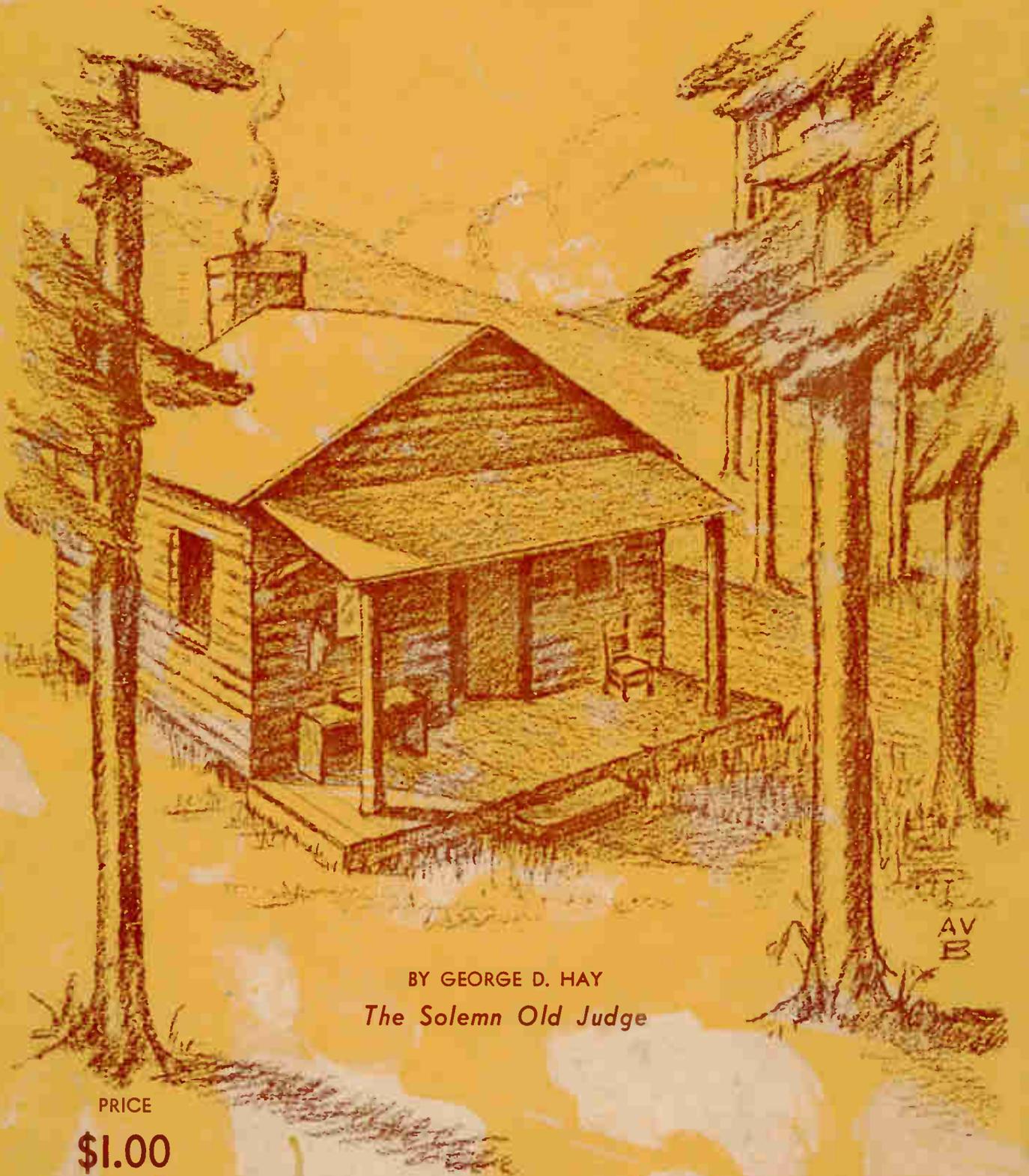


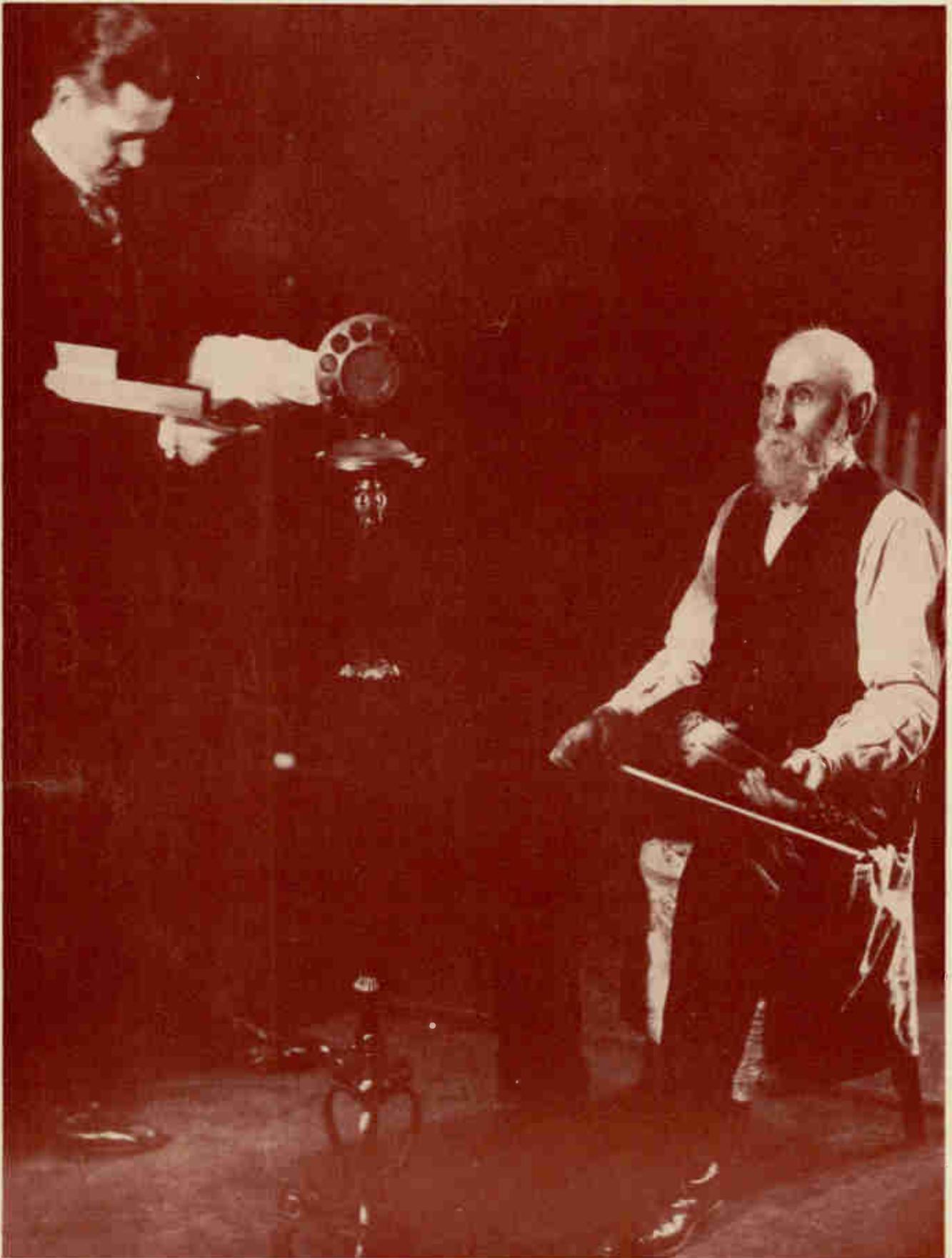
# A STORY OF THE GRAND OLE OPRY



BY GEORGE D. HAY  
*The Solemn Old Judge*

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The Solemn Old Judge and Uncle Jimmy Thompson start the Grand Ole Opry in Nov., 1925, in Studio A of WSM

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## Part One

### CHAPTER ONE

The Grand Ole Opry is as simple as sunshine. It has a universal appeal because it is built upon good will and with folk music expresses the heart-beat of a large percentage of Americans who labor for a living. There is no trick about it and it requires no fancy key to open its front door. The latchstring is always out. That is the main reason why it is on the air as one of America's biggest radio shows after almost twenty-eight years of broadcasting each Saturday night.

Especially since America was drawn into the second world war the value of the Grand Ole Opry has been shown time and again to the officials of Radio Station WSM. The regular weekly performance is a "Letter from Home" to millions of American service men and women. The principal appeal of the Opry is a homey one. It sends forth the aroma of bacon and eggs frying on the kitchen stove on a bright spring morning. That aroma is welcomed all the way from Maine to California.

In spite of the fact that the Opry has grown to circus proportions it still strives to maintain the simple charm with which it attracted its first listeners in the fall of 1925. Today during a four and one-half hour period from 7:30 to 12 each Saturday night at the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville approximately 125 performers appear briefly, twice. Even today when traveling conditions are so very difficult the Grand Ole Opry audience is made up of home folks from fifteen or twenty states.

There is hardly a hamlet, town or city throughout the South which doesn't tune into the Grand Ole Opry each Saturday night and "let it ride" from 7:30 to midnight. The appeal of the Opry is national although its flavor is mid-south. Radio Station WSM discovered something very fundamental when it tapped the vein of American folk music which lay smoldering and in small flames for about three hundred years.

Because the Grand Ole Opry is a very simple program it started in a very simple way. Your reporter who was the first director of WSM had considerable experience in the field of folk music when the station opened in October 1925. Realizing the wealth of folk music material and performers in the Tennessee Hills he welcomed the appearance of Uncle Jimmy Thompson and his blue ribbon fiddle who went on the air at eight o'clock, Saturday night, November 28, 1925. Uncle Jimmy told us that he had a thousand tunes. Past eighty years of age, he was given a comfortable chair in front of an old carbon microphone. While his niece, Mrs. Eva Thompson Jones, played his piano accompaniment your reporter presented Uncle Jimmy and announced that he would be glad to answer requests for old time tunes. Immediately telegrams started to pour into WSM.

One hour later at nine o'clock we asked Uncle Jimmy if he hadn't done enough fiddling to which he replied, "Why shucks, a man don't get warmed up in an hour. I just won an eight-day fiddling contest down in Dallas, Texas, and here's my blue ribbon to prove it." Uncle Jimmy Thompson, Mrs. Jones and The Solemn Old Judge carried on for several weeks for an hour each Saturday night. Telegrams poured into the station.

About that time Mr. Henry Ford presented his first prize for old time American music to a New Englander named Mellie Dunham which was sufficient to make Mr. Dunham America's Champion Old Time Fiddler. WSM invited Mr. Dunham to fiddle a duel with Uncle Jimmy but his advisors realizing that he had nothing to win refused to allow him to accept. Where-

upon our Uncle Jimmy remarked, "He's affeared of me". The fact that Mr. Dunham was advised to refuse our invitation probably gave Uncle Jimmy more publicity than he would have received if the Hon. Mellie had come to Nashville. It added up to the fact that WSM had a good natured riot on its hands. After three or four weeks of this fiddle solo business we were besieged with other fiddlers, banjo pickers, guitar players, and a lady who played an old zither. Her name was Mrs. Cline and she made several appearances in those early days.

To the best of our recollection the first old time band we presented on the Saturday night show, which at that time we called the WSM Barn Dance, was headed by a very genial country physician from Sumner County, Tennessee, named Dr. Humphrey Bate. Dr. Bate was a graduate of Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and was very highly respected in his community as a physician and surgeon. He was in the Medical Department of the United States Army during the Spanish American War. Folk music was his hobby and he played a harmonica with considerable dexterity. With him came five or six of his neighbors. Dr. Bate and the Judge named the band the "Possum Hunters".

At the piano was seated Dr. Bate's little daughter, at that time thirteen years of age. Alcyone Bate has been a member of the "Possum Hunters" band for almost twenty years. She is now Mrs. Beasley and has several children of her own. Other members of the original "Possum Hunters" were Humphrey Bate, Jr., known as Buster; Walter Liggett, with his banjo, who always insisted on crowing like a rooster every time he left the Opry stage; Oscar Albright whose brother was United States Minister to Finland after he had been editor of a Sumner County paper for many years; and Staley Walton, a good old country boy from the same neighborhood. A short time after the beginning of the Opry, Oscar Stone came on as fiddler for the "Possum Hunters" and since the death of Dr. Bate in 1936 has been leader of the band. Oscar Stone is a carpenter by trade and has eleven children. He is a very kindly man who typifies the older generation on the Opry.

The Grand Ole Opry enjoys the unique distinction of having four basic old time country bands on the show. They followed the "Possum Hunters" during the next few weeks and have been here ever since the fall of 1925 or the early spring of 1926. The other three are the "Gully Jumpers", the "Fruit Jar Drinkers", and the "Crook Brothers". In addition to these four bands we had for many years a similar unit known as the "Dixie Liners", composed of Arthur Smith, fiddler, Sam and Kirk McGee with guitar and banjo. Arthur Smith is in our opinion one of the greatest of the old time fiddlers. He left the Opry seven or eight years ago and has been featured on many radio stations throughout the country. Sam and Kirk McGee were with us until only a few months ago when they gave up playing and devoted all of their time to their farms in Williamson County, Tennessee. They are fine citizens, who are well thought of in their county and known all over the United States by the introduction The Solemn Old Judge always gave them— "Sam and Kirk McGee from Tennessee".

Throughout these nearly twenty years the "Gully Jumpers" have been led by Paul Warmack. The other three members are Charlie Arrington with his fiddle, Bert Hutcherson with guitar

and Roy Hardison with banjo. Paul Warmack also plays guitar. This band has remained intact ever since the Opry began.

Paul Warmack is a skilled automobile mechanic who had his own shop for many years but now plies his trade for the State of Tennessee in one of its Nashville shops. Paul has been a great friend to all of the boys on the Opry. His heart seems to know no bounds. Even though he is a man of limited means his purse strings are always out for a friend in trouble. Charlie Arrington is a farmer who lives about twenty miles north of Nashville in a community known as Joelton. He is an Irishman with quick wit and is always ready with a funny story. Bert Hutcherson is a wood worker by trade who now has a job in the home office building of our parent company, The National Life and Accident Insurance Company of Nashville, Tennessee. Roy Hardison is another expert automobile mechanic who had his own shop in Nashville for many years but now has a position as a foreman in a large garage.

