



## MUSIC HISTORY OF NORTH CAROLINA

### With a Focus on the Northwest Piedmont

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## INTRODUCTION

### Many Cultures. Many Voices

**D**id you know that North Carolina has one of our nation’s most extraordinary musical histories? The school assembly program *Carolina Live!—Our Musical History* highlights our state’s special musical history and some of its most famous and influential musicians.

This document focuses mostly on our state’s northwest Piedmont region (where the nonprofit Carolina Music Ways is located) and highlights the area’s unsung musical heroes. This diverse group of musicians, who performed in a variety of musical styles in the area from the mid 1700s to the mid 1900s, reflects the region’s impressive musical mix.

Area old-time stringband musician Kirk Sutphin, for example, comes from a long line of fiddlers and banjo pickers from the northwest Piedmont. Like many rural families in the region, Mr. Sutphin's grew tobacco. Sutphin recalls hearing from his mother



Kirk Sutphin



and grandfather that at tobacco auction time, downtown Winston-Salem was "a real hoppin" place.<sup>1</sup> This was when

farmers brought their crop to market. The streets outside "Big Winston" and other tobacco auction houses were bursting with music, tobacco, and trade. The scene was a lively one. Bluesmen, such as Blind Boy Fuller, filled the air with soul-stirring sounds from their guitars; stringband musicians hammered out favorite banjo and fiddle tunes.

Looking backward helps reveal the roots of this scene. Migration patterns brought a variety of European and African American settlers into the northwest Piedmont. A diverse group of European Americans entered the area via the Great Wagon Road during the Colonial Period. A large influx of African Americans came to the area for work during the post-Civil War industrial boom. European Americans brought with them their fiddles, hymns, chamber orchestras, and brass; African Americans their banjos, rhythms, and spirituals. From these early musical traditions emerged "hillbilly" and early country music, as well as blues, gospel, jazz, and rhythm and blues. Radio and phonograph recordings eventually introduced these music traditions into the broader American scene.



The fiddle came from Europe; the banjo came from Africa.



### **Music and Community—The Common Bond**

The variety of peoples and music traditions that migrated over time into city and country settings in the northwest Piedmont shaped the unique qualities of the area, creating a rich and textured musical culture central to community life that has continued to this day. The following chapters will introduce you to a varied cast of musical characters from the region—including early Moravian songster Brother Gottlob Konigsdorfer, stringband and blues musician Preston Fulp, early "hillbilly" recording artist Ernest Thompson, world-



renowned fiddler Tommy Jarrell, and gospel and R&B sensation John Tanner of the “5” Royales. These and many other musicians from North Carolina’s northwest Piedmont share a common bond over time—a deep connection to music and its important role in community life. Whether settling the wilderness, playing the blues on the streets at tobacco auction time, plucking out a tune on the front porch of a farm, or performing gospel quintet harmony in church, musicians and their music have been wedded to daily life in the northwest Piedmont for centuries.

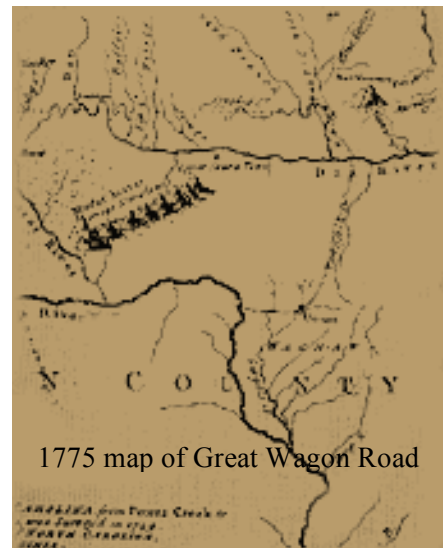


## CHAPTER I

### 1745– 1776

#### The Colonial Period: Exits off the Great Wagon Road

Who were the northwest Piedmont’s first non-Native American settlers and how did they get here? Many settlers traveled here from the North on the **Great Wagon Road**, which was known as the main highway of the colonial backcountry. Running from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Augusta, Georgia, the Great Wagon Road included among its exits present-day Stokes, Forsyth, and Davidson counties.



These early settlers trickled into our region beginning in the 1740s. Settlement was sparse and mostly consisted of scattered groups of extended kinfolk. Family groups settled along both sides of the Yadkin River and in the area between the present-day towns of Germanton and Walnut Cove.

About a decade later, **Daniel Boone** settled along the Yadkin River in present-day Mocksville in Davie County. Boone, then a teenager, traveled down the Great Wagon Road with his family from Pennsylvania, arriving in North Carolina around 1751.



The northwest Piedmont's proximity to the Great Wagon Road opened it to a wide variety of Europeans in addition to the Scotch-Irish so often associated with the

American South. Boone, for example, was of Welsh and English descent. Germans, Swiss, French Huguenots, and other Europeans also made their way down the Great Wagon Road.

Germans played a large role in the settlement of the area. Germans were some of the first settlers of Forsyth, Stokes, Davidson, and Davie counties. The German-speaking Moravians settled in Forsyth County beginning in 1753. A Protestant religious group, the Moravians trace their ancestry back to the present day Czech Republic, but they lived in Germany for many years before coming to the American colonies.



