality were means of social mobility through which the ambitious singer was attaining a certain amount of respect his family had not been accustomed to in Jefferson. In this caste-conscious river town, Try Slaughter became almost socially acceptable through the use of his vocal talents. He was, in the memory of a resident who prefers not to have her name identified, "a very fine boy--not at all like the rest of the family, which evidently weren't real good people. His mother was a Castleberry and it was her brother, Bob Castleberry, who shot Try's father outside of and beside an old saloon down town (a dentist's office is now where the saloon was)."

Robert Slaughter, Try's murdered father, had operated until his death "a farm near Jefferson but lived in town on Line Street," according to one informant. The rural and city locations may be the source of confusion among some Jeffersonians about whether Dalhart was born in Jefferson or on a ranch outside Jefferson. Of the Line Street home, Mr. Elbert A. Wise continued in his letter of March 22, 1969:

The old house has about fallen down. I never knew Try's mother and never heard of any brothers or sisters. I think he was an only child. Mr. Slaughter's killing was brought on over family troubles. He had married Castleberry's sister. the shooting took place at the back entrance of the Kahn's Saloon.

A February 20, 1969 search of court records at Jefferson revealed that Bob Castleberry was indicted for murder on June 14, 1893. Cryptically, the same court records show that on the nineteenth of the same month and year, Case Number 3028, "The State of Texas vs. Bob Slaughter" was dismissed and that one Bob Castleberry did pay a cost of \$20 and that the murder charge against him was dismissed on June 26, 1893.

There are still whispers among oldtimers in Jefferson that the family trouble which led to the fatal altercation was Robert Slaughter's physical cruelty to his wife. According to my anonymous informants, Mrs. Slaughter's brother took her part in the family fights, eventually shooting Robert Slaughter outside Kahn's Saloon in Jefferson.

Mrs. Lucille Bullard, a local historian active in the Jefferson Museum, uncovered the following additional cases involving the father of the future country singer:

#897 The State of Texas vs. Bob Slaughter:  
Aggravated assault. Arrested by A. J. Braden.  
Complaint: Cutting of Isaac Walker with a  
knife on December 5, 1883. Case Dismissed.

The day after this altercation, Robert Slaughter's infant son, Marion Try Slaughter, was eight months old.

Case #2868 The State of Texas vs. Bob  
Slaughter: Assault and Battery Charge:  
Assault on Haywood Jones on November 5, 1887  
with a knife. Found "Not Guilty."

Although Robert Slaughter's granddaughter and Dalhart's only immediate survivor, Mrs. Janice Shea, has refused to divulge, among other things any Slaughter family genealogy, I have found through Jefferson historian, Mrs. Lucille Bullard, that Mrs. Shea's grandfather Robert Slaughter was the son of M. Try Slaughter, Jr., and that Mrs. Shea's father, Try Slaughter, (or Vernon Dalhart) was the namesake of this even earlier defendant who seems to have begun a family tradition in the annals of the Marion County, Texas District Court.

#130 State of Texas vs. M. T. Slaughter:  
Assault and Battery. Charge: M. T. Slaughter  
struck Squire Johnson with a stick 4 June,  
1877. M. T. Slaughter paid the fine.

#169 State of Texas vs. M. T. Slaughter:  
Assault and Battery. Affidavit of Complaint:  
Squire Johnson said Try Slaughter threw a rock

at him and also struck him with a piece of scantling "with intent of him the said Try Slaughter to kill and murder the affiant."

The one letter Mrs. Shea wrote was very brief. "I really did not know Vernon Dalhart very well," she apologized for not helping me with questions about her late father's career. But then she had no answers either to my inquiries about the life of Marion Try Slaughter. The retired singer, according to his letters to Marion Hoffman, worked in a Bridgeport, Connecticut, defense plant, shortly after the U. S. entry into World War II, commuting on weekends to his home in Mamaroneck, New York. From 1943 until he died September 15, 1948, Mrs. Shea's father and mother had been residents of Bridgeport, the city where her husband was in 1969 still the chairman of the board of a Bridgeport bank.

Shortly after I had acknowledged Mrs. Shea's letter, Mr. Lewis A. Shea sent me a note even more curt than the one his wife had written. He complained that recalling her father's career and family life, or lack of family life, was distressing to his wife. He added that she had not been well lately and that he would appreciate my not troubling her further. I respected Mr. Shea's feelings and sent no other letter to her. Instead I asked Mr. Shea for the information I needed. He replied in an even shorter note than his first that he had nothing to tell me about his father-in-law as Vernon Dalhart or as Marion Try Slaughter.

Citizens of Jefferson, Texas, may have explained in part, at least, some of the reticence the Sheas have had about discussing the Slaughter family. However, it hardly needs to be said that any blots on the family escutcheon have certainly been atoned for by Mrs. Shea's accomplished father. Dalhart's considerable contributions to American music--country, popular, semi-classical, and classical--should certainly have redeemed the Slaughter family name in Jefferson and everywhere else, but then one remembers suddenly that Try Slaughter, the ambitious young tenor, changed his name to Vernon Dalhart. Not one of his 80 or more pseudonyms uses any part of the singer's legal name. but whether one calls him Slaughter or Dalhart, the late singer's achievements are documented on phonograph recordings and in the annals of classical, popular, folk, and country music. The interesting legal histories of some members of his family only serve to add color, in my opinion, to the pioneer and country heritage of an already exciting life and career. They also may shed light genetically on a personality in the mature singer which some of Dalhart's associates and acquaintances described as cantankerous.