The "Fruit Jar Drinkers" compose another band which has remained intact for nineteen and a half years. They are led by Grandpappy George Wilkerson, a red hot fiddler. The other members are Claude Lampley with guitar, Tommy Leffew, mandolin and H. J. Ragsdale, base fiddle which we call "The Dog House". The "Fruit Jar Drinkers" have always been strictly country boys although they have lived in Nashville and have been mechanics with the exception of Tommy Leffew who is a barber by trade. They are very friendly fellows and all good citizens.

The "Crook Brothers" band was originally headed by Herman Crook and one of his brothers. The latter left many years ago but his place was taken by a cousin named Lewis Crook. The name was held as the "Crook Brothers" because it had a build-up. The members of the "Crook Brothers" band have changed somewhat since the beginning. For many years their guitar player was Blythe Poteet of Williamson County, Tennessee, who

is a cousin of Sam and Kirk McGee. Neil Mathews, Sr., is now a valuable member of the band. Blythe Poteet is now back with the band after considerable absence. The members as they stand now are as follows: Herman Crook, leader; Neil Mathews, Sr.; Neil Mathews, Jr.; Basil Gentry and Blythe Poteet.

Herman Crook, the leader of the band, is a cigar maker by trade. His cousin, Lewis Crook, became a salesman in one of the district offices for our company although at present he is in the U. S. Army in the Pacific Theatre. He writes very interesting letters stating that the boys over there enjoy the Opry so much which they receive by short wave.

These four hoedown bands, as we call them, form the backbone and lend a rural flavor to the entire Grand Ole Opry. They are heard at intervals throughout the four hour broadcast. Their breakdowns are definite punctuation marks in our program which get us back to earth the minute they plunk the first note. They are down-to-earth men. Most of them have large families.

The "Grand Ole Opry" is unlike any show in the world. It has individual flavor and character. It is genuine to the core. The keynote of it is, as we stated before, simplicity and good will backed up by a tremendous repertory of folk tunes.

Our Music Librarian at WSM, Vito Pellettieri, who was a popular orchestra leader for many years and whose band was one of the foremost in the South a quarter of a century ago, takes a great interest in our show. In the WSM Music Library, of which he has charge, are thousands of pieces of folk music. Mr. Pellettieri takes a big part on the Opry backstage every Saturday night. We call him our "plainclothes man" as he stalks around backstage with his banker's suit on and lines up the music for the following Saturday night as well as supervises the program in progress. Everybody on the show loves Vito.



Grand Ole Opry Cast, 1926

## CHAPTER TWO

Before we resume with the story of the The Opry in chronological order, which of course is the way most stories unfold, let us take a look at the show as it is broadcast each Saturday night from the old Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, which is our present "Grand Ole Opry House."



Whitey Ford, the Duke of Paducah

Now, let us take a brief peek at the stars of the Grand Ole Opry, before we drop back almost twenty years to pick up our story, which depicts a right good slice of America "as she is" today.

One of the best features of our show is the cooperation and family spirit shown by all of our performers, all the way from the man who plunks a "gittar" in the background to the star who plays to thousands in the largest theatres and auditoriums in the cosmopolitan centers of our nation. Every one calls the other fellow or girl by his or her first name. The green eyed monster, jealousy, doesn't get to first base in our ball game.

Let's take a birdseye view of the present day Opry before we pick up our main story at the point of 1926 and bring it up to date. It is a human interest yarn which paints a picture of Americana. Only a short time ago, a man who has been listening to our show for many years, came to the Opry House to see it. He wrote a letter to the effect that the performers should pay admission because they have so much fun on the stage and back-stage. But that is another ingredient which goes into the pot to make it unique.

Roy Acuff, who accompanied by his band, The Smoky Mountain Boys, came to us from Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1937, has become the greatest drawing card we have ever had. His personal appearances, records and motion pictures have netted him an income which is indeed handsome. In a short time he has become one of radio's big stars and certainly one of the most popular entertainers in the field of American folk music. To his great credit, let us say that Roy has held his head and has taken his unusual success in stride. He loves people and his attitude is one of gratitude to the American public for his place in the entertainment sun. He comes from a very fine family in East Tennessee, where his father was a Baptist preacher and a lawyer who served on the bench during the last years of his life. Roy worked for about fifteen years in the entertainment field before his big break came and he knows what it is to eat coffee and rolls. His band is composed of country boys who like Roy have become excellent showmen. We will go into that later.

Minnie Pearl, whose real name is Miss Ophelia Colley, is a graduate of Ward-Belmont College, of Nashville, where she studied dramatics, which she taught for many years throughout the South. Her father was a well-to-do lumberman, of Centerville, Tenn., about fifty miles southwest of Nashville. She tells us that the character of "Minnie Pearl" is a composite of all of the country girls she taught for several years. Minnie Pearl is one of our biggest stars, a young lady who is charming to meet and to know. She never lets herself get more than a couple of miles from the country which has always been her home. More about Minnie Pearl later.

A comparative newcomer to the Opry is another star, who served many years in vaudeville and in radio. He is known throughout America as "The Duke of Paducah." His name is Whitey Ford. He came to us after a long run as the star of the network radio show "Plantation Party." Whitey is a skilled performer, who works equally well as comedian and master of ceremonies. He has given much of his time to the war effort and has raised thousands of dollars in war bonds throughout the country. He is a very friendly and jovial man, who came up the hard way on his own steam. He has a rich fund of anecdotes and a fine sense of humor, which makes him well-liked by his associates. He is generous to a fault.

One of our latest stars is a real Texas cowboy, Ernest Tubb, who has a very large following throughout the length and breadth of the land. With his Texas Troubadours, Ernest Tubb has in a very short time become one of our biggest drawing cards. He is a tall, slender man in his early thirties, who was born and reared in southwest Texas, where at an early age he learned to sing cowboy songs and plunk the guitar. He has made a great many records and several motion pictures. He loves the wide open spaces and funny stories, which he uses on and off the stage. His songs are for the most part on the romantic side and his voice is deep and friendly. Ernest Tubb is going places.

The Opry has a new comedian who is making rapid strides. His name is Rod Brasfield and he is a natural, if we ever saw one. A native of Mississippi, he married a charming young lady from Hohenwald, Tenn., where they have made their home for several years. Rod has been in the show business for almost twenty years, serving for a long time in stock companies traveling throughout the South. They don't come any finer than Rod Brasfield.



Uncle Dave Macon and His Son Dorris  
Taken Shortly Before His Death which Occurred in March, 1952

Curly Fox and Texas Ruby are back on the Opry after several years' absence. With their Fox Hunters, Curly and Ruby are big drawing cards. They are both excellent performers. In addition to being a first class comedian, Curly Fox is one of America's greatest fiddlers. Miss Texas Ruby has a deep contralto voice, which she uses to excellent effect.

Two veterans of our Opry, Jamup and Honey, black-faced comedians, are now on the road, in charge of Opry Tent Show Number One. Honey Wiles has been one of our featured comedians for a dozen years, coming to us as a member of the famous minstrel team of Lasses White and Honey Wiles. When Lasses White quit radio for motion pictures, Honey Wiles stayed on. His newest and present partner, Bunny Biggs, the present "Jamup", was a member of the radio team "Slow and Easy." He has had many years' experience in the show busi-

ness. The present team of Jamup and Honey have rendered much good service to our show. They are swell comedians and good fellows.

There are many featured performers on the present day Opry who will receive honorable mention later in our story. Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys are true representatives of our show. Bill is one of our best singers of folk music, a fine fellow from Kentucky.

Eddy Arnold, Lew Childre, Zeke Clements, Paul Howard, Curly Williams, Clyde Moody and last in this list, but by no means least, that swell showman and citizen, Pee Wee King, with his Golden West Cowboys. Now we swing back to the beginning of our story about that well known American institution, The WSM Grand Ole Opry....



Claude Sharpe's Old Hickory Singers  
Claude Sharpe, Ross Dowden, Luther Heatwole, Joseph MacPherson

## CHAPTER THREE

During the first two or three months of the year 1926 we acquired about twenty-five people on the Opry. It was during that period that Uncle Dave Macon, "The Dixie Dew Drop," joined us and for the first fifteen years on the air Uncle Dave was our biggest single star. Deford Bailey, "the wizard of the harmonica," came along. The Pickard Family, Theron Hale and his two daughters, Elizabeth and Mamie Ruth, made it quite a party. We quickly outgrew Studio "A" and the station built Studio "B" with large plate glass windows, so that our visible audience of several hundred could be seated in the large hall outside to watch the broadcasts.

In the early days of radio, we thought that all studios should be practically air tight. Usually one side was glassed so that visitors could witness the programmes. If the programme was of such nature that a visible audience was not interested, curtains were drawn to black it. However, on account of the very informal nature of our show, we admitted as many people as we could to this larger second studio. They were all over the place. We scarcely had room to put on our show, but that was okay with us because we loved 'em and the applause helped put the show over. When Uncle Dave came on we moved him back so that he would have plenty of room to kick as he played. He has always been an actor who thought the microphone was just a nuisance. It took a long time to "hitch" him to it. To this day, Uncle Dave, who is still going strong in his seventy-fifth year, as we write this, would much rather play at a picnic or in front of a small audience in a country church or schoolhouse than on the stage of Madison Square Garden, in New York City. He loves to drop his banjo and "go into" a yarn about some of his neighbors down in the Cannon County Hills of Tennessee. We don't know of a better time to tell you something about "The Grand Ole Man of the Grand Ole Opry" than right now. So here goes:

David Macon was born in Cannon County, Tennessee in October, 1870, one of a large family. His parents were well-to-do farmers who had all the advantages of the community. The Macons are highly respected and have contributed much to the development of their county. They are cheerful, very quick witted and God-fearing people; the kind of people who make America a safe place in which to live. When David was a small boy his parents moved their family to Nashville, about forty miles north of their home county, where they purchased a small hotel on Broad Street. Uncle Dave attended what is now Hume-Fogg High School.

Their hotel catered to theatrical people. Nashville was the host to leading dramatic and musical shows in those days, as it is today. David was born a showman. He was thrilled at the stories of the troupers who were his father's guests. In very little time he acquired a five-stringed banjo and with the help of the performers soon learned to handle it creditably. That was about sixty years ago. During these sixty years, Uncle Dave Macon has entertained millions of Americans, playing the banjo and singing the old songs of the South, as only he can do it. He is an individualist, but he also recognizes the rights of others. Uncle Dave and your reporter have been working together for almost twenty years and we have never exchanged a cross word, which is indeed remarkable. I have never heard him say an unkind word to anyone, even though at times he has been the object of unkind jests and remarks. But on the other hand he has countless friends who love him. Surely he is a troubadour of the countryside who has lightened

the burdens of his neighbors and helped them over many hurdles.

Uncle Dave knows the Bible from "kivver to kivver" and many a time has put down his banjos (he always carries three, tuned in different keys) to preach a sermon in some community miles from the beaten paths. Even though he is familiar with the other side of the King's English, his "cuss" words are cute and never off-color. He is a child of nature and enjoys each day for what it is. Perhaps that is why he is younger in spirit at the age of seventy-five than many of us who are much younger. Here is a very interesting case in point:

Back in about 1939, our station, WSM, received a tentative offer from Republic Studios, in Hollywood, to make a picture of the Grand Ole Opry. They dispatched a representative to Nashville to "catch" the show and look over the situation. We asked Uncle Dave if he would mind entertaining our friend at his farm in the Cannon County Hills, knowing that the producer would get the right background and become acquainted with a true representative of the Opry. Uncle Dave was delighted. He asked his cook to prepare a real, sho' 'nuf Tennessee dinner with all of the trimmings and we drove down from Nashville on a beautiful day.

Friends, we hope some day that some of you will be fortunate enough to be Uncle Dave's guests at dinner. Until that day arrives, we fear that you will have missed a great deal in the realm of culinary art and true Southern hospitality. Uncle Dave asked the blessing and we were served a dinner which is not for sale anywhere in these United States, more is the pity. We were forced to be satisfied with rich country ham, fried chicken, six or seven vegetables, done to a Tennessee turn,



Cousin Jody



Lonzo and Oscar

jelly, preserves, pickles, hot corn bread and white bread. Then came the cake. Oh, well, why carry this any further. . . .

After dinner Uncle Dave invited us to be seated under a large tree in his front yard, where we discussed the possibility of the Grand Ole Opry picture. As the producer and your reporter drove back to Nashville, that experienced executive said "I have never met a more natural man in my life. He prays at the right time and he cusses at the right time and his jokes are as cute as the dickens." Needless to say, Uncle Dave was chosen to be one of the stars of the Opry picture. Roy Acuff and his boys and Little Rachel and the Solemn Old Judge were the other representatives of the Opry in the picture which was produced in 1940 in Republic Studios, by Armand Schaefer, and directed by Frank McDonald. Uncle Dave was the most popular man in the picture. Everybody loved him.

In 1932 about twenty of us, including Uncle Dave, played a large picnic in the woods of West Tennessee, promoted by a Mr. Dowland. We got there early in the morning and, on a crude bandstand, played to eight or ten thousand people throughout the day, putting on about five one-hour shows. Uncle Dave was our star and he shined forth in all of his glory that day. The next year we repeated it and for three or four years we played two picnics a year for Mr. Dowland in Tennessee and Kentucky. It was on one of these occasions that we saw Uncle Dave without a word to say—no comeback when the boys played the celebrated "badger game" on him. Usually, he thinks very quickly on his feet, but on that occasion all he could do was to say "Shucks!"

We ran across a picture of Uncle Dave, taken when he was eighteen. He was very carefully dressed with his little coat buttoned closely beneath his white collar and tie, topped off by a hat of soft felt, turned up in front. His banjo was in his lap. He was a city dude,—no mistake about it. However, it was not until thirty years later at the age of forty-eight that

Uncle Dave left his farm with his boys and started on his professional career as "King of the Banjo Pickers." That was twenty-seven years ago. What a career, started at an age that many of us are hunting a soft place to light for the latter years.