In all likelihood, the **music** of most of the non-Moravian settlers who came down the Great Wagon Road concentrated on the **fiddle**, as did music in other parts of the South. The fiddle, or violin, was popular in many European countries, and settlers from Europe brought it with them, including Moravians. In early colonial America, the fiddle was everywhere. According to historian Bill Malone:

**"The fiddle came with the earliest colonists, was soon mastered by nearly every folk group in North America, from the French inhabitants of Acadia to the blacks of the south." <sup>2</sup>**

A social dance, be it a formal plantation quadrille or a rural frolic, was the primary setting for early North American fiddlers. It is likely that some of the early settlers of the northwest Piedmont got together to enjoy dancing to the fiddle in and around their small cabins in the wilderness.





## CHAPTER II

**1753-1800:**

### **Early Moravians in the Wachovia Tract: Musical Pioneers in the Wilderness**

According to music scholar Gilbert Chase, "Artistically, none of the religious minorities that settled in America approached the musical achievement of the Unitas Fratrum, more commonly known as the Moravian Church."<sup>3</sup>



### **A City of Twelve: The Bethabara Settlement in the Wachovia Tract**

German-speaking Moravians were a close-knit, religious group who settled the Wachovia Tract, which covered most of present-day Forsyth County. The first twelve Moravian settlers came to Wachovia Tract from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, via the Great Wagon Road. They arrived to an area in the woods they named "Bethabara" on the evening of November 17th, 1753.

Members of the early Moravian settlement team were talented men with practical skills. These men could do one or more useful jobs. The team included a minister, a business manager, a physician/surgeon, a shoemaker/nurse, a millwright/carpenter, a cooper/farmer, a gardener/laundrer, a tailor/woodcutter, and a baker.

**"A community with a tailor, minister, and physician was well prepared to tackle the challenging wilderness of the Wachovia Tract. According to historian Frank Tursi: The Moravians... came in 1753 to what is now Forsyth County...to transform the wilderness, not be changed by it." <sup>4</sup>**

### **A Little Pilgrim Band: Early Music in the Wachovia Settlement**

On the evening of their arrival in the Wachovia Tract in 1753, the twelve men in the Moravian settlement team tamed the wilderness with music. They sang a song together during a special Moravian religious service called a "Lovefeast." This service and this



song marked their arrival in their new home. One of the men, Brother Gottlob Konigsdorfer, composed the song's music and lyrics for the occasion. The men sang together:

**"We hold arrival lovefeast here, In Carolina land, A company of Brethren true, A little pilgrim band, Called by the Lord to be of those Who through the whole wide world do go, To bear Him witness everywhere, And naught but Jesus know." <sup>5</sup>**

The fact that Brother Konigsdorfer could write his own song was not unusual for a Moravian. Learning how to read and write music was an important part of education for Moravians and something Brother Konigsdorfer learned to do as a boy. From a young age, music was an important part of daily life for him, as was the case for the other Moravians in the settlement team.

Singing and writing music was easy for Brother Konigsdorfer, but before long, he and the other men missed having musical instruments to accompany their singing. On February 23rd, 1754, a few months after the twelve settlers arrived, one of the men solved this problem by carving a trumpet from a hollow tree! He used this wooden trumpet to announce that evening's religious service. A diary entry of that date states "no trumpet in Bethlehem [Pennsylvania] has a better tone." <sup>6</sup>



### **Chamber Orchestras in the Wilderness: Sacred and Secular**

Before long, Moravians imported a variety of other instruments into the Wachovia Settlement. Writings from as early as 1756 describe chamber orchestras with a variety of instruments accompanying Christmas Eve services. (A "chamber" orchestra refers to a





small orchestra.) In 1762, the Moravians went through the expense and difficulty of moving an organ to Wachovia from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Later in the 1700s, twenty piece orchestras with strings, winds, and brass instruments accompanied Moravian church services.

In early America, the Moravians were unique in their attitude



toward secular (nonreligious) music. Most American ministers of other faiths were firmly against music outside of church services. Not so with the Moravian ministers, who accepted non-church music. By 1788 in the Wachovia Tract town of Salem, the community's amateur music society, the *Collegium Musicum*, performed regularly outside of church. With their violins, violas, cellos, flutes, horns, and trumpets, this amateur group of musicians performed the works of famous European composers.

Amateur musicians in Salem—almost all the musicians were amateurs with other jobs—had a lot of written music from which to choose for their chamber music concerts. These musicians had "one of the largest and most diversified libraries of secular music...in that period of American musical history."<sup>7</sup> Living in their little wilderness community, these Moravian musicians were performing music similar to music heard in the courts and concert halls of Europe.

### Brass Bands

In addition to small orchestras, the Moravians created lively brass bands. This Moravian brass band tradition began well before the "band craze" struck America in the late 1800s. According to Moravian music historian Dr. Nola Reed Knouse and historian C. Daniel Crews, as early as the mid 1700s:



**"Brass music played a special role in the Moravian settlements. ...the Moravian brass ensembles announced special services, welcomed visitors, announced deaths, accompanied hymn singing at outdoor services and funerals, and marked events of note throughout the community. The ensemble would often mark someone's birthday by 'blowing them up' early in the morning."<sup>8</sup>**

The **Salem Band**, a mixed brass and wind instrument band, began with the founding of the town of Salem in 1766 and has a special place in American musical history. During the early years, the Salem Band played mostly for religious services, but it also played for special occasions. In 1791, the band performed for President George Washington's visit to Salem.