Several Jefferson residents have volunteered opinions about the social status of the Slaughter family producing the future singer. One matron confided that neither the family of Robert Slaughter nor the family of his wife Mary Jane Castleberry was "of the best" socially or financially. She wanted me to know, too, that Dalhart's mother had worked for" the informant's mother.

The fact that young Try Slaughter would be taking a job as a ranch hand two years after his father's death and dropping out of high school at the age of fifteen to go to work in a Dallas hardware store seems to lend further attestation to the humble origins of the New York opera tenor turned country music star.

James E. Hale said his earliest and most vivid recollection of Try Slaughter goes back to the Jefferson of Hale's sixth or seventh year. A teenager, Try was already handy with a gun. Mr. Hale recalled following along behind his older friend and picking up robins Slaughter had shot. "He was an excellent shot," Hale remembered.. "My mother used to buy some of the robins from him."

Mr. Hale said young Slaughter moved away from Jefferson "soon after 1895," or in other words, when the future singer was approximately thirteen. This age is too early, however, for his permanent removal from Jefferson, according to other informants who knew him. Elbert A. Wise in his letter of March 22, 1969, stated that

Try quit school here before he graduated. Like most of us boys he went to work.

Try was in the first grades in high school. When Try left Jefferson, he went to Dallas and worked for one of the big companies there.

The age at which the future Vernon Dalhart left Jefferson and "moved to Dallas, Texas...where he worked in a hardware store" was sixteen: this, according to the July, 1921, Edison Amberola Monthly. (10) However, Dalhart's Majestic Theatre of the Air press release for the September 1, 1929 show reports that Dalhart "at fifteen...was working in a Dallas hardware store and singing blithely behind the counter." (11)

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(10) Edison Amberola Monthly, unsigned article, July 21, 1921, In Walsh, op. cit., May, p. 35.

(11) Majestic Theatre of the Air, press release, September 1, 1929, C. B. S. Radio, New York City, New York.

Thus, it seems likely that about 1895 or 1896 Try Slaughter did begin to do ranch work between terms of grade school. Vernon and Dalhart are the names of two Northwest Texas towns between which Dalhart may have herded cattle in the summers of his twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth years. The New York Times obituary of September 17, 1948, in fact, describes the two towns as "dear to his childhood." (12)

A Victor catalog of the early 1920's refers to one of Dalhart's earliest work experiences as that of a "cow puncher." The C. B. S. press release, quoted earlier, further verifies Dalhart's having worked as a ranch hand: At twelve, Vernon was punching cattle and crooning cowboy songs." (13)

And yet some country music authorities, generally unaware of Dalhart's genuine grassroots origins, have disputed the singer's right to be named this nation's first successful exponent of commercial country music. The Texan, who started the country music industry off with million-selling recording hits about the time the WLS National Barn Dance was making experimental broadcasts from Chicago's Sherman Hotel and before the now world-famous Grand Ole Opry was even a gleam in the eye of George D. Hay, has been too long discounted as a singer lacking country origin and orientation. What these authorities have really objected to, I believe, is Dalhart's amazing ability to sing an operatic aria with as much sincerity and ease as he does a maudlin country weeper like The Song of A Shut-in. It must seem impossible to such critics that the same man could sing on one recording in impeccable Italian and on another in an authentic regional dialect of this country.

In his now rather well-known October, 1955, letter to Variety, the late Ralph S. Peer, former artists and repertoire man for R. C. A. Victor, wrote:

Vernon Dalhart was never a hillbilly and never a hillbilly artist. Dalhart had the peculiar ability to adapt hillbilly music to suit the taste of the non-hillbilly population. Perhaps we could characterize him as pseudo-hillbilly. Dalhart was extremely successful as a recording artist because he was a professional substitute for a real hillbilly. (14).

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(12) New York Times, unsigned article, XVIIC (September, 1948), p. 28.

(13) Majestic Theatre, op. cit.

(14) Walsh, op. cit., July, p. 37.

Peer's letter attempted to answer a persuasive case Walsh had made in a previous issue for Dalhart's being the recording artist who really started commercial country music. Walsh had admitted, though, in his September 21, 1955, comment in Variety, "To meet an anticipated objection, I'll concede that Dalhart was not born a hillbilly."

But in July, 1960, Mr. Walsh described Dalhart at the time the singer recorded The Wreck of the Old 97 for Edisc Recording Laboratories as "well equipped" to make the transition from operatic, popular, and minstrel arrangements to the simpler fare of folk and country music:

He had grown up in the heart of the Texas ranch country and become familiar with cowboy songs, such as "O Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie." Somewhere along the way he had become an expert player of the mouth-harp and he was an accomplished whistler. All he needed to invade the hillbilly territory was a guitar accompanist.