Asked how he finally made up his mind to turn professional entertainer, Uncle Dave told us:

"All of my life I had played and sung for fun. My neighbors always asked me to play at picnics and special occasions. Finally one very self-important farmer approached me and asked me to play at a party he was planning. I was very busy and a bit tired, so I thought I would stop him. I told him I would play at his party for fifteen dollars. He said "okay, it's a deal." It was a large affair and in the crowd was a talent scout for Loew's Theatres. My act seemed to go over very well. When I had finished, the theatre man offered to book me at a leading theatre in Birmingham, Alabama at several hundred dollars a week. They held me over many weeks and booked me throughout the country. I was in the show business and I have been in it ever since.

Uncle Dave has been ably assisted by his son, Dorris, who plays the guitar and sings with him occasionally. Dorris is a fine, upstanding farmer, who looks after his dad under all circumstances.

We hope that the WSM Grand Ole Opry will last at least a hundred years. Regardless of how long a life it may have, the name of Uncle Dave Macon should always be remembered with gratitude by all of the members of the cast and by the managers and officials of WSM. He has contributed so very much already and will continue to do so as long as he is able. Our hats are off to this grand Tennessee farmer who has done and is doing good wherever he goes with his three banjos, his plug hat, gates-ajar collar, gold teeth and his great big, Tennessee smile! God bless you, partner.



Ray Price



Roy Acuff

## CHAPTER FOUR

One of the most dramatic incidents which occurred during the early days of the Grand Ole Opry was a tragedy which visited the home of the Pickard Family, known from coast to coast as delineators of homespun music, whose career began at WSM. Obed (Dad) Pickard, now in his seventies, was the oldest son of Colonel P. P. Pickard, a banker of West Tennessee, who became comptroller of the State of Tennessee. He was born in or near Waverly, a charming town, the main street of which is banked by tall trees as one enters from the east on the principal highway. Every time we think of Waverly it reminds us of the most delicious Tennessee country ham, which we were served at a local cafe after putting on a big portion of the Opry at a picnic near there. Now for our main story:

A short time after the station opened in the fall of 1925 we were asked to help locate Dad Pickard, who was a commercial traveler for about twenty-five years prior to that time, on account of a fatal accident which occurred to their oldest child, a girl of about 18. We put an announcement on the air several times one night and Mr. Pickard was located over in a small town in the Carolinas. He was able to reach home very soon, as a result of the service rendered. Several weeks later, he came up to our station to thank us for the help, which WSM was able to render. We had a nice talk with Dad and he sat through part of our Opry. He was terribly shaken as a result of the tragedy.

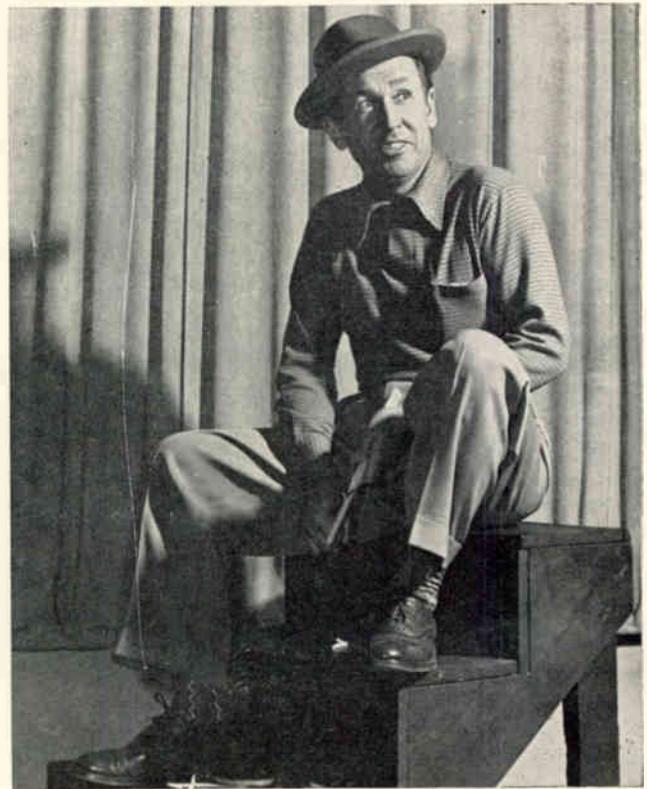
Quite some time later Dad Pickard came up to visit us one Saturday night, bringing along his guitar, jews harp and harmonica. He told us that he entertained Admiral George Dewey aboard ship when, as a soldier, he was being transported to the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. He said he would be glad to play a few tunes and sing a song, if we cared to have him. We did and he forthwith joined the Opry as our "roving reporter," taking part in the broadcast whenever he was in Nashville, which was about half of the time. He got a tremendous kick out of his part in the Opry. A few months later he brought his family along, with Mrs. Pickard at the piano. There were Dad and Mrs. Pickard, Obed, Jr., Ruth, Phaney (now known as Charley) and Little Ann, now a young lady. Mrs. Pickard and Ruth were accomplished musicians, who had studied the art for many years. They did not care much for the homespun tunes in those early days, but it was not long before they put their hearts into the act which shortly became known as The Pickard Family. They made a big hit on the Opry and in a couple of years they decided to take the act to New York and call on the newly formed National Broadcasting Company. Dad Pickard has always been a cracker-jack salesman. He stuck to the ship and the first thing we knew was that The Pickard Family had a coast-to-coast network show, which was commercially sponsored. After a successful run in New York, they played in Chicago and many other cities. For several years now they have lived in Hollywood, doing free lance radio and picture work. We just heard that Dad is working in a series of Westerns, while Charley is in the U. S. Army and Obed, Jr., is an executive in a war plant. Ruth has been married for several years and has two or three children, while Ann is doing some singing and is also doing a war job. Dad and his family are swell folks and we are happy that they have done and are doing so well.

Theron Hale and his daughters, Elizabeth and Mamie Ruth were with us for several years. Mr. Hale is still in business here in Nashville, according to our latest information; Eliza-

beth taught school and Mamie Ruth married. Only a short time after her marriage she passed away bringing a child into the world. They were excellent performers, always giving a fine touch to their work. Very nice people, the Hales.

For the first two years our Saturday night show was on the air, we called it the WSM Barn Dance, which of course as a name was a "dead head," as we would say in the newspaper game. But with the organization of The National Broadcasting Company and WSM's association with it we carried practically full network service; that is, we carried a great many network shows. Our station always believed in the individuality of WSM, which in our opinion has always been a wise policy for us. Our company had a definite purpose in mind for WSM; it was put in to help create good will for our parent company.

It so happened that on Saturday nights, from seven until eight o'clock WSM carried The Music Appreciation Hour, under the direction of the eminent conductor and composer, Dr. Walter Damrosh. Dr. Damrosh always signed off his concert a minute or so before eight o'clock, just before we hit the air with our mountain minstrels and vocal trapeze performers. We must confess that the change in pace and quality was immense, but that is part of America, fine lace and homespun cloth, our show being covered entirely by the latter. One great thing about radio is embodied by a small button on our receiving sets which obliterates that form of broadcasting which does not interest us. Throughout the history of the so-called human race, "one man's meat is another man's poison". So, really there was no conflict. The members of our radio audience who loved Dr. Damrosh and his Symphony Orchestra thought we should be shot at sunrise and did not hesitate to tell us so.



Lew Childre



"String Beans"

Radio is a great institution, neighbors, because it covers the entire waterfront. So much for that.

Our show was about to receive a name out of the blue, blue sky, but we didn't know it. Thank goodness for some of the things we do not know.

The monitor in our Studio "B" was turned on, so that we would have a rough idea of the time which was fast approaching. At about five minutes before eight, your reporter called for silence in the studio. Out of the loud speaker came the very correct, but accented voice of Dr. Damrosh and his words were something like this:

"While most artists realize that there is no place in the classics for realism, nevertheless I am going to break one of my rules and present a composition by a young composer from 'Ioway', who sent us his latest number, which depicts the onrush of a locomotive. . . ."

After which announcement the good doctor directed his symphony orchestra through the number which carried many "shoooses" depicting an engine trying to come to a full stop. Then he closed his programme with his usual sign-off.

Our control operator gave us the signal which indicated that we were on the air. At that time your reporter was twenty years younger than he is now. Youth is a marvelous thing in some ways and oftentimes a pain in the neck in others. Take your choice, friends. However, the damage was done so long ago that we'll have to tell about it. We paid our respects to Dr. Damrosh and said on the air something like this: "Friends, the programme which just came to a close was devoted to the classics. Dr. Damrosh told us that it was generally agreed that

there is no place in the classics for realism. However, from here on out for the next three hours we will present nothing but realism. It will be down to earth for the "earthy." In respectful contrast to Dr. Damrosh's presentation of the number which depicts the onrush of the locomotive we will call on one of our performers, Deford Bailey, with his harmonica, to give us the country version of his "Pan American Blues." Whereupon, Deford Bailey, a wizard with the harmonica, played the number. At the close of it, your reporter said: "For the past hour we have been listening to music taken largely from Grand Opera, but from now on we will present "The Grand Ole Opry." The name has stuck for almost twenty years. It seems to fit our shindig, hoedown, barn dance or rookus, which has become known throughout America and in some foreign lands.

That brings us to Deford Bailey, a little crippled colored boy who was a bright feature of our show for about fifteen years. Like some members of his race and other races, Deford was lazy. He knew about a dozen numbers, which he put on the air and recorded for a major company, but he refused to learn any more, even though his reward was great. He was our mascot and is still loved by the entire company. We gave him a whole year's notice to learn some more tunes, but he would not. When we were forced to give him his final notice, Deford said, without malice: "I knowed it waz comin', Judge, I knowed it wuz comin'."

Deford comes to the show now and then to visit us. We are always glad to see him—a great artist.



Annie Lou and Danny  
(Mr. and Mrs. Danny Dill)

## CHAPTER FIVE

While actual records including dates are not available to your reporter at this time, we believe that it was during the second winter season that our attention was called to the fact that a fellow Tennessean won the blue ribbon as first prize from Mr. Henry Ford as America's champion old-time fiddler. Mr. Ford held the contest in Detroit and it lasted for about two or three weeks as one of his many activities to preserve certain features of early American life; that is early except for the Indians, who have lived here for many, many centuries and are greatly amused, justifiably, with our attitude and treatment of them. But, of course, that is another long story.

Uncle Bunt Stephens, of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, emerged the winner, after many eliminations. He and his wife, Aunt Maggie, lived in a two or three room "shot-gun" house about a mile from the town, in the middle of a clump of woods. His neighbors told us that "Bunt Stephens is a right nice little feller that never has amounted to much, but he sure can play that fiddle." The truth of it was, as near as we could find out, that Bunt Stephens was a fine artist, who up to that time had never found his rightful place in a commercial world. With proper musical training he might have been a fine violinist.

A very fine friend of ours, Bill Craig, one of the department managers of our parent company, was very much interested in WSM. Along with another friend of ours, Clay Faulkner, a local business man, we jumped in a car one cold and windy winter day and set out for Lawrenceburg. Reaching that thriving middle Tennessee town, we were directed to Bunt Stephens' home. It was very small and set back a couple hundred yards from the road. He and Aunt Maggie were somewhat reluctant to admit us. It seems that they had been put upon by certain sharp-shooters since he had been crowned king of America's fiddlers. But when we told him we were home folks from Nashville he warmed up and brought up a couple of extra chairs from the kitchen. When we say "up" we mean *up* because the front room, a bed-room with a crude fireplace was on the ground level while the kitchen, directly behind it was two steps lower. The front room was small; just enough room for the double bed, a wash stand, one rocking chair, one straight chair and a rather large, country fireplace, through which the wind whistled on that winter day. He punched up the back-log and added a smaller one. He said "Set down and make yourself to home." We did.

The walls were bare, except for two decorations; one meant business and the other pleasure, for on one wall, hanging on a big spike was Uncle Bunt's double-barreled shot-gun, while on the opposite wall, suspended in the same manner was his famous fiddle; it was not a Stradivarius by a long shot, but that did not worry Uncle Bunt, because what he didn't know didn't bother him in the least. We'll bet two tickets to The Grand Ole Opry that if "Strad" could have heard Bunt play, he'd have made him one for free. Uncle Bunt could not read music, but his tones were soft, sweet and on the nose. He played several numbers, forgetting about the wind whistling down the chimney and forgetting about the whole cock-eyed world. They were definitely folk tunes, dreamed up years and years ago by men and women of good will. They made us forget about the bills and taxes we owed. It was good to be living and visiting a man who lived back in the woods where the trees sighed deeply and the harmony of nature is as sure as sunshine. We asked him to come up to Nashville and play on our radio. He said "I reckon I will, if nothin' happens 'tween now an' then."

We asked Bunt about his trip to Detroit. He told us with mixed emotions that Mr. Ford was very nice to him. "He asked me where I wanted to stop an' I told him I didn't care much as long as it wasn't in the middle o' town, so he told a big colored feller to take me out to the country club. . . . After I played about a week for him I told him I would have to go home 'cause Maggie didn't have no groceries or cord wood in the house. Mr. Ford told me to stay and he'd have his man in Lawrenceburg send me out a whole wagonload. An' sure enough, he done it."

The following Saturday night, Uncle Bunt Stephens made his first appearance on our radio show. We were still broadcasting from our first studio. He played for about thirty minutes and did a beautiful job. We tried to make him feel at home, primarily because of ordinary hospitality and secondly because it would help his performance. In the meantime, Uncle Jimmy Thompson was burned to a crisp, as even better men than he have been when a rival takes the edge away. But, he stuck to the ship and for many months we nursed two elderly male prima donnas who couldn't see each other for the dust in their eyes.

It was not long before Uncle Bunt and Aunt Maggie, who developed a country clog dance adorned with petticoats, were booked in vaudeville. That was the last time we saw them, save for a guest appearance they did on the Opry years later. They had become hardened troupers, but their new life did not make them happy; in fact they became ill and retired to their home in the woods. They had their fling, for better or worse. Perhaps some of us do not know when we are in the right spot.

Vaudeville took another act of ours when Dr. Humphrey Bate and his Possum Hunters were booked throughout the South and Middle West for many weeks. The good doctor was experienced and kept his boys and girls in the middle of the road, so that all of them returned whole.