Years later during the Civil War, members of the Salem Band made up the **26th North Carolina Regimental Band**. It was one of the most popular bands that played for soldiers on the battlefields of the war, including at Gettysburg.

The Salem Band has continued performing until this day. It is the oldest mixed brass and wind instrument band in the United States.



## **CHAPTER III**

**1800 - 1860:**

**Piedmont Music in Black & White Before the Civil War**

(For multimedia version, visit [www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-antebellum/5186](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-antebellum/5186).)





Although the pre-Civil War African American population of the northwest Piedmont was small when compared to many other areas of North Carolina, its effect on the music of the region was large.

### **Afro-European Interaction in Moravian Sacred Music**

In the Wachovia Tract, which covered most of current-day Forsyth County, African Americans participated in the rich religious music of the Moravian community.

According to historian Jon F. Sensbach:

**"During services, blacks and whites sang together—in German. Black children educated in Moravian schools developed advanced singing and instrumental capabilities on flute and violin in the classical tradition." <sup>9</sup>**

By 1823, construction began on a separate church for African Americans in Salem. In the early 19th century, there are several accounts of the dislike of the shouting, dancing, and dissonant harmonies coming from the African American congregations, such as this one from Salem minister Peter Wolle:



by Woody Long

**"Soon I had to step behind the table and preach. About twenty Negroes were present, and also a bench full of [white] young men and three women. All of those present, the Negroes, and especially John Spach, sang in a loud voice the Methodist melody... I will always remember the first verse because of the horrible dissonances that appeared in it, because the women sang in nothing but pure fifths. In order to correct this**

**mistake, I succeeded in the second verse to hit their tone, so that I could at least unite the two parts." <sup>10</sup>**



### **Afro-European Interaction in Secular Stringband Music**

The secular stringband tradition offers another example of musical interaction between African and European Americans during this period. According to folklorists Bob Carlin and Pamela Grundy,

**"The string band music of the Western Piedmont reflects the interaction of the settler and slave groups. The Germans and Scotch Irish contributed a fiddle tradition and melodies. The African Americans, the banjo and rhythms." <sup>11</sup>**

The following reference discovered by Bob Carlin to stringband music before the Civil War describes a dance in the northwest corner of what is now Davie County around 1830. The passage describes an African American fiddler with white dancers:



**"There was an old Negro sitting in the corner of the room patting his foot and wagging his head squeezing out the 'Mississippi Sawyer', the 'Arkansas Traveler', 'Leather Breeches' and other tunes fashionable in those days. The dancers were cutting the pigeon wing, running the double shuffle and the three-step with great vigor." <sup>12</sup>**

This short passage tells a lot about fiddle music in the region before the Civil War. First, it refers to blacks and whites socializing together. This was not all that uncommon. Black musicians were often called upon to play at white dances in addition to parties in their own community. Second, an African American is playing a European fiddle and tunes of European origin. The foot patting and head wagging of the fiddler seem to illustrate the African rhythmic emphasis on these European melodies.

This early passage reveals a trend that had been happening throughout the South in the 18th century and 19th centuries. African Americans had adopted the European fiddle and



its repertoire of tunes. In turn, the African banjo and rhythms had influenced European music, in many cases changing the sound of European melodies into something clearly different.



## CHAPTER IV

1860 - 1940:

### From Stringbands to Bluesmen in the Northwest Piedmont

(For the multimedia version visit

[www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-sampler/5187](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-sampler/5187).)

During the industrial period, changes were happening in African American music. In the early 20th century, there was a movement from a collaborative approach to music between blacks and whites, as seen in the stringband tradition, to a more distinctively African American approach and sound, as seen in the blues.

In Winston-Salem a vibrant blues scene was emerging. With the boom of Reynolds Tobacco and other smaller tobacco companies, Winston-Salem attracted African American bluesmen from all over the South, just as had occurred in the eastern tobacco town of Durham. Southern bluesmen would follow the harvest. When farmers brought their tobacco to sell at downtown auction houses, bluesmen such as **Blind Boy Fuller** were there, playing on streets such as Old Town Street, now Trade Street.



Blind Boy Fuller

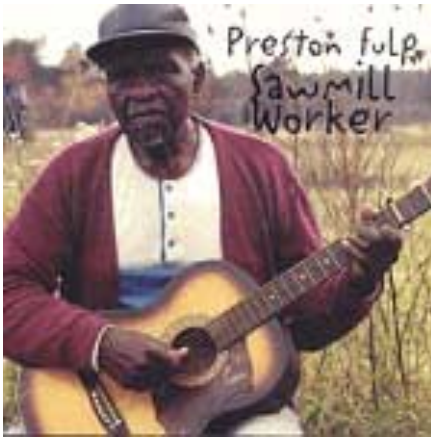
Farmers had money in their pockets, and for the bluesmen, there was profit to be made—from coins tossed into their hats to getting hired by farmers to play at their house parties. According to Winston-Salem blues performer Peter May, these bluesmen had versatile musical repertoires:



**“For whites, blacks...played mostly ragtime, popular songs of the day. [If] they went to record, their records would sell to blacks, and they recorded blues.”<sup>13</sup>**

### **Preston Fulp**

Some of these bluesmen who played on the streets of downtown Winston-Salem were residents of the northwest Piedmont. One such local bluesman was Preston Fulp.