Among Dalhart's non-vocal musical talents, Walsh could have added here the singer's prowess with the jew's harp and kazoo, both of which he played sometime on his vocal recordings. In a later installment of his Dalhart series, Mr. Walsh described the singer's vocal mannerisms on Dalhart's first foray into what was to become commercial country music:

In the Victor recording of The Wreck of the Old 97 he imitated the nasal sound of Henry Whitter's Okeh record from which he had copied the words. Perhaps this was done on orders from some Victor official, who suspected with considerable reason that lovers of country music prefer a singing-through-the-nose effect...The record sounded a lot like an indigenous hillbilly, but it didn't sound like the former operatic artist, Vernon Dalhart. (15)

Even though the music Dalhart sang during his country music career was at one time called "hillbilly," a few knowledgeable critics, except for those who wish to poke fun or heap scorn upon the music, call it that today. If by "hillbilly" Mr. Walsh or Mr. Peer referred to the sort of native music Dalhart was born to and did not have to acquire through formal training such as he had to undertake for his

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(15) Ibid., August, p. 34.

opera career, I would agree he was truly an indigenous singer. But I cannot agree that Dalhart's superb and natural singing of country songs, at one time popularly designated for the market "hillbilly," brands him irremediable as either "hillbilly" or "pseudo-hillbilly." He was a country-bred singer who, after a successful career in other types of music, proved that he could revert to the first kind of music he had known. On the matter of the authentic regional dialect, Dalhart had this to say in a letter to Marion Hoffman dated August 26, 1943: "My dialect used in Hill Billy songs, was simply...my native dialect."

The one-time singer of popular and minstrel songs had given a similar explanation of what some critics have called his "affected dialect." As early as the December, 1918 issue of the Edison Amberola Monthly Dalhart said of his dialect on minstrel recordings:

I never had to learn it. When you are born and brought up in the South your only problem is to talk any other way. All through my childhood that was almost the only talk I ever heard. I've broken myself of the habit, more or less, in ordinary conversation, but it still comes pretty easily. (16)

Whether Dalhart was interpreting Negro specialty songs or, later, country tunes, he simply imagined, according to the Edison article, that he was "back home again," singing "as the spirit and...home experiences" he remembered led him.

Some of the instruments and cowboy and country songs Dalhart knew appear to have been learned from his rancher-father. In a letter of August 26, 1943, he wrote to Hoffman: "The harmonica...I learned to play on our farm in Texas before I was four years old."

As much, and more than this, was said in the press release announcing C. B. S. Radio's Majestic Theatre of the Air program which featured Dalhart September 1, 1929: "At the age of three and while still wearing dresses, he (Dalhart) imitated his daddy by playing the harmonica and the jew's harp." (17)

Since the versatile singer did have a country heritage of this sort, it would appear that the dispute among music authorities over whether or not Dalhart's country credentials were real or forged has been mainly a matter of

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(16) Edison Amberola, op. cit., Walsh, June, p. 35.

(17) Majestic Theatre, op. cit.

semantic fine hair. "Hillbilly"--the pejorative label mis-applied to the singer, his vocal styling, and his background--seems to be at the vortex of the controversy.

"I am no more Hill Billy than you are," Dalhart recoiled in a letter to Hoffman August 26, 1943.

"Hillbilly", coined in derision, is to this day a derogatory term connoting a backwoodsiness and ignorance one seldom finds in the lives and careers of most country music artists. If later commercial singers of the stature of Bradley Kincaid, Red Foley, and Ernest Tubb have preferred to be called "folk", "country", or "country-western", it is hardly surprising that an even more versatile singer pioneering the way before them found the label "hillbilly" offensive and unrepresentative of the recordings he was producing. On the other hand, I am aware of no objection Dalhart ever had to the terms "old-time", "folk", or "country" when these more apt descriptions were applied to the recordings he began to cut in 1924.

No matter what other types of music and artistic expression a person learns to appreciate as he gains wider sophistication of tastes, it is still certainly possible--and more than likely probable--that he will yet have a genuine love for the music on which he cut his cultural teeth.

This, I believe, was the case with Vernon Dalhart. It was his early and thorough grounding in the elemental music of the common folk of this country which first sparked his interest in music in general and at last made his timely switch from popular to country music a natural and easy transition in 1924. Country music fans can be grateful that a singer of such talent, experience, and rural roots was willing as early as 1924 to stake his career on such a new, untried commercial music form. It was Dalhart's folk education in the musical grassroots of this country which gave his unmistakable voice a sincerity remarkable not only in classical and popular music, but in country music as well, a music he sings with an authenticity to make him believable to any country fan. Because he knew and felt country music deeply, Dalhart never had to "fake it". It was an even more natural matter for him to become the nation's first great country music recording artist than it was for him to build distinguished careers, first in classical and then in popular music. That such a phenomenon as Dalhart could occur in the American music industry may seem difficult to believe, but I hope that this paper has made such a seeming paradox more understandable.

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