It seems to us as we look back over the twenty years since the Opry first hit the air that there are three qualities which predominate. They are atmosphere, color and flavor. Without it we would have just another run-of-the-mill radio show, the kind of programme which pops up and pops out. There are many shows on the air and on the stage in this great land of ours, which maintain individuality. Each one holds and generally increases its audience. It pleases a certain portion of our population. That is true of our show, which is presented for the rural and industrial workers throughout the states. Above all, we try to keep it "homey." Home folks do the work of the world, they win the wars and raise the families. Many of our geniuses come from simple folk who adhere to the fundamental principles of honesty included in the Ten Commandments. The Grand Ole Opry expresses these qualities which come to us from these good people. When we broadcast, we do it for our own and with our own. One of the results is that it attracts large audiences wherever units of it play. But the largest audience as a rule is seated each week in The Grand Ole Opry House itself.

Our first few broadcasts originated in our Studio "A", which was our first. It has since been enlarged, but in the beginning it was a medium sized room, about twenty by fifteen feet, heavily draped with dark red curtains. The side next to the hall was glassed. In a few weeks that little hall was so filled with people that the station decided to build Studio "B", considerably larger than "A". Directly in front of the glassed-in



"Red" Foley

side of "B" was a large room, which held several hundred people. In addition to this hallway we admitted about fifty or sixty people to the studio. Each Saturday night brought more than its quota of people who wanted to watch our broadcast. They milled around for several hours and most of them stuck to the finish. They were hungry for the rhythm of the soil and the heart songs, plus the rural flavor and humor which spiced it.

In a few years WSM built its beautiful auditorium studio, with portable stage and the latest acoustical treatment of the walls and ceiling. It seated comfortably about five hundred. The Opry audience promptly filled it. Things went along pretty well in that direction for some time. Finally the crowds stormed the wrought-iron doors of our Home Office Building to such an extent that our own officials could not get into their offices, when they felt it necessary to do so on Saturday nights. People in crowds are apt to lose their heads and finally the pay-off came one Saturday night when our two top officials were refused admittance to their own office building. They were forced to seek out the night engineer and be admitted through the back door. Our audience was very politely invited to leave the building. For some time we did not know whether or not The Grand Ole Opry would be taken off the air.

We broadcast for some time without any audience, but something was lacking. It seemed that a visible audience was a part of our shindig. So we went into a huddle and it was decided to rent the Hillsboro Theatre, a neighborhood house, not too far from the center of Nashville. It was a great relief to the audience and to the performers. We had a few dressing rooms and we acquired a staff of ushers to handle the front of the house. Because it was small, we played to two audiences from eight until midnight. There was no charge for tickets. The three thousand agents of our parent company were allowed to distribute a limited number of them. Of course that applied to our nearby district, so that the distribuion was handled very equitably.

In a couple of years we had to seek a larger place for the Opry. We found a tabernacle in the east side which had saw dust on the floor and crude benches. We played there for a couple of years, but it lacked facilities to handle the crowds which ran over three thousand each Saturday night. Then we moved it down town to the new War Memorial Auditorium, which seated about twenty-two hundred. A small price of twenty-five cents was put on the seats in an effort to handle the crowds, but the auditorium was soon overflowing each week. People came from twenty-two states throughout the summer months. Yes, friends, over twenty states were represented, because our show had been on the air for about ten years and



Cowboy Copas

its circulation had grown tremendously. Imagine a theatre turning them away year after year. That is the record of The Grand Ole Opry in cold black and white. Finally we moved the show to the Ryman Auditorium, the largest house in Middle Tennessee, where we now show to turn-away audiences week after week. The interest in the Opry is truly phenomenal. It is one of the wonders in the field of American entertainment. We will stoop to use a pun here, with your pardon; It is simply because it is so simple. Again we say it's like bacon and eggs frying on the kitchen stove on a bright, spring morning. In the humble opinion of your reporter, the moment the Opry is allowed to "put on the dog" it will be a dead duck. Let us hope and pray that will not happen. America would miss "John Henry, the Steel Driving Man," "Old Dan Tucker," "Chicken in the Bread-pan Pickin' Out Dough," "Whoop, 'em Up Cindy" and nine hundred and ninety-nine other ditties which Mother Nature smiles upon.



Hank Williams

## CHAPTER SIX

During the first two or three years we presented a great many performers. It was purely a labor of love and the Opry had not been put on a commercial basis. Whoever showed up went on the air sometime and usually several times during the Saturday night show. By that we do not mean that it was a free-for-all. We passed upon all of them in a crude sort of an audition. It has never been a case of seeking talent for the show. It has always been a case of choosing the ones who had the talent to do a good job. With the exception of Uncle Dave Macon, most of the performers were amateurs, but it was not long before they became professionals in their field and were in demand for country hoedowns, picnics and other personal appearances in high school auditoriums, etc. Our show was a natural for picnics, because the Opry has always been a big picnic in itself.

One of the bands which played with us for several years with good results was known simply as Ed Poplin and his Band. Ed Poplin was a rural mail carrier for Uncle Sam, a very fine, steady and cheerful man whose home was in Lewisburg, Tenn., about a hundred miles from Nashville. The members of the band were his friend Jack Woods and his charming daughter, Ed Poplin, Jr., and one or two more, whose names are not available to us at the moment. They played well, specializing in folk music although once in a while, before we could or did stop it, Uncle Ed would slip in an old popular song, such as "When You Wore a Tulip and I Wore a Red, Red Rose." There is not much difference between that number and for instance "Darling Nellie Gray," except that we have always regarded the latter as strictly folk music. The line of demarcation between the old popular tunes and folk tunes is indeed slight. We have just as much trouble, if not more, now sorting them out. We have tried to keep the Opry Southern in flavor, although any folk tune is okay.

During the first couple of years we took in our company two blind men, Uncle Joe Mangrum and Fred Schriver, both good musicians. In fact, Uncle Joe was known throughout the Mid-South as one of our greatest old-time fiddlers. He was in his middle seventies when he came to us. His heart would be almost broken each week because we would not permit him to play selections from the classics and light classics, which he did very well, although we do not believe Uncle Joe ever had a lesson in his life. But, he did a beautiful job with "Pop Goes the Weasel", "Barbara Allen," "Turkey in the Straw" and scores of other folk numbers, for which the Grand Ole Opry is noted. His wife, Aunt Maggie Mangrum, who was blessed with normal vision, took excellent care of Uncle Joe. In fact, the tenderness these two delightful old people had for each other would make some members of our flip younger generation blush, if they knew how.

Fred Schriver played the piano and accordion very well. He was married to a blind woman and they had a child with normal vision. Each Saturday night Uncle Joe and Fred would hold a "jam" session right on the air. It was one of the features of the show. All of the members of our company were delighted when the old man and the young man teamed up to give out their best. One of the things we are so thankful for is the fact that the members of the company cooperate to a marked degree. This cooperation is actually broadcast. Without good will in their hearts, our boys and girls could not put it across the footlights and into the microphones. Of course they have their little differences. During the first ten years, they held a convention backstage for an hour or so before

show-time. Well, it was more of a contest. Now and then the fur would fly but they would end up smiling and be ready for the shindig. Opera stars are not the only artists with so-called temperament. Our own Opry stars have a bit of it, too.

For the first few years the Opry talent was largely confined to the boys and girls from the Tennessee hills, but as a result of the radio it attracted people from a wider area. It is an American show and now we have a dozen or more states represented in our company of about seventy-five. Since we have been on the network for six years we have invited performers with names regardless of locality, as long as they interpret American folk music.

In the early days, along about 1930 or '31, Harry Stone made a deal with Asher Sizemore and his son, Jimmy, at that time about six years of age. The act was known as Asher and Little Jimmy Sizemore, or more often as Asher and Little Jimmy. Asher Sizemore, came to us from Kentucky, where he learned the songs of the mountains and a number of sacred songs. Little Jimmy had unusual talent as a child singer. Only a few weeks ago we received an invitation to his graduation from high school up in Indiana, where they live on a large farm. We are so glad that he went ahead in his school work, because many times youngsters in the entertainment field travel so much that their schooling is spotted.

Asher and Little Jimmy sang heart songs and closed their programmes with a prayer. They got out a song book, which sold by the thousands. The fact is, it was a phenomenal success. They broke records with their personal appearances on the road and people crowded into our studios to watch them



The Carter Sisters and  
Mother May Belle



Chet Atkins

work. We were very much concerned for fear the emotional strain would be too much for Jimmy, but he has survived beautifully. They have always maintained a normal home life, where they lived happily when not traveling. Now they live on a beautiful Indiana farm, purchased from the proceeds of their professional work. Several times they bought their own wires and time on several stations to sell their song books, which meant that they went like hot cakes. We have seen large sacks filled with mail for the Sizemores.

Asher Sizemore is a shrewd showman. He knows how to talk to an audience and introduce his songs. If our memory is correct, Asher worked in or near the coal mines in East Kentucky when he was a youngster. His life had been hard in many ways, but he has a keen mind and a delightful sense of humor which have carried him through many squeaky spots. Show business requires a sense of humor perhaps a bit more than other lines of work. We come in contact with so many people, each one different, that agility is required to deal with them.

Only last Saturday night, as we write this story, and it might have been any Saturday night as far as the Opry goes, a good soldier insisted on getting the boys to sign his autograph book during the broadcast. We tried to explain to him that we

would be delighted as soon as the show was over, but there was nothing doing. He wanted what he wanted right now. We always try to bend over almost double for our radio friends, but sometimes they ask too much. However, we would much rather that they ask too much than not ask us at all. Like one of America's largest merchants, our slogan always has been "The Customer is always right."

Asher and Little Jimmy were with us for quite a while and they have repeated on our station with good results. Their programme pulls the heart strings, which in our language means a sure fire hit. Somebody said that an entertainer can reach eighty-five percent of the public through the heart, ten percent through the foot with dance music and five percent through the head with the classics. That may be a rough idea. At least our experience shows it to be pretty accurate.

Your reporter made several personal appearances with Asher and Jimmy and they went over much beyond the average and their drawing power was excellent. We do not know whether they have completely retired or not. This is not a book of record. It is a story based on memory. However, if they come to your town, go to see them, by all means.

In the late thirties Pee Wee King and his Golden West Cowboys, under the management of J. L. Frank, came to us and have been one of our standard acts for ten or twelve years. Mr. Frank managed Gene Autry, when Gene played at WLS, Chicago. He has been in the show business for more than a quarter century; has had his ups and downs like all of us. He is a square shooter and has made many friends throughout the country. Business men do not hesitate to put Joe Frank "on the cuff" because they know he is good. He has been perhaps our outstanding manager of talent on the road, working out of our station, although he has never, to our knowledge, had any official connection with the station. At present Joe is managing Minnie Pearl, The Duke of Paducah, Ernest Tubb and his Texas Troubadours, The Golden West Cowboys and several other acts on his "jamborees." We always enjoy working with Joe, because he knows his business and can take it on the chin when the going is rough. He is a native of Giles County, Tennessee.

Pee Wee King, the leader of the Golden West Cowboys, is one of the most cheerful boys we ever had on the Opry. Born in Wisconsin, he drifted into the music game at an early age. He is a flashy showman, playing the accordion and singing comedy numbers with his boys and he has an infectious smile on the stage which cheers an audience. We have worked with Pee Wee for many years and have yet to see him in a grouch. He has been in the money and out of it, but he keeps that grin plastered on his face and his eyes twinkling. That makes him strictly okay with us.

Frank (Pee Wee) King has been married to one of the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Frank for many years. She is a charming young lady. They have several children, the latest being twin boys. Recently Pee Wee and his wife bought a small farm about ten miles north of Nashville, "so the kids will not be fenced in," says Pee Wee.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

A NEW turn in the Opry road was reached in 1931 when The Vagabonds, Herald, Dean and Curt, joined the company with a big bag filled with mellow tunes, arranged for male trio. Each the son of a minister of the gospel, the boys were thoroughly familiar with sacred numbers and heart songs they introduced with great success on the show. Their backgrounds varied somewhat from the other members of the company, in that they had received more formal education. Born in the Middle West, they had lived in small towns during their earlier years. They could hardly be called "country boys," but they loved folk music and handled it with a background of formal musical training, which smoothed it as against the usual renditions handled in a strictly rural fashion. Typical folk music sung and played by people of the hills and countryside carries a bit of sadness and longing for the next world on the one hand and a rollicking sense of comedy on the other, according to your reporter's experience of more than twenty years.

The Vagabonds jumped into the spirit of the show and soon drew very well on their personal appearances tours, which usually prove to be a barometer for the popularity of an act. Of course, the exception is that some acts on the air attain a build-up in time that none could expect at the outset. Having had considerable experience in the show business, they were publicity conscious and used that knowledge in their new connection. They went in for pictures and stories which added to their build-up. They published a very attractive song book which sold by the thousands.

In 1932, Herald, Dean and Curt began to write heart songs. Their first effort, "When It's Lamp Lighting Time in the Valley" sold more than one half million copies in fifteen countries and was recorded by many companies. This information came to us only a few days ago from Dean Upson, who was the originator of The Vagabonds and remained director of the trio. At the present writing Dean is acting as Commercial Manager of WSM, while Winston Dustin is serving in the armed forces. Herald Goodman, who was the business manager of the trio, now has his own group stationed in Texas. Curt Poulton worked as a single in Illinois for some time and we understand now that he is somewhere in Germany with Uncle Sam's Army.

The boys wrote other song successes, among which are "Little Mother of the Hills," "Little Shoes" and "Ninety-Nine Years." The Vagabonds recorded for two companies for a number of years, Dean tells us. Before coming to WSM a brief sketch of their career follows: The trio was organized and directed by Dean Upson at WLS, Chicago, in 1925, with other members. In 1928, Curt Poulton, with his mellow home-made guitar, joined the group. In 1930, Herald Goodman came with The Vagabonds when they started their two-year run at KMOX, St. Louis. These three formed a rare combination in that their voices blended so well and their enunciation was clear. So many singers of folk music, not unlike singers of classical music in that regard, pay little attention to words and lay almost complete stress on the music. The Vagabonds told a story with each song. Teachers and students of music are not apt to agree with that, we have discovered, but the average layman wants to hear the words as well as the music. When it comes to a comedy number, the singer, to be successful must become more of an actor than a singer because a comedy number "sells" by the correct use of words including the inflection thereof.