Fulp, born in Stokes County in 1915, did not start his musical life as a blues musician. Rooted in a family stringband tradition, Fulp represents the transitional African American folk musician who moved from stringband to blues.

Coming from one of the oldest African American families in the region, Fulp was the great grandson of an African American woman named Suckie and a white planter and doctor named Fulp. According to folklorist Bob Carlin, shortly after the Civil War, Suckie and Dr. Fulp's grandsons Joseph and Bill Fulp were born near Walnut Cove. Joseph played banjo in the down picking or "frailing" style, and Bill played the guitar. The next generation of Fulp family musicians included Preston, Robert, and Clifton Fulp. Clifton played mostly banjo. Robert played mostly guitar.

Preston Fulp also played guitar. In addition, he played some fiddle and banjo. He performed stringband tunes at house parties for blacks and whites to add to the money he earned working at local sawmills. Preston Fulp's musical horizons broadened when he began to play for customers of tobacco warehouses in downtown Winston-Salem. In Fulp's own words:



**"In 1937, I started to go to Winston and play at the tobacco warehouses and would pass around the hat, and I would get a little change. Sometimes I would make \$100. I would go about once a week." <sup>14</sup>**

During this time in Winston-Salem, Fulp came under the influence of the blues. He became familiar with recordings of North Carolina blues giant Blind Blake. He also learned to play in the key of C from watching bluesman Blind Willie McTell. Even in this new urban environment of African American blues, however, Fulp also had contact with white hillbilly artists, such as Matt Simmons from Stokes County, as well as Ernest Thompson from Forsyth County.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **1920s – 1930s**

#### **The Dawn of “Hillbilly” Recordings in Forsyth County**

(For multimedia version, visit [www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newcentury/5190](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newcentury/5190) .)

**1923** is often recognized as the beginning of the country music recording industry, and Ernest Thompson of Forsyth County was one of its first hillbilly recording artists. The term "hillbilly" referred primarily to white southern stringband musicians of the period. In the decades following, the hillbilly sound would develop into bluegrass and country & western music.

In the early 1920s, A&R (Artist and Repertoire) record company businessmen from the North were searching the South trying to figure out what music was going to sell. They were guessing and did not really know what the American record audience was looking for.

What they did know, however, was that Okeh #4890, a record of solo fiddler and singer John Carson singing "Little Log Cabin in the Lane" and "The Old Hen Cackled and the



Rooster's Going to Crow," was selling as fast as the company could make the records. The Okeh record company's A&R man claimed that the record sounded "pluperfect awful."

However, the once inconceivable market of white rural southerners had finally been tapped and there was lots of money to be made. Record companies were in a scramble to snap up talent for this new market that they didn't really understand. Within ten months of the release of Okeh #4890, (generally considered the first commercially successful hillbilly record), Columbia had "Forsyth County's Favorite Musician," Ernest Thompson, in their New York studios. On April 28th, 1924, the Winston-Salem *Twin Sentinel* reported the creation of Winston-Salem's new local recording star:



Ernest Thompson (center)

**"Last Tuesday Ernest Thompson was a farmer living on a small tract of land near Tobaccoville. This morning he is an employee of the Columbia Phonograph Company, having made 44 records...at the salary of \$100 a week and expenses. It all happened this way... William S. Parks, regional representative of the Columbia Phonograph Company . . . came to Winston-Salem last Tuesday in his quest...he discovered a blind man, sitting in the doorway of a humble home. The blind man was Thompson. Sitting there in the**

**warm April sunshine, Thompson played and sang a number of old southern melodies and folk songs. The more he played and more he sung, the more convinced was Mr. Parks that he had found the man he was looking for."** <sup>15</sup>





Just how "hillbilly" was Ernest Thompson and other early hillbilly recording artists from the northwest Piedmont? They were probably not as much as the record companies made them out to be. The newspaper article about Thompson suggests a very idealistic hillbilly image, that of Thompson down on his farm playing and singing a number of old southern



melodies and folk songs. Thompson certainly did live on a farm and did play a number of traditional numbers, but as folklorist Bob Carlin explains:

**"Thompson's recorded repertoire from those first sessions runs counter to the common image of the country rube performer. Rather than emphasizing old English ballads or Celtic fiddle pieces, Thompson, as did many of his contemporaries, favored Tin Pan Alley compositions of a recent vintage." <sup>16</sup>**

According to old time musician Kirk Sutphin's interviews with Thompson's sister Agnes, much of Thompson's repertoire came from early cylinder recordings. This influence of turn-of-the-century popular music is one of the distinguishing characteristics of 20th century Piedmont stringband styles.

In total, Ernest Thompson would record thirty-four sides for Columbia, all in 1924.

Unfortunately, Thompson's records did not sell well. The same is true for other

northwest Piedmont musicians who recorded during this period, such as the North Carolina Cooper Boys of Lexington, as well as Matt Smith and Frank Miller of Stokes County. But the recorded legacy of these musicians, coupled with the September, 1927



Okeh record company recording session in Winston-Salem, offer valuable insights into the Golden Age of hillbilly records.

### 1927 Okeh Recording Session and Area Musicians Who Recorded There

In September 22, 1927, in one of the earliest recording sessions outside of New York City, representatives from the Okeh Records traveled south to Winston-Salem to record hillbilly musicians at the old West End School, which was located on Broad Street in downtown Winston-Salem. The North Carolina Cooper Boys, a trio from the Lexington area, recorded six cuts at this session. This group had instrumentation and style similar to the North Carolina Ramblers, known as the most popular North Carolina string band of the 1920s.