It is to be greatly regretted that The Vagabonds, Herald, Dean and Curt, separated for business reasons, although they have remained warm friends ever since. In our opinion the boys had a swell combination. Their success for many years proved that. But, none of us knows what steps will be taken tomorrow or why they will be taken. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

In 1932 THE WSM GRAND OLE OPRY welcomed one of America's greatest black face comedians when Lasses White, dean of minstrelsy at that time, joined the regular staff of our station to present a radio version of Lasses White's Minstrels, which had played the leading theatres throughout the land for several years. He brought along one of his featured comedians, Lee Davis Wilds, known to WSM listeners for the past dozen years as Honey Wilds. For many years now Honey Wilds has been the "Honey" of Jamup and Honey. He has had several partners since Lasses White went to Hollywood to work in pictures. Tom Woods, an excellent entertainer, was the first "Jamup." After his untimely death Honey made a deal with Bunny Biggs, formerly of the team of "Slow and Easy", who has done fine work as "Jamup" for several years.

One of the leading newspapers of the South referred to Lasses White as "The last of the American minstrels to have his own show on the road." We remember when Lasses was a star with Al G. Field and later with Neil O'Brien, just before he produced his own show, and we had the pleasure of seeing his first show which played the old Lyric Theatre in Memphis almost a quarter century ago. Lasses sent "Pat" Wilds and one or two others up to the studio of WMC, Memphis, when your reporter was in charge there back in 1923 and '24. Now



Mother May Belle Carter



Bill Monroe



June Carter

known as "Honey" Wilds, he and his partners gave us several minstrel numbers which were very refreshing.

Since that time Lasses White has become one of our very best friends. He is a gentleman of excellent character and a very fine artist, who has a beautiful home in West Los Angeles, California, which he and Mrs. White designed. Lasses wrote us recently that he has a new contract in pictures, playing a leading character in "Westerns". We had the pleasure of visiting him on the West Coast when we worked in Republic's "Hoosier Holiday" in 1943. Friends have told us since that he now has a beard, grown for the parts he is now playing.

Lasses and Honey took a spot on the Opry soon after they got their minstrel show going full blast at WSM. They used material which fitted the Opry and became stars of the big shindig almost immediately. The name of Lasses White was legendary throughout the South and Middle West. His high-pitched minstrel voice and delightful sure-fire comedy was a big attraction. Honey worked very well with him, with his deep voice trained to dialect so well that he lets it run over into his private life, and fed Lasses with perfect timing, so necessary to comedy routines. Their personal appearances made under the auspices of the newly organized WSM Artist Service were very successful. In fact they "had 'em hangin' on the rafters" in the schoolhouses throughout the territory served immediately by our station. Lasses and Honey usually carried a company of entertainers with them so that they could present a bang-up show of about two hours. By request, they played the same "dates" time after time and gave their audiences new material each time. Lasses had several show-

trunks filled with comedy routines and has written a great many songs, which were big hits.

The life story of Lasses White is an American success story, made possible by native intelligence and hard work. If our memory serves us, he told us that he was born on a farm in Texas. Later the family moved to Dallas, where Lasses was attracted to the theatre as a bee loves flowers. He took bit parts in "stock" and later played character parts. He played with the famous Swor Brothers.

He told us that his first big chance came when he was signed as understudy to that great American minstrel, Honey Boy Evans. When Mr. Evans died in the middle of the theatrical season, Lasses stepped into his part and carried the show through the season for Mrs. Evans. That job established him as a minstrel and he was offered one feature part after another until he quickly became a star.

In Memphis, we saw him give a half dozen encores to his "Sweet Mamma, Tree Top Tall" number and his "gags" were show stoppers.

Off stage, Leroy "Lasses" White is a very quiet and dignified man, very much a gentleman. He has helped many a performer, young and old, to get started and keep going. We understand from mutual friends that he is doing a great deal of entertaining for the service men and women stationed on the West Coast, after he finishes his work at the studios. True artists are known for their generosity in times of trouble, so it follows naturally that Lasses White would give his best to his native land, which he loves so much, because Lasses is a fine American.



Anita Carter

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Chattanooga, Tennessee, was a battle ground of importance in the War between the States, with Lookout and Signal Mountains guarding the charming southern city which seems to get hotter in the summer and colder in the winter than any place we have seen south of the Ohio River. Business abounds and beauty is resplendent in and around Chattanooga. The highway from Monteagle for a distance of about seventy-five miles is one of the most beautiful drives east of the Rockies. People are friendly and life is not too hard.

From the Chattanooga area came The Grand Ole Opry's first feminine stars, Sarie and Sally, sisters who entered the field of professional entertaining quite a few years after they reached twenty-one. Mrs. Edna Wilson and Mrs. Margaret Waters were reared in the neighborhood of Lookout Mountain. Their natural talent for mimicry became very much apparent when they were children, although their opportunity did not come until many years later. Sarie (Mrs. Wilson) the elder by several years did quite a bit of amateur performing in her early twenties. Sally, who has always looked to her older sister for guidance, followed suit later.

Sarie and Sally came to WSM in about 1933, doing a couple of dialect sketches during the week. Their understanding of women who live in the rural sections of the South was truly amazing and their ability to put into words these observations was likewise remarkable. Sarie's humor was brittle while Sallie played the good natured sister who was usually agreeable to anything short of downright harm to others. It was not long before the girls stepped onto the Opry stage and "laid 'em in the aisles."

Those were the days when a company of ten to twenty of the Opry performers would be called upon to play on crude bandstands in the deep woods of the South. Many times your reporter went along as the master of ceremonies. The neighbors came for miles around in mule drawn wagons, horse drawn carriages, or perhaps we should say "buggies" and quite a few drove up in cars. We do not wish to give the impression that the South is backward in such matters, but in the backwoods sections of America, from the Atlantic to the Pacific automobiles are not as common as trees.

We remember one of several picnics we played in West Tennessee, about one hundred and fifty miles from Nashville, where the admission price was one dime, ten cents for the entire day and we put on as many as five one-hour shows. These affairs were called "homecomings" and were arranged by a Mr. Dowland, an employee of the U. S. Post Office in Nashville, for his neighbors in his home county. Soft drinks were sold on crude counters, to be used with "side meat," which was to be had for another dime at the next counter.

More than eight thousand people came to our first picnic, most of them paying the large admission price of ten cents, but not a few remained on the outside of the barbed wire fence in their wagons with several children amusing themselves by jumping up and down on the backs of the mules. The next year our friend moved his bandstand back about a quarter of a mile, which proved to be a very sharp business move. The receipts shot up about thirty percent. It would seem that the further we go in this world the further back from the road we must move, which is indeed a pity.

The stars of our show in those days were Uncle Dave Macon on the one hand, accompanied by his very fine son, Dorris, and Sarie and Sally, accompanied by their sunbonnets and huge aprons. The neighbors stood for hours in the shade of thin

woods, because there were no seats provided, to look up with smiles lighting up weatherbeaten faces as they beamed distinct approval of the songs, hoedowns and jokes of our performers. When the sun finally went down they reluctantly withdrew and started the long trek home, telling us to be sure to come back next year. America is a great country, friends, worth fighting for beyond any shadow of doubt. The patience and friendliness of those sturdy farmers make us very humble, indeed, as we approach the microphone this very day to give them a smile and a song.

Sarie and Sally came in with the picnics which was only natural because they were a couple of picnics themselves. They made personal appearances throughout the South and in many other parts of the States. They were very funny on the stage or in the studio, but because they were naturals, they were more funny at ease. The Opry units travel long distances, or as we say in the entertainment field "make long jumps." There are long hours of association, so it is important to have pleasant traveling companions. Sarie and Sally kept the boys and girls in stitches half of the time with their large background of homely humor, mostly situation humor which carries the longest ripple. Fortunately there have been very few members of our large company who couldn't or wouldn't "take it." Few of them were born with silver spoons and if they become spoiled they did it deliberately, but a crowd is a good leveler and if one doesn't want to play ball he becomes very lonesome indeed. Unless one is "snoozing" on a trip, silence is deadly.

The Opry was growing in stature and the quality of its performers as we approached the middle thirties. Harry Stone had taken over the duties of general manager of the station and



Helen Carter

did not have much, if any time, to work on the mike. The business of a small radio station is ample, but when WSM became a fifty thousand watt outlet for entertainment and information, the business became large. It is divided into many departments: management, sales, programmes, engineering, music, announcing and dramatic, publicity, audience relations, etc., etc.

Your reporter has always taken the master of ceremonies' duties most of the time during the Opry. It has developed into almost a life work. But no one can stick on a mike four solid hours week after week. It could be done in an emergency once in a while, but not as a regular job. So WSM engaged the services of David P. Stone, one of Harry's brothers, to be the associate. David came to us with a very cheerful disposition, a capacity for hard work and several years' experience as a theatre manager. His work on the air is friendly and he has made a definite place for himself in radio. About five years ago David left us to take a good position as director of the barn dance at KSTP, St. Paul-Minneapolis.

For a short time before David came, one of the regular station announcers, who also served as continuity editor, Arthur W. ("Tiny") Stowe, did relief work on the Opry. Tiny was a jolly man, who tipped the scales at about 230. He did a nice job. Later he went to Chicago and then the West Coast, where he went into the production business in connection with radio. He revamped some old thrillers and whipped them into shape for radio broadcasting. These were syndicated under the Stowe name and were used by many stations throughout the country. Tiny had the knack for radio writing and production. We have not heard from him for some time, but our best wishes go with him wherever he lives and works.

David Stone was reared in Nashville, Tennessee, the home of WSM. He is the youngest of four brothers, Fred, Harry, Ralph and David. Fred and Ralph became architects. Fred later entered politics in Texas and is now a well known figure in the Lone Star State, as mayor of the City of Beaumont. Ralph died in young manhood, at the beginning of a very successful career, leaving a charming family and many friends. Harry and David are doing very well in the radio field.

A couple of years after we started the WSM Artists Service Department, David took it over and with his experience in theatre management did a progressive job and helped to build it into a very important part of the station. It is the booking department, handling the engagements of our performers in personal appearances in a great many states.

David became very popular on the air. His manner is pleasing and he adapted himself very quickly to the handling of folk music programmes. His work is informal, which of course is the only manner in which the Opry or similar programmes can be handled.

Along about the time David Stone joined us, it became necessary to have someone look after our music, which had developed into a good sized job. Vito Pellettieri was elected, because he had already been appointed music librarian of the station.

As we write this story, only today a Colonel in the U. S. Army dropped in to see the station and to see us to say "howdy" to Vito, who with his very popular dance orchestra had entertained him and many others a quarter century ago. Vito had one of the most sought-after musical aggregations in the South. He is the man behind the music on the Grand Ole Opry and he *knows his business*.



Bill Carlisle



"Cousin" Minnie Pearl

## CHAPTER NINE

Here we are well past the middle of our story of the Opry and we haven't told how the idea came to us. Many times we do not realize just how ideas are unfolded. The Opry idea came from the blue and the green,—the blue of an Arkansas sky and the green of the Ozarks in midsummer. There is a little town which skirts the Missouri line, called Mammoth Spring. The spring itself, from which the town got its name, is really a small lake. It is said to be one of the largest open springs in the world. The water is almost icy cold. Near it there is a large country hotel, well appointed, where people of the old South came to spend the summers. They still do. Mammoth Spring is one of the most typical small towns in America. Perhaps that is why we got the idea out of the blue and put it on the green, because the Opry is a common denominator of all of the small communities in America—letting off steam on Saturday night.

The Commercial Appeal, of Memphis, Tennessee, sent your reporter, who was one of its reporters, to the Ozarks to cover the funeral of one of America's World War One heroes. He was the son of a farmer, who was a one hundred percent American. We rode behind a mule team thirty miles up in the mountains from Mammoth Spring, leaving very early in the morning. It was a beautiful day. The neighbors came from miles around in respect to the memory of this United States Marine who gave his life to preserve their way of life. The young man's father welcomed them as he stood on the crude platform in the country churchyard, but closed his brief remarks in this manner: "Let all those who were against the government during the war pass on down the road." We didn't see anyone leave. The minister conducted the services and the neighbors drove their mules and cars silently down the road. It was a very impressive scene at the end of a day when rural Americans took time out to check up on their lives.

We lumbered back to Mammoth Spring and filed our story which drew an editorial from the able pen of one of the South's greatest newspaper men, Col. C. P. J. Mooney. One of Mr. Mooney's primary objects in life was to help improve the lives of farmers in the South.

We spent a day in Mammoth Spring. It is a beautiful spot for rest and quiet. In the afternoon we sauntered around the town, at the edge of which hard by the Missouri line there lived a truck farmer in an old railroad car. He had seven or eight children and his wife seemed to be very tired with the tremendous job of caring for them. We chatted for a few minutes and the man went to his place of abode and brought forth a fiddle and a bow. He invited me to attend a "hoe-down," the neighbors were going to put on that night until "the crack o' dawn" in a log cabin about a mile up a muddy road. He and two other old time musicians furnished the earthy rhythm. About twenty people came. There was a coal oil lamp in one corner of the cabin and another one in the "kitty corner". No one in the world has ever had more fun than those Ozark mountaineers did that night. It stuck with me until the idea became The Grand Ole Opry seven or eight years later. It is as fundamental as sunshine and rain, snow and wind and the light of the moon peeping through the trees. Some folks like it and some dislike it very much, but it'll be there long after you and I have passed out of this picture for the next one.

Units of The Grand Ole Opry are now grand stand attractions at many fairs and our performers have been starred in a great many so-called jamborees and variety shows. However

from the very beginning of our personal appearances throughout the country our units have put on their own shows. One reason is that it is a show with distinct individuality and another reason is that it is generally recognized as the top attraction in the field of American folk music and homespun entertainment in the South and Southwest.

A few groups played before the station organized its Artists Service Department, but the need for regulation and supervision, plus coordination was felt in the summer of 1934, with the result that your reporter was assigned the job of organizing the bureau to handle all personal appearances of WSM artists regardless of the type of work they did. Since then the bureau has become almost entirely devoted to the business of booking the performers who appear on the Opry and the early morning programmes which present the homespun entertainers, generally referred to as "hillbillies." We never use the word because it was coined in derision. Furthermore there is no such animal. Country people have a definite dignity of their own and a native shrewdness which enables them to hold their own in any company. Intolerance has no place in our organization and is not allowed.

Our Artists Service Department, which has developed into a very important auxiliary of the Opry, started in a very small way. Our first show was given "for free" to a local church to raise a few dollars to help pay its bills. There was something prophetic in that, because it showed a good attitude on the part of our performers who have always been ready to donate their services for a worthy cause.