According to folklorist Bob Carlin, at the heart of the North Carolina Cooper Boys were two cousins from Rockingham County, Tom Cooper (guitar and vocalist) and Dewey Cooper (fiddle and vocalist). These cousins had settled in the Lexington area, following the classic pattern of farmers turned millworkers. The trio's banjo player, Clay Everhart from Lexington, also played music as a sideline, making most of his money working in factories in Davidson and Guilford counties.

The duo of Matt Simmons and Frank Miller also recorded at the 1927 Okeh session. Simmons was a guitarist and worked as a mailman in Stokes County. Frank Miller was a vocalist only and did not play any instruments. As mentioned in Chapter IV, Simmons played with Preston Fulp. Both Simmons and Miller also recorded for the Edison label.

### Musical Stereotypes Created

The 1927 Okeh session in Winston-Salem shows some of the stereotypes that the new



hillbilly recording industry was creating. According the folklorist Bob Carlin, the headline of the *Twin City Sentinel* story on the Okeh recording session, "Mountain Folk Music Being Recorded Here," illustrates the misconception that stringband music was solely a product of the “mountain” South. When most readers saw this term, they thought of white folk musicians from the mountains. In fact, as described in the previous chapter, it was common for black musicians to perform “hillbilly” stringband music.



African American stringband musicians did not fit into the recording company's image of "the mountains." If Preston Fulp had tried to record at the Winston session, he would likely have been turned away. His best hope for recording during the 1920s and 1930s would have been to turn to his new blues rather than his native stringband repertoire. African Americans were definitely an important part of the record company's sales strategy, but despite similarities in repertoire and approach, black musicians in the South were segregated into their own category of blues and gospel “race” records.



## CHAPTER VI

**1920 - 1960:**

**Jubilee Quartets and the “5” Royales: From Gospel to Rhythm and Blues**

(For multimedia version, visit [www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newcentury/5188](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newcentury/5188) .)

At the beginning of the 20th century, an African American gospel tradition emerged which incorporated blues sounds. Later in the century, gospel gave birth to rhythm and blues (R&B), in which gospel music sounds were stripped of religious lyrics and replaced



with secular ones. This evolution from gospel to rhythm and blues occurred all over the South, certainly in cities like Winston-Salem with its large and vibrant African American community.

African American gospel is often viewed as a mix of music styles. Thomas Dorsey, commonly cited as the father of gospel music, began his musical career recording jazz and blues songs. He later mixed these musical ideas with older spiritual songs and helped create African American gospel music. Winston-Salem gospel radio announcer Tim Jackson, Jr. concurs with this view:

**"I think of gospel in terms of a blend of sacred, spiritual and hymns, with a jazz and blues style. I'm looking at the history of our music, and this is how Thomas Dorsey put it together." <sup>17</sup>**

In the early 20th century, many African American families in the northwest Piedmont were rooted in the community quartet tradition, a predecessor to early gospel traditions. The *a cappella* quartet tradition was based on the singing of the Fisk Jubilee singers from Nashville, Tennessee, and quartet groups were originally called "jubilee quartets." According to recording artist Bernice Johnson Reagon, these jubilee quartet groups had a "a smooth, restrained... style of choral singing". <sup>18</sup>



Over time, the sound of these quartets changed and a gospel sound emerged. As Reagon explains:

**"In the 1930s, solo leads evolved that mirrored the preaching tradition, and the jubilee quartet became the gospel quartet. This change saw the prolific creation of new songs and arrangement techniques." <sup>19</sup>**



### **The Tanner Family, John Tanner, and the “5” Royales**

The Tanner brothers of Winston-Salem—John, David, Purnell, Eugene Jr., and Fred—were among the many young men soaking up the new sounds of gospel quartets and quintets. Sons of E. E. Tanner and his wife Marie, natives of South Carolina who moved to Winston in the '20s to work at RJ Reynolds Tobacco, the Tanner brothers grew up in a religious and musical family, performing gospel songs with their parents in church and on the road.

Dr. Fred Tanner recalls spending Sunday afternoons after church with his brothers practicing pieces for the usual Sunday evening performance. As Dr. Tanner recounts:

**"We got our repertoire from the recordings of "The Five Blind Boys", "The Soul Stirrers", "The Pilgrim Travelers", all those groups.... We'd go get the records and ... learned the parts right off the recordings." <sup>20</sup>**

The oldest Tanner son, John, was a member of the Royal Sons, a local quintet consisting of voice and guitar helping to define these new gospel sounds in Winston-Salem. The group sang in local African American churches, as well as at gatherings for white Winston-Salem residents. The Royal Sons also performed on radio stations WSJS and WAIR.



**Royal Sons Quintet**

A friend suggested they send some of their recordings to New York's Apollo Records. Their test cut, the gospel standard "It's Gonna Rain," gained them an audition and finally a record contract.





When the Royal Sons traveled to New York, they didn't know what kind of group they were about to become. At their first session, the group—including Lowman Pauling, Johnny Holmes, Jimmy Moore, and Otto Jeffries—recorded equal amounts of gospel and R&B material. They had been regularly switching between gospel and the secular R&B music, depending on what their audience wanted. According to John Tanner, “we could switch easy...”<sup>21</sup>

According to Tanner, at the Apollo Records recording session, the record company was testing to see which they thought would sell better to the public, the gospel or the R&B songs. Two subsequent number-one R&B hits off back-to-back recording sessions, "Baby, Don't Do It" and "Help Me Somebody," made it clear that the company had made the right choice.

The gospel quintet the Royal Sons became the **“5” Royales**, who helped pioneer the new sounds of rhythm and blues. During their fourteen-year career, the “5” Royales—described by *Juke Blues* magazine as "one of the most important R&B vocal groups from the 1950s"<sup>22</sup>—recorded five top-ten rhythm and blues hits.



“5” Royales (John Tanner, 2<sup>nd</sup> from left)







## CHAPTER VII

**1930 - 1960:**

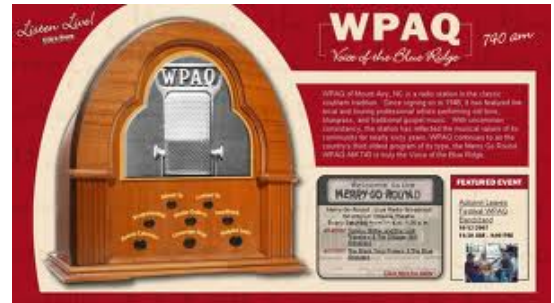
### **THE INFLUENCE of RADIO:**

#### **The Rise of Three Radio Stations in the Northwest Piedmont**

(For **multimedia version**, visit [www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-postwar/5191](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-postwar/5191) .)

The early days of radio had a large influence on musicians and listeners in North

Carolina's northwest Piedmont. Three particularly influential early radio stations in the region were WPAQ in Mount Airy and WSJS and WAAA in Winston-Salem.



### **WPAQ**

During the 1940s and '50s, as today, WPAQ featured a variety of music styles native to the region, including old-time stringband, bluegrass, and traditional southern gospel music. Live, on-air performances were common. Local and touring gospel groups performed live. African American gospel groups, such as the Silvertone Harmonizers, were among these groups.<sup>23</sup> Live performances by local stringband musicians were particularly popular on the station. The area was filled with talented old-time stringband musicians, and fiddlers' contests and square dances were plentiful in the region.<sup>24</sup>



WPAQ, Studio A, 1940s

Live broadcasts were common on WPAQ during this era when most radio stations were turning more and more programming over to recorded music. According to music historian, National Public Radio newscaster, and former WPAQ news director Paul Brown, "In the station's early days, as much as half of WPAQ's daily music programming was live, featuring local and professional talent in Studio A and Studio B."<sup>25</sup>



WPAQ's weekly live radio show, the **Merry-Go-Round**, began in 1948 and featured local and touring talent. The show, still going strong today, is part of the living history of American radio. According to folklorist Fred C. Fussell:

**"Over the years a host of regional and national music legends, including Tommy Jarrell, Benton Flippen, The Carter Family, Mac Wiseman, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, and Bill and Charlie Monroe, have gathered before the microphones for the Saturday morning broadcast. The program's popularity and proven devotion to regional music has resulted in WPAQ's Merry-Go-Round's becoming the third-longest-running live radio show in the nation."**<sup>26</sup>



The Round Peak community of northwest Surry County was home to some of the local musicians who performed live on WPAQ during the early years.<sup>27</sup> Some Round Peak musicians who performed during the 1940s and '50s included members of the old-time



Tommy Jarrell

stringband, the Camp Creek Boys: Fred Cockerham, Ernest East, Paul Sutphin, and Verlen Clifton.<sup>28</sup> In the late 1960s, the intense, hard-driving, Round Peak-style of old-time stringband music attracted national and international attention to Surry County, and the Camp Creek Boys became legendary among old-time stringband fans.

Probably the name that became the most associated with old-time stringband music worldwide was that of another Round Peak musician, fiddler **Tommy Jarrell**.



Paul Brown explains why Jarrell and other Round Peak musicians were not heard regularly on WPAQ in the early days:

**"...stories told by musicians and others indicate that the Round Peak sound may have been considered, even in 1948, a bit old fashioned...for air on a frequent basis. It was only during the 1980s, when Tommy and Benny Jarrell, Earnest East, Benton Flippen, Kyle Creed and Fred Cockerham had produced recordings with full band accompaniment, that the music of Round Peak was commonly heard on WPAQ's weekday programs."<sup>29</sup>**

This was after Jarrell and others were discovered during the national folk revival of the 1960s and '70s. During this period, folk music enthusiasts traveled to the Blue Ridge region from all over the country and the world. They wanted to meet the local musicians and find the source of the popular folksongs of the day. They wanted to learn to play old-time stringband music from the masters.<sup>30</sup>

WPAQ's commitment to keeping the area's native musical culture and performers at the center of its programming has made a lasting impact on the station's listening area.

WPAQ has played an important role in keeping traditional Blue Ridge mountain music alive in and around Surry County. It has helped inspire young local musicians to learn to play the music of their parents and grandparents.

### **WSJS and WAAA**

Almost two decades before WPAQ hit the airwaves, the first radio station in the northwest Piedmont, WSJS in Winston-Salem, began in 1930 at 600AM on the dial. WSJS is still on-air today, though in a different format from its early days.