Our people began to play high school auditoriums and small theatres in groups of a half dozen. Many of our smaller units



Johnny and Jack



Grandpa Jones

still play the high schools to standing room only. In those early days about ten years ago our red letter personal appearances were at large country picnics on special holidays, such as July 4th, Labor Day, etc. We will repeat the statement that the Opry is a picnic in itself. When we go out in the woods about twenty strong with the proper advertising it seems to become an event to our radio friends who have listened for many years.

One of the largest picnics we played in those days was promoted by our friend, Mr. Dowland, and staged in the deep woods near a community called Backusburg, Kentucky. It was on July 4th, which that year arrived on Saturday. We made arrangements many weeks before and drove about one hundred and fifty miles to Cadiz, Ky., where we put up at a small hotel

on the night before. Early in the morning we started down a dusty country road to the picnic grounds. We discovered to our amazement and delight that the roads were blocked for miles around by would-be members of our audience. It took us a couple of hours to get through, when we told our neighbors that we were the entertainers. When we arrived our friend Dowland was wringing his hands because he had a crowd of several thousand milling around in the woods in front of the crude band stand waiting for the show to start. Fortunately for him and us, those good people were very patient. When we unloaded our instruments they howled and whistled with delight and we started the business of putting on five shows of one hour each to what finally added up to about twelve thousand people. What a day!

While there were plenty of food and refreshments on the picnic grounds, an elderly couple insisted on inviting several of us for lunch, or as it is called in the country—"dinner." They brought an extra basket filled with fried chicken, home made bread, preserves, hard boiled eggs and several other items which enabled us to put on several more shows with the punch that is required on such an occasion. To this day we can see that crowd which extended far into the woods of dear old Kentucky. There were smiles aplenty and a spirit of kindness which would stop a good sized war in any part of the world. Too bad the so-called world politicians do not throw more picnics. They might improve and cure situations which seem to be impossible.

When that Independence Day came to an end we sat on a row of stumps and watched the sun go down. We had done our stint pretty well because our Kentucky neighbors were still smiling as they filed out of the woods headed for home. It was good to be alive.

After a short snack, Brother Dowland and his associates sat down with Paul Warmack and Bert Hutcherson of the Gully Jumpers Band and the Judge to count the twenty-five cent pieces which were deposited at the gates during the day. We were playing "on percentage" and had business to handle. Just to be on the safe side, because human nature is apt at times to run amuck, two six-foot deputies, armed with '48's stood guard as the quarters clicked into the cigar boxes.

The moon smiled down on us as we drove one hundred and fifty miles back to Nashville, known for many years as "The Athens of the South," because it is the home of several colleges and universities. What a strange thing had descended upon it—The Grand Ole Opry.

## CHAPTER TEN

Our story of the Opry has now reached the beginning of 1938, although we have jumped ahead and retraced our steps several times. One idea suggests another, so in order to catch it as it whizzes by we put it down. However, most of the pieces fit into the picture, because there is a rough-hewn continuity which has always been maintained. Like our Tennessee landscape, the Grand Ole Opry contains a variety of scenery.

For many years our biggest drawing card was Uncle Dave Macon, with the exception of Lasses and Honey and Sarie and Sally, who were not with us very long. Uncle Dave is still "hot" in his seventy-fifth year. However from the Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee there descended upon us a young man who was destined to become a leader in his field of entertainment. His head and heart joined the fingers which handled his fiddle and bow and it was not long before he started to burn up the countryside like a forest fire. His name is Roy Acuff.

Born in Maynardville, in Union County, Tennessee, Roy attended the public schools and finished Central High in Knoxville, after which he worked as a call boy for the L. & N. railroad. Then he played semi-pro baseball for Fountain City and held several jobs before he went into the music and entertainment field professionally.

Roy told us that when he was a small youngster, his dad and mother played the fiddle and guitar for relaxation. He picked up his dad's fiddle "for fun" and it was not long before he realized that he had found a friend. Simultaneously, he began to sing the heart songs for which he is now famous throughout the land.

Roy Acuff never took a formal music lesson in his life, but his natural talent for it has broken all bounds to date. His common sense, predicated upon his religious training, for his father was a minister of the gospel, has carried him to unusual heights. We have been associated with him for almost eight years now and we have never seen him take unfair advantage of anyone. More to the point, we have seen him go out of his way time after time to help others. He modestly fluffs it off by saying that "it's good business". Yes, it is good business, but it stems from something much better than coin of the realm. It comes from a big heart and a sound mind, which Scripture tells us are sufficient to overcome all evil.

After an illness of considerable duration, Roy joined a medicine show, because it took him out into the open. There he built upon his natural talent and became a real showman. In 1933 he got a job on the air at WROL and later at WNOX, Knoxville, playing in a band,—sometimes referred to as a hill-billy band. Three years later, he organized his own unit, called "Roy Acuff and his Crazy Tennesseans." The boys did a thirty minute show each day at noon, broadcasting from WNOX, and made all of the personal appearances they could get.

In the midwinter or early months of 1938, Roy and his boys came to Nashville to "try out" for the Grand Ole Opry. They were accepted and started out to play small dates. They had very tough sledding for the first two years, with many heart-breaks and small rations. Some of the boys quit and Roy had to build his band over again. If our memory serves, Jess Easterday, his present master of ceremonies and one of the comedians, is the only man who stuck it through. Jess is a good man in his job and a very likeable boy personally.

Roy then persuaded Lonnie Wilson, an old friend, to join him. Lonnie had studied engineering at the University of Tennessee for a year or so, but left school to work for a shoe

store. He later became manager of one. He created the original role of "Pap" and was Roy's chief lieutenant until he joined the Navy a couple of years ago. Lonnie is a talented comedian and a swell boy. We hear from him frequently and he tells that each time he hears the Opry over in the Pacific he sheds tears. We miss Lonnie and hope he comes home safely very soon.

Soon after Lonnie, Roy engaged Beecher R. Kirby, a native of the Smoky Mountains, who is better known as "Bashful Brother Oswald". We have watched a great many comedians work, but never have we seen one whose timing and natural ability for humor are more pronounced. He reminds us of Chick Sale, who was tops in his line a generation ago. With Brother Oswald appears Miss Rachel Veach, born and reared on a farm in Middle Tennessee, who plunks the banjo with hot country licks and laughs without restraint at the antics of her professional brother, Oswald. Miss Rachel married a young farmer neighbor about two years ago. He is in the U. S. Army as we write this story. His name is Watson and he is a fine, upstanding boy. Joe Zinkins, Sonny Day and Tommy Magnus are new members of Roy's band. Joe is an able comedian, who plays the role left vacant by Lonnie Wilson. Sonny is a youngster, who handles the accordion with dexterity and Tommy is a cracker-jack fiddler, whose favorite tune is a warm hoedown called "The Black Mountain Rag". Three of Roy's boys are now in the Armed Forces, Curly Rhodes, Jimmy Riddle and Jack Anglin. Curly Rhodes, who played the part of "Odie" is a First Lieutenant in the Army. Jimmy Riddle and Jack Anglin are both in the Army. They are fine boys.

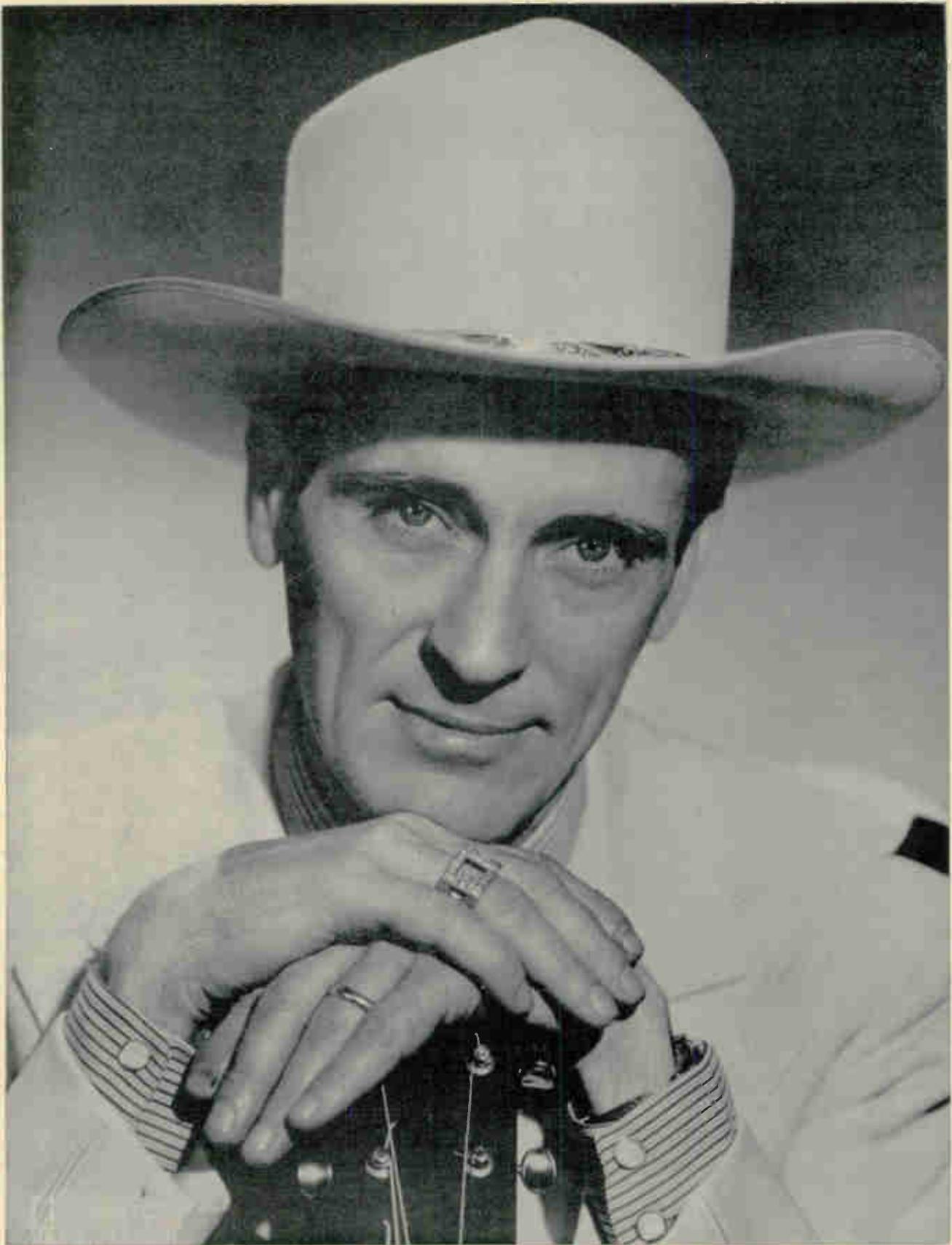
Roy Acuff got his first big break when he joined the Opry and his second when he took a leading part in The Grand Ole Opry Picture, produced by Republic Studios, in 1940. We will tell more about that later. He is now one of the biggest recording artists in America. Recently he bought a beautiful home on the banks of the Cumberland River on the outskirts of Nashville. There he lives with his charming wife, Mildred, and their son, Roy Neal, aged two.

Since Roy Acuff and his band worked in the Republic production of The Grand Ole Opry he has made several pictures for the same company and one for Columbia Pictures. He is now, in the year 1945, as we write this story under a long term contract for Republic as a star.

When he first came to WSM he brought with him two big song hits, "The Great Speckled Bird" and "The Wabash Cannon Ball". Since then he has added a great many numbers, including "The Precious Jewel". Roy's appeal, in our opinion, is what is known as "heart" in the entertainment field. He gets a tremendous mail from the older generation. On one occasion an elderly lady wanted to adopt him as her son, because his work on the air releases pent-up emotions and unlocks the door to many who are seeking escape from troubles. His voice and style are completely individual.

During the last few months of the European war, just ended, Roy was voted the most popular male singer by the men in the armed forces. He had stiff competition from the leading American entertainers in radio and pictures. While these contests were not organized to cover all of the armies, he was given the blue ribbon by many units in the Mediterranean theatre and in France. The news gratified him but did not turn his head.

In Tennessee Roy is so well liked that they tried to run him for governor. He declined after due deliberation. His future



Ernest Tubb

is indeed bright. He has helped to gather the American family around the fireside once again. That is indeed worth while. The girls and boys on The Grand Ole Opry join your reporter in best wishes to Roy Acuff, his family and his company of mountain minstrels.

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In July, 1939, the Opry was moved from a tabernacle in East Nashville to the War Memorial Auditorium on Capitol Boulevard, in the center of the city. Its seating capacity is about twenty-two hundred and it is owned by the State of Tennessee. It was built shortly after the first World War as a monument to Tennessee's heroes who gave their lives for our country. Its main purpose is to house concerts and lectures and special state affairs.

With us on our opening night at the War Memorial appeared an old friend and radio star of twenty years' standing,—Ford Rush, formerly of the team of Ford and Glenn, of WLS, Chicago, where the three of us in 1924, Ford and Glenn and The Solemn Old Judge started the WLS Barn Dance, now known as The National Barn Dance, and several other programmes.

Ford and Glenn were starred in vaudeville, after they became two of radio's brightest stars in the early 1920's. After many years together they decided to dissolve their partnership. Glenn Rowell and Gene Carroll formed the team of Gene and Glenn to be featured by the networks and several individual stations. Ford decided to work as a single and later took his son, Ford, Jr., as a junior partner, working under the names of Ford and Slim.

No sooner had he joined our staff than we crowned him as our High Sheriff and the name has stuck ever since. He continued to sing, using his mellow baritone voice, and did microphone duty as relief master of ceremonies. He played personal appearances, taking with him a group of Opry people. A year or so later he was assigned as manager and master of ceremonies of one of the Camel Caravans units, which played the army camps for a year and a half, going as far afield as the Panama Canal Zone. It was the Grand Ole Opry unit, sponsored by Camel Cigarettes and Prince Albert Tobacco. They had a very successful engagement.

Ford Rush was born in Columbia, Mississippi, situated on the Pearl River, the son of a well-to-do farmer. Columbia is a town of about 5,000 population and is representative of the thousands of smaller communities which form the foundation of our country. His father lost his life through an accident and Ford's mother and the children moved to Mobile, Alabama, when Ford was five years of age. When he was ten years of age the family moved to St. Louis. Shortly thereafter as is the case of many American boys Ford got a part time job delivering newspapers. At the age of 14 he got a job in a large

department store in St. Louis where he worked in various capacities of progression until he was about twenty.

He had a natural singing voice and when he was in his middle teens he used to sing at night in the picture houses. He considered that a pleasure and not work. When he was about twenty he received an offer to go into vaudeville as a member of an act. He became a professional singer and a few years later entered the music publishing business as Pacific Coast Manager for a music publishing concern. With headquarters in San Francisco he covered the entire Pacific Coast for a period of four years.

Radio came into being and he decided it would be a good thing for him. He had the right "hunch" because through one of his many friends he was engaged as studio manager and singer by WLS, Chicago. He went to work several months before the station was officially opened, working up programmes and lining up talent. Your reporter joined the staff as chief announcer a week after the station went on the air in April, 1924. Ford recommended Glenn Rowell to be engaged as music director and they formed the team of Ford and Glenn. They zoomed in popularity and soon were in the big money, playing theatres and auditoriums throughout the nation. For some time they were headlined by a large vaudeville circuit.

When Ford and Glenn decided to break up their partnership, Ford came to Nashville for a short time, appearing as an artist on the staff of WSM. For personal reasons he left for St. Louis, to look after some affairs. Then he struck out as a "single" handling commercial accounts on several of the larger stations in the middle west and east. After several years he grew homesick for the South and showed up bright and early one morning at WSM. He was immediately engaged and has done excellent work in several capacities for the past six years. When David Stone left to join the staff of KSTP, St. Paul, Minnesota, Ford Rush succeeded him as manager of the Artists Service Department, which he left to head the Prince Albert Unit on the road and later to be Personal Representative of Roy Acuff, whose business on the road had grown to such proportions that it required an experienced showman to handle the promotional work. He has done an excellent job for Roy. He knows what the score is in the show business.

Ford Rush is a gentleman who has made his own way since he was a youngster. He has unusual talent as an entertainer and is an interesting companion, because of his delightful sense of humor and wide experience in many kinds of work.

Ford, Jr., has been in the U. S. Army for three years, as we write this story in the summer of 1945. He is a sergeant in the Transport Corps, after serving as a radio operator in the Air Corps. He has definite talent for music and wants to pick up in the show business where he left off when the war came along. Both Ford, Sr., and Ford, Jr., adore Mrs. Rush, a charming little lady who cannot do enough for "her big boys".

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

During the winter of 1938-39 Station WSM sold thirty minutes of the Opry to the makers of Prince Albert Smoking Tobacco--The R. J. Reynolds people. Various portions of the show had been sponsored for many years, so we who work behind the mikes attached no particular significance to the deal, except that we were glad to work for such an outstanding concern. The arrangements were made by Dick Marvin, radio director for the William Esty Company, the New York advertising concern which handled the account.

Mr. Marvin had an idea in the back of his head to put the Opry on the NBC network, provided there were enough people in America who cared for our type of entertainment. His idea was considerably off the beaten track used by advertising agencies in the metropolitan areas of our country and he came in for much ribbing by many members of his profession. But he stuck to his guns and found that there was considerable interest in our efforts to entertain with homespun music and comedy.

To our very great surprise we were told that the Prince Albert people would sponsor the Opry, that is, thirty minutes of it each week, on NBC, beginning in October, 1939, with a limited number of stations taking the show. Opening night arrived. Representatives from NBC in New York and Mr. Marvin and his staff came to Nashville. The Opry House was crowded. Heretofore we had not made any attempt to produce the show, in the accepted sense of the word. We had to be snatched off the air at the end of our thirty minutes, but with that exception the half hour went over pretty well. Before the next week rolled around we had timed our opening and closing and had no further difficulty in the direction. We were off on a four year journey on what is known as a "split network," doing two half hours each Saturday night, one of them being a repetition of the other. Later during that period we were able to get the time cleared for a single half hour each week.

The stations included in the Prince Albert deal were located all of the way from the southeastern zone to the west coast. We did pretty well, for a bunch of country boys and girls, that first winter. Most things in this world being relative, we found that certain groups of the American population, regardless of locality, listened to us and wrote very interesting cards and letters in appreciation. There is a bit of the homespun in most of us and more of it in some of us.

Since October, 1939, the Prince Albert people increased their contract until in October, 1943, the Prince Albert Grand Ole Opry was put on the full NBC, Coast to Coast network of more than a hundred and twenty-five stations. As we write this it is still going strong, starring Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl and The Duke of Paducah, with the Smoky Mountain Boys and Girls, The Old Hickory Quartet, Mack McCarr and many others.

The success of the network presentation of thirty minutes of The Grand Ole Opry, by the Prince Albert people, attracted another large concern, The Ralston Purina Company, which became interested in the show during the summer of 1942 and in January, 1943, another thirty minutes of the Opry, with entirely different talent, was presented as the Purina Grand Ole Opry through stations affiliated with NBC in the South and Southwest.

As a result of these network broadcasts it has become necessary to produce the show somewhat, which has changed the old Opry much as the advanced models of automobiles have been streamlined. This is only right and proper, as long as we keep

the show in the groove of homespun entertainment, presenting American folk music and comedy.

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About a year or so before the Opry was put on NBC, one of the associate producers on the staff of Republic Productions, Inc., of North Hollywood, California, was assigned to come to Nashville to look over our show. They were considering the thought of making a full length picture of it. We discussed the show and its history with that very intelligent young man and took him out to Uncle Dave Macon's farm for a dinner which consisted of Tennessee country ham, fried chicken and ten or twelve other items aimed to satisfy the appetite of a senator. As usual, Uncle Dave was a charming host and by his unfeigned hospitality our friend caught the spirit behind the Opry and what it means to several millions from coast to coast. That homey and kindly atmosphere will last as long as people try to get along with each other. It is good will walking down the road holding out its hand to all.

The project was pigeon-holed for more than a year until the Opry "went network" and was carried by one of the Los Angeles stations. Then it came to light. Republic turned it over to its ace producer, Armand Schaefer, who has since been put in charge of all production there. Mr. Schaefer meant business and after a short time he made a deal with WSM to produce The Grand Ole Opry Picture, with a picked cast from our show teamed with The Weaver Brothers and Elviry, nationally known rural comedians. Our show was represented by Uncle Dave Macon and his son, Dorris; Roy Acuff and his Smoky Mountain Boys, with Little Rachel; and your reporter, The Solemn Old Judge.



Marty Robbins

The Opry picture was made in April and May of 1940 and the premier was held at the Paramount Theatre, in Nashville, in September, with Sergeant Alvin C. York, Governor Cooper, of Tennessee, and several other distinguished guests of honor. We broadcast a bit of the premier from the Paramount through NBC. The opening was a big success, in spite of the fact that it was held in our home town, which for the moment seemed to reverse the line "A prophet is without honor in his home town, etc." The house was turning them away that night and our friends were very nice to us, indeed. Picture exhibitors tell us that The Opry Picture is still in circulation after five years, which makes our chests swell at least a half inch.

The script of the picture was very well written by the McGowan Brothers, of Hollywood, who have done a great many similar stories for Republic. They kept it in the groove and injected plenty of homespun humor and the situations provoked many laughs which are barometers in the show business.

The business of making pictures was entirely new to us. We went to Hollywood with considerable uncertainty. As the country boy puts it, we were "shore oneasy." However, "Mandy" Schaefer, our producer, and Frank McDonald, our director, as well as the photographers, electricians, sound engineers and a host of others were very kind to us, indeed, and when the job was done on a little more than two weeks we realized that we had chalked up a grand experience. As a matter of fact, that experience opened several doors for all of us who were privileged to participate.

When we arrived at Republic Studios, we were admitted to watch the shooting of a "Western," starring Chester Morris and Ona Munson. We found, very much to our relief, that the actors were not expected to "hit it on the nose" the first time. They were given several opportunities. Republic is noted for its courtesy to and cooperation with the actors who work for it. So, that made us twice fortunate.

The story of the picture was a simple one dealing with local politics in a small town. Again we were lucky to work with The Weavers, who are democratic and kindly in their dealings with fellow actors. They were stars in vaudeville for many years before they went into picture work. Leon (Abner) was our "lead," playing the mayor and later the governor; Frank (Cicero) was the village constable, and Elviry was herself. Their handling of comedy situations is delightful and when it comes to the serious bits they are "there". Abner usually plays a "rough straight" character with excellent change of pace. Cicero is one of the funniest men in the show business and Elviry is a grand person and a swell performer.

One of the highlights of the experience to me was the trip we had "on location" about one hundred and twenty-five miles southeast of Hollywood, high up in the California mountains, where we shot some of the out of door scenes. Abner and I were billeted in the same log cabin during the night before the shooting. We swapped yarns and he told me stories far into the night of his many travels. A grand and kindly man is Leon Weaver. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Weaver (Elviry) are just



Eddie Hill

as interesting and when it comes to handing out laughs they are strictly on the beam.

Our director, Frank McDonald, is a very able picture man. The people who work for him love him for his patience and helpfulness. For many years he was an actor in New York and he knows what an actor can do and what he cannot do and live. He has the rare gift of making people do their best. When one messes up a scene for Frank McDonald, he or she feels very badly about it. He's that kind of a guy.

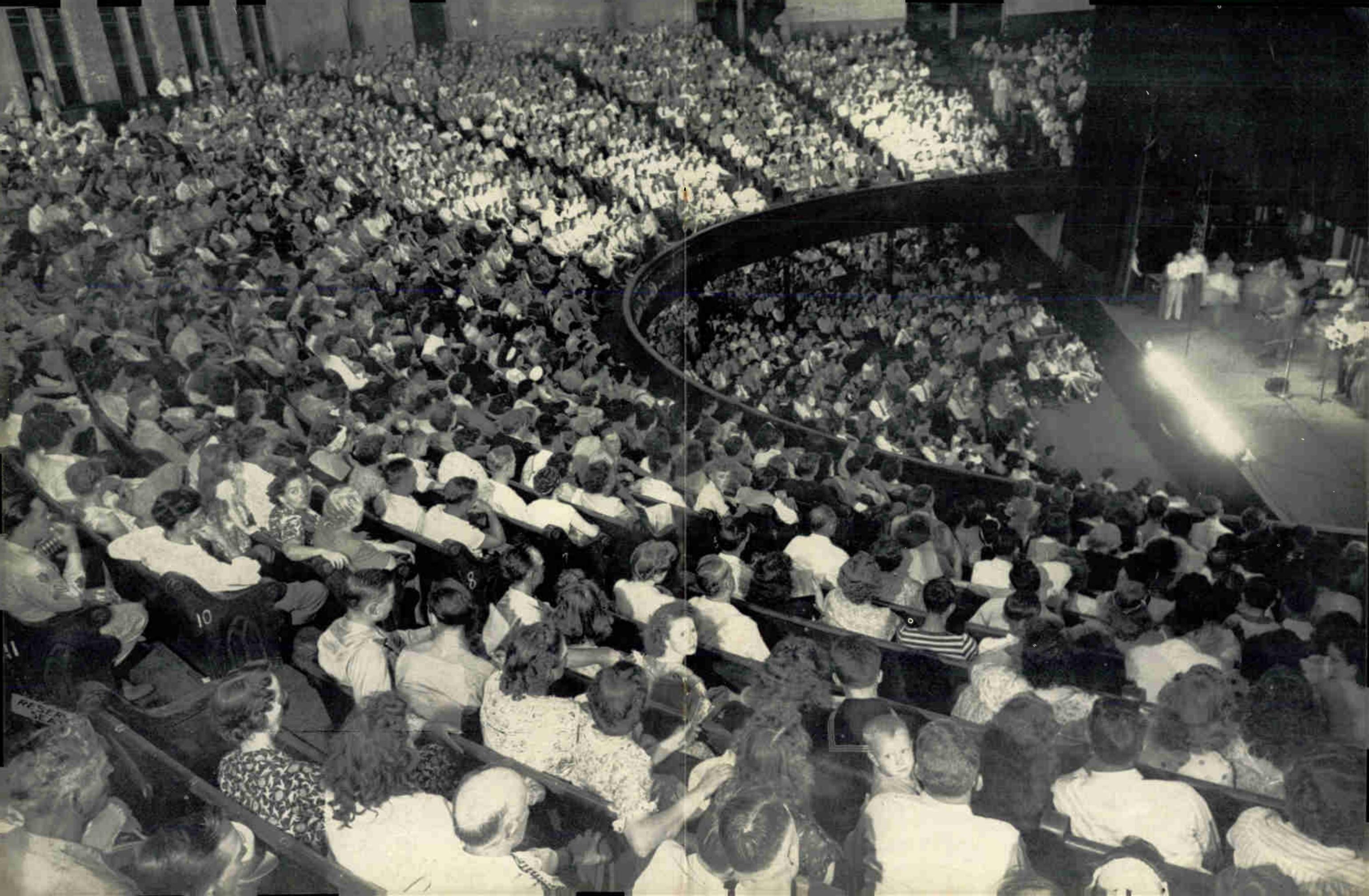
We doubt if anyone in the world ever enjoyed two weeks more than Uncle Dave Macon. Everyone on the set liked him. His off stage wit, always kindly, made him the center of quite a bit of the activity. When Mr. Schaefer let us see a few of the "rushes" of our picture a day or two before we finished, Uncle Dave exclaimed with great glee and without a trace of self-consciousness—"Whee, that's me!"

Roy Acuff and his company and your reporter got a big kick out of the experience. Roy has worked in several more pictures and now has a fine contract with Republic. It was my pleasure to take one of the principal parts in Republic's "Hoosier Holiday," produced in the summer of 1943.

Our best wishes to "Mandy" Schaefer, Frank McDonald and to all of our friends at Republic Studios!



Rod Brasfield





Hal and Velma Smith

Lew Childre is a fine artist, one of the very best in our field of entertainment, according to the opinion of your reporter. He is a gentleman and a student of human nature. He has remarkable poise in front of an audience and can go out single-handed singing with his guitar and put on a whole show by himself. That is indeed unusual. Like all true artists, Lew is modest and quiet off stage. He dresses very neatly and on off stage without any flash and he has a very happy disposition. We have enjoyed our association with Lew very much and we hope he will stay with the Opry until he is old and grey because he is our kind of "folks".