Considering the region's religious nature, it is not surprising that WSJS's first day on the air offered religious programming. WSJS began broadcasting on Good Friday of 1930:

**"A religious program was the first to be broadcast. The Right Reverend Edward Ronthaler, bishop of the Moravian Church, offered the prayer of dedication and the choir of St. Paul's Episcopal Church provided appropriate music."<sup>31</sup>**



Beginning in the 1920s, southern old-time stringband or "hillbilly" music as it was called, was very popular, and barn dance programs sprung up across the country. WSJS was no exception. As did many early radio stations around the South, WSJS featured touring, as well as readily available, inexpensive local performers. According to Worth Bacon, an early news broadcaster for WSJS:

**"Hillbilly bands were favorites in the early days of WSJS. They came by the dozen to the news room and waited their turn on the air. Frequently they went to an adjoining room... and tuned their guitars, banjos or vocal chords, sending forth echoes which were almost deafening to editors and reporters who worked nearby."<sup>32</sup>**

The broadcast schedules of the station's first few months confirm the popularity of string bands. Musicians came from all over the northwest Piedmont to play on the radio—groups such as the Mocksville String Band, the Walkertown Merry-makers, the Stokes Mountaineers, the Thomasville Jack Rabbits, the Cooleemee String Band, the Stanleyville String Band, and the Lexington String Band.

WSJS succeeded in this format and attracted a large number of both white and black listeners. Early country music programming on WSJS was a normal part of many



African American families' routines, growing up to the sounds of Grandpa Jones, Red Foley and Roy Acuff.

In the earliest days of radio broadcasting, the airwaves of the northwest Piedmont were not open to local African American artists and their newly emerging sounds.

E. E. Tanner's gospel program on WAIR began in 1937, seven years after WSJS began broadcasting. It was not until the 1940s that the African American gospel ensemble, the Camp Meeting Choir, could be heard on WSJS.<sup>33</sup> According to veteran Winston-Salem radio announcer Al Martin, the "Godfather of Gospel":

**"Back when I started, there was no chance for blacks to get on the radio except Amos and Andy, and they weren't even really black...Because of that, I got my start in radio late. I was thirty-nine when I started in radio."<sup>34</sup>**

Al Martin's first Winston-Salem radio opportunity appeared at WAAA, the first station in North Carolina to be formatted to the interests of the African American community. The station began broadcasting on October 29, 1950 in its studios on the corner of Liberty Street and Third Street "in the heart of a booming black district downtown."<sup>35</sup>

Popular announcers on WAAA during the station's early years included Larry Williams, Fred "Steady Freddie" Allen, Robert "Bobcat" Roundtree, and Oscar "Daddy-Oh" Alexander,

whose legendary "Daddy-Oh on the Patio" show aired from Ray's Roadside Drive-In.<sup>36</sup> For half a century, WAAA reflected the musical tastes and community values of many African Americans in and around Winston-Salem, serving as a source of entertainment, information, and inspiration.



WAAA's "Daddy-Oh", late 1950s







## CHAPTER VIII

**1940s – 1950s:**

**Music Masters in the Schools:**

**Extraordinary Music Educators in Segregated Winston-Salem**

In the 1940s and 1950s, passionate music educators in area schools taught and inspired their students. They had a profound influence on musical families throughout the northwest Piedmont. These music masters existed in rural and urban, as well as in segregated black and white schools in the region.



Bernard Foy

Two examples of such masters were Harry D. Wheeler of Atkins High School and Bernard Foy of Kimberly Park Elementary School in Winston-Salem. The work of Foy and Wheeler and other music educators in the segregated black schools was extraordinary and influenced the vibrant African American community in Winston-Salem. The talent pool at Atkins High School created several spin-off jazz and R&B groups that thrilled audiences at local clubs, as well as on college campuses up and down the East Coast.

Both Wheeler and Foy were extremely talented instrumentalists. Wheeler was best known as a trumpeter. Foy was known to play any instrument very well. Sax, keys, woodwinds—nothing seemed to be out of the range of this extraordinary instrumentalist with perfect pitch. Winston-Salem jazz musician Joe Robinson simply describes Foy as "the coolest man I've ever seen."<sup>37</sup>

Wheeler and Foy had extensive school responsibilities. Wheeler directed the concert band, as well as a jazz band and choir, arranging all the parts and writing the music for the groups directly from recordings. He exposed young musicians to the extraordinary works of African American composers like Duke Ellington, as well as to a broader array. Former student Shedrick Adams recalled:





**"Wheeler not only taught the black heritage music. To the old masters he exposed me,...to Oklahoma!, to the classical music, and to other things, so we became more well rounded, so we began to expand our horizons." <sup>38</sup>**

Foy and Wheeler, in addition to teaching, had a group called the Royal Sultans that was active in the 1940s and 1950s. Former student Dr. Fred Tanner states that there were many other jazz groups in Winston at the time, but this was *the* jazz group. Wheeler and Foy often supplemented the Royal Sultans with talent from Atkins High School. Former student Joe Robinson proudly recounts one such event from the 1950s: "They'd come over to Happy Hill for a dance. They would let me come in and play my one song.... they looked like they were so glad I could play." <sup>39</sup>

Today, jazz trumpeter Joe Robinson is one of Winston-Salem's most beloved musicians. He inspires students when he performs in Carolina Music Ways' *Old Timey Radio Show* and when he visits music classes in area schools. Joe Robinson carries forth the legacy of his extraordinary music teachers Bernard Foy and Harry Wheeler. These great music educators are no longer alive, but their music and inspiration live on. Thanks to their former student Joe Robinson, their passion for music and learning is inspiring the next generation of musicians in the northwest Piedmont.



Bernard Foy (left)  
and Harry Wheeler

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***\*Please Note:*** The text for this "Music History" section has been adapted from Carolina Music Ways' *"Varieties of Musical Experience: Origins of the Music Traditions of Davidson, Davie, Forsyth & Stokes Counties, North Carolina"* (2003), which is based on research provided by **Steve Terrill**.



**Steve Terrill** is a musician and music historian who lives in Greensboro, North Carolina, where he graduated from Guilford College. He performs mandolin, banjo, guitar and vocals and has played in a number of old-time stringbands. He is the CEO of Old 97 Wrecords, as well as a collector of southern recordings.

**Elizabeth Carlson** wrote this “Music History” section, based primarily on Steve Terrill’s research. Carlson founded Carolina Music Ways and serves as Curriculum Director. She holds a BA in English and American Studies from Princeton University and an Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She is the author of the book **North Carolina String Music Masters: Old Time and Bluegrass Legends**.



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<sup>1</sup> From phone conversation with Kirk Sutphin, May 12, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Country Music USA*, Revised Edition (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 1985), p.17.

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert Chase, *America’s Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*, Revised Third Edition (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1922), p.50.

<sup>4</sup> Frank V. Tursi, *Winston-Salem, A History* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1994), p.27.

<sup>5</sup> C. Daniel Crews, *Villages of the Lord: The Moravians Come to Carolina* (Winston-Salem, NC: Moravian Archives, 1995), p.20.

<sup>6</sup> C. Daniel Crews, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Donald M. McCorkle, *The Collegium Musicum Salem: Its Music, Musicians and Importance* (Winston-Salem, NC: Moravian Music Foundation, 1979), p.6.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Nola Reed Knouse and C. Daniel Crews, *Moravian Music: An Introduction* (Winston-Salem, NC: Moravian Music Foundation, 1979), p.6.

<sup>9</sup> Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan, The Making of an African-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763-1840* (Chapel Hill, NC:University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p.124.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Bob Carlin and Pamela Grundy, *Musical Change in the Western Piedmont: A Research Summary* (Lexington, NC: Davidson County Community College, 1991), p.8. (Notice that they sight German influence as well. Commonly only British Isle references are made in terms of string band tradition.)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



<sup>13</sup> From phone conversation with local blues musician Peter May, May 10, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Duffy, "North Carolina Blues, Winston-Salem, Part One" *Living Blues*, (January/February, 1993), p.36.

<sup>15</sup> Bob Carlin, "Ernest Thompson: Forgotten Pioneer" in *The Journal of Country Music*, Volume 18, #1, p.42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Comments made by Tim Jackson, Jr. on tape recording from gospel specialists meeting for project at Winston-Salem State University, February 18, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Bernice Johnson Reagon (Editor), *We'll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), p.14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> From phone interview with Dr. Fred Tanner, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Seamus Egan, "The Five Royales, Part I" in *Juke Box Blues*, No. 31 (Summer 1994), p.10.

<sup>22</sup> Tom Steadman, "R&B Kings of a Bygone Era", *The Greensboro News & Record*, from press files of the North Carolina Arts Council. Date and page unknown to author.

<sup>23</sup> From phone conversation with Ralph and Earlene Epperson, January 14, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Brown, Notes for CD *WPAQ: Voices of the Blue Ridge Mountains –Radio Recordings from Mount Airy, NC, 1947-50* (Cambridge, MA: Rounder Records, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>26</sup> Fred C. Fussell, *Blue Ridge Music Trails: Finding a Place In The Circle* (Chapel Hill, NC & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), p.16.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Wilson and Wayne Martin, "History of Blue Ridge Music" in Fred C. Fussell's *Blue Ridge Music Trails: Finding a Place In the Circle* (Chapel Hill, NC & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp.10-11.

Note: According to Wilson and Martin on page 11, "Some musicians like Tommy Jarrell and Fred Cockerham of Surry Co, North Carolina, became musical role models for thousands of



people who had grown up outside the region, a phenomenon noted by the New Yorker magazine in 1987.” (“Our Far Flung Correspondents: Fiddling”, New Yorker, July 20, 1987, pp.74-88.)

<sup>31</sup> Adelaide Fries, Stuart Thurman Wright and J. Edwin Hendricks, *Forsyth: The History of a County on the March* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), p.218.

<sup>32</sup> "Bacon Recalls Role as Newscaster," *Journal and Sentinel*, 4/17/60. Cited in unpublished writings of Bob Carlin.

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<sup>34</sup> Robin Barksdale, "'Godfather of Gospel' Bids Farewell to Off-air Duties," *The Winston-Salem Chronicle*, (6/22/89).

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<sup>36</sup> From WAAA web site, waaa980.com, no longer online.

<sup>37</sup> Comment made by Mr. Joe Robinson during taped meeting with Steve Terrill, November 12, 2001, East Winston Heritage Center. Also present at the meeting were Dr. Fred Tanner, Mr. Cary Cain, and Mr. Shedrick Adams.

<sup>38</sup> Comment made by Mr. Shedrick Adams at the same meeting above.

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