#### ZEKE CLEMENTS

As we write this story Zeke Clements is in Southern California fulfilling a very attractive contract in the Los Angeles area. Zeke left the Grand Ole Opry several months ago; but in view of his long service and good work that he did on our show it is our pleasure to say a few words about him in this story. We hope someday that Zeke will come back to the Opry and in the meantime we wish him the very best of luck.

Zeke Clements was born near Warrior, Alabama, September 6, 1911. He started in radio in the fall of 1929 at WLS, on the National Barn Dance program. In his travels Zeke has broadcast from forty-four states. He plays the guitar, fiddle, banjo and bass fiddle.

Zeke first came to WSM about 1931 or '32 with his own band entitled Zeke Clements and his Bronco Busters. He stayed quite a while and then went out on the road and played several radio stations and finally landed in Southern California where he did considerable radio and picture work. He has written several songs. His latest and biggest hit is "Smoke on the

Water", of which he is the co-author. Zeke is a very careful performer and can sell a song in grand shape. His diction is excellent. Zeke reads lines very well and has taken parts in several motion picture productions.

#### DUKE OF PADUCAH

"I'm goin' back to the wagon, boys, these shoes are killin' me!"

That closing line of the Duke of Paducah is known all over the United States and several foreign countries. His real name is Benjamin Francis Ford but almost everybody calls him Whitey Ford. He is an established radio comedian who has appeared on network shows at the head of his own company for several years. His humor is broad and he is a performer who lays his material in the lap of his audience in a manner that leaves no doubt that he has had wide experience.

Whitey Ford has a very sunny disposition and a heart in him as big as a house. Almost every day we hear somebody relate the story of a kindness he did to a fellow performer or a casual acquaintance. Whitey is a good citizen of the United States. He has done outstanding work in raising war bonds and other funds for worthy causes. His comedy is always good natured. Usually the joke is on him but if it happens to be on the other fellow it does not sting.

Benjamin Francis Ford was born in De Soto, Missouri, May 12, 1901. He started his radio career at Station KTIS, Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1924 and 1925. Following four years' active duty in the Navy he toured the country with his own orchestra, "Benny Ford and his Arkansas Travellers". He later toured the Keith Vaudeville Circuit with "Otto Gray's Oklahoma Cowboys" and later was Master of Ceremonies for Gene Autry. This versatile master of ceremonies' experience covers the entire entertainment field, Whitey having appeared with dramatic tent shows, minstrels, stage presentations, motion pictures, and he states he believes he gained his most valuable experience while appearing on a medicine show platform. During October of this past year "The Duke of Paducah" was billed as one of the headlines attractions at the big radio jamborees in Memphis, St. Louis and Birmingham which attracted a crowd of fifty-two thousand paid admissions. Whitey's ability to hold and sway audiences was recently rewarded by a citation from the U. S. Treasury Department in appreciation of his feat of selling nearly \$4,000,000 in War Bonds in less than six weeks.

The Duke of Paducah is featured on the Prince Albert Grand Ole Opry.

#### CURLY FOX AND TEXAS RUBY

Curly Fox and Texas Ruby rejoined the Grand Ole Opry recently after a very successful engagement at Station WLW, Cincinnati. Both of them were members of the Grand Ole Opry Company several years ago. They are both radio stars who have been in the game long enough to know most of the answers.

Curly Fox is one of the outstanding old time fiddlers in America. In addition to that he is a grand comedian. Curly's favorite chore on the stage and on the air is to sing a comedy number using his fiddle as a background punctuating the song with hot licks to the delight of his audience. Curly was born in Graysville, Tennessee, and he picked up the fiddle at an early age. He said he really didn't take his entertaining work seriously until after he had been doing it for a living several years.

Texas Ruby was reared on a ranch near Fort Worth and is

## CHAPTER TWELVE

The remainder of this little book will be devoted to short biographical sketches of several of the principals on the Grand Ole Opry. We have mentioned most of them in our story, but for the sake of our friends who like this information in a nutshell we are including it. These sketches are not running according to the importance of these people, because everyone on the show is important to it. We will run them for the most part on the basis of length of service on the Opry. It is your reporter's rare privilege to be a friend to everyone on the show and they return that friendly feeling to me each Saturday night. Without that good will backstage our show would miss fire and be another "one of those things". Here they are, friends:

#### EDDY ARNOLD

A West Tennessee farmer's son, who spent many a year behind the plow is Eddy Arnold who picked up his guitar when he finished high school and hit the country road with a bunch of kids. After several years of barnstorming this lad landed on the Grand Ole Opry as a member of Pee Wee King's Golden West Cowboys. Before long he became master of ceremonies for the Cowboys and did solos in song with a very pleasing voice and ingratiating manner. He remained with the Cowboys for quite a while and was given a spot as solo singer on the Opry. Shortly thereafter he was given permission to organize his own group, which he named The Tennessee Plowboys. His right hand man is Speedy McNatt, a boyhood pal who grew up with Eddy and is a cracker-jack fiddler and singer. He has three or four other boys who are competent entertainers of the homespun variety. At present they are, in addition to McNatt, Roy Wiggins, Tommy Page and Dempsey Watts.

Eddy Arnold is fast becoming a big feature on the Opry. He is making records and writing songs at a pretty clip. A few months ago he became master of ceremonies and featured singer on the Purina Grand Ole Opry, which is carried by NBC on a split network.

We have trouped with Eddy and, of course, worked with him on the radio for several years. He is a swell boy, with plenty of talent and takes his work very seriously. He is constantly working on new songs and writes much of his own material which he uses on the air and on personal appearances. He has a colorful voice with a lilt that rings far into the night. He is a particular favorite with the younger generation, although the older people like him just about as well. Eddy tells a story well and his smile "sells" his act beautifully. Eddy Arnold should go places in the entertainment field.

He is five-eleven tall, with blond hair and gray eyes and weighs about one hundred and seventy pounds. He is a very good American boy with a future.

#### BAILES BROTHERS

One of our newest acts on the Opry is known as the Bailes Brothers and their band. They came to us in October 1944 after about ten years in radio.

John, 27, and Walter, 25, are natives of West Virginia. They were born near Charleston, sons of a Baptist Preacher. Both of the boys started playing professionally at a very early age. Each one had his own group but before long they joined hands and have been operating as the Bailes Brothers for several years. In addition to the two brothers the group is made up of Miss Evy Lou, a very charming young lady, who sings with

the boys in trio numbers and does a solo every now and then. They carry two musicians who are strictly down to earth. The group contains five people at the present time. They have the "feel" of folk music and their work rings true. In addition to that, they are very fine young people who are very much interested in their work and should go a long way in their field.

#### DAN BAILEY

The latest addition to our Grand Ole Opry is the act known as Dan Bailey and his Happy Valley Boys. A curly black haired boy from East Tennessee with a good voice, Dan is the youngster of our outfit as far as band leaders go. He just passed his twenty-first birthday. He carries a band of five including himself. They have made a very good start on the Opry and are doing well on their personal appearances. Dan is very likeable and his boys, most of whom are older than he, do very good work. Our best wishes go to all of them.

#### ROD BRASFIELD

In the twenty years the Grand Ole Opry has been on the air it is the opinion of your reporter that we have never had a funnier comedian than Rod Brasfield, who joined our staff a year ago. He has been featured on the Purina Grand Ole Opry for several months and is doing an excellent job.

Rod Brasfield was born in Smithville, Mississippi, August 22, 1910. Having an older brother in the show business Rod "joined up" with him at the age of 15. It was a stock company which played throughout the South. Rod started in a very small way doing bit parts; but he said his main job was running errands for actors. There followed several years in dramatic stock playing all kinds of parts. Before joining the Opry about a year ago he was a member of Bisbee's Comedians, a well known organization playing throughout the South.

Mr. Bisbee is a shrewd showman who was starred in vaudeville as a magician for many years. Rod started with him in a small way. J. C. Bisbee thought he had the making of a good comedian, although he had never done much comedy work. Mr. Bisbee was right because Rod turned out to be the star of his show. Since he joined the Opry he has made a world of friends on our show and in our audience. He is very modest and unassuming, a grand traveling companion, and a fine young man. His future looks bright.

#### LEW CHILDRE

There is a performer for you, neighbors. Lew Childre is one of the most talented artists that we ever had on the Opry. He came to us only a few months ago with a wealth of experience in the entertainment business.

Lew Childre was born in Opp, Alabama. He tells us that he managed to finish high school there and take two years of college work at the University of Alabama. This schooling he acquired in between engagements, because he started his professional career at the age of 16.

He has been in radio 15 years and has been featured on many stations. Lew says "My parents are just plain everyday people, my dad being Judge for many years and my mammy keeping the home together and flapjack and syrup handy for three of us youngsters."

known as Radio's Original Yodeling Cowgirl. She came to WSM several years ago for a short time.

Curly Fox started in radio in Atlanta in 1933 and has appeared on a great many stations throughout the country. In addition to winning many blue ribbons with his fiddle he is reported to be the only old time fiddler ever to appear on the same program with the noted violinist, Dave Rubinoff. They gave contrasting versions of the art of playing the violin.

Miss Ruby Owens is proficient as a blues singer and does very well with the heart songs which are used to a great extent on the Grand Ole Opry.

Curly and Ruby carry with them a band of old time musicians known as the "Fox Hunters". They are grand troupers always putting forth that smile regardless of the situation at hand.

#### PAUL HOWARD

The idea of The Grand Ole Opry hit us between the eyes in the charming and sometimes rugged State of Arkansas. In 1942 that state sent us a very competent and affable representative in the person of Paul Howard, whose singing voice and cheerful and cooperative manner have won for him a definite place in our congress of country troubadors. Paul talks as well as he sings and does a fine job as master of ceremonies on his personal appearances with his own band, The Arkansas Cotton Pickers. He was a salesman and business man before he came to us and has a level head on his shoulders.

Born in Midland, Arkansas, on July 10, 1908, he was reared in the typical American manner, taking it on the chin with the rest of the kids in Midland. After he finished school he worked on a farm and did many other things which gave him the necessary general experience to get around in this world.

Paul took a fling at radio at Station KOY, PHOENIX, ARIZONA, in 1931, as an avocation along with other work. In those days there was very little, if any, financial advantage for the artists, so he had to leave it temporarily to continue his sales work. Not long after that he organized his own company which made and sold mattresses and he did very well. However, the radio bug had bitten deep into his skin. He happened to be in Nashville on business and dropped in to see us, with his guitar. His voice and manner won a spot on our show. After a year or so he was given permission to organize his own band. Since that time he has made steady progress and is doing very well.

Paul Howard is of English, Irish and Cherokee Indian ancestry. He has the shrewdness of the English, the minstrelsy of the Irish and the poise of the Indian. No matter what hits him he manages to land on his feet, which is enough to get him through this world in good shape. He is a regular guy.

#### JACK, NAP AND DEE

Jack Shook, Nap Bastien and Dee Simmons joined the staff of WSM in 1933. Jack Shook and Nap Bastien have been in the armed forces of the United States for quite a while as we write this. Dee Simmons is still on our staff. He was unable to join the service on account of eye trouble. The boys were featured on the Grand Ole Opry for several years and worked on many other programs at WSM as a trio. All of the boys were born in Illinois. When Jack first joined the staff he organized a band known as "Jack Shook and his Missouri Mountaineers". This band did a very fine job for the Opry for many years. The three boys are right and regular and valued members of our staff. We are awaiting the return of Jack and Nap.

#### FRANKIE (PEE WEE) KING

For the past eight years one of our happiest performers on the Grand Ole Opry has been Frankie (Pee Wee) King, leader of the Golden West Cowboys. When you have a happy performer you have happy audiences. He abounds in good cheer and puts on a genuine smile even when the going is tough. Pee Wee is a grand trouper who takes a great deal of interest in his act, always seeking to improve it. He has developed into one of our best masters of ceremonies on personal appearances, although until very recently he devoted his entire efforts to the musical end of the act, leading the way with his accordion which he handles with flash and shrewd showmanship. He sings with the boys.

Pee Wee was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1914. He finished high school there, but even before that time he studied the violin and the concertina, later switching to the accordion. He became a professional as soon as he finished school, playing with a group which specialized in popular and semi-classical music. In 1935 he organized the Golden West Cowboys in Louisville, Kentucky, becoming associated with J. L. Frank, veteran manager of talent and producer of shows. Not long after that he married Mr. and Mrs. Frank's daughter, Lydia, a charming young lady, even tempered and a great help to him. Mr. and Mrs. King have four children, Marietta-Jo, aged seven; Frankie Jr., three, and about a year ago Mrs. King presented Pee Wee with twin boys, Gene and Larry.

Pee Wee King and the Golden West Cowboys joined the Opry in 1937 and have made personal appearances from the Atlantic to the Pacific. He was our first performer to take a part in a motion picture. When the war thundered down on us he and the Cowboys took a basic part in the Prince Albert-Camel Caravan with the name Grand Ole Opry stamped all over the show. The caravan played almost every state in the Union and entertained the service men in Central America and the Panama Canal Zone. Pee Wee and the Cowboys recently took part in the Monogram picture, "Flame of the West," starring Johnny Mack Brown, which has just been released.

For several years Pee Wee's right hand man has been Chuck Wiggins, an able musician and talented comedian. Their comedy routines are highlights of their personal appearances. Fiddlin' Hal Smith, from Alabama, has been with him for several years. Hal is a swell boy. So are Chuck and the rest of the Cowboys who usually number seven or eight. Becky Barfield, a very talented young lady who sings and yodels with the boys has that spark which means success as a performer.

J. L. Frank has been manager of the Cowboys all of these years. He also manages several other acts on the Opry. By that we mean their personal appearances, because Station WSM is their boss on the air and is their big boss on the road. Mr. Frank is an able showman with great patience and a big heart.

#### ROBERT LUNN

For more than 15 years Robert Lunn has been a featured comedian on the Grand Ole Opry. As we write this Robert is serving in the United States Army. We have received several letters from him, the last from Okinawa. We hope and pray that Robert will come home safely for the benefit of his family and his friends who are numbered in the millions.

To put it frankly, Robert Lunn has been for many years one of the most popular boys on the Opry. There is never a dull moment when he is around. His infectious good humor, his practical jokes and his ability to practice to a limited degree the ventriloquist's art keeps the boys and girls in a mild uproar most of the time Robert is near.



Martha Carson

Robert Rainey Lunn was born November 28, 1912 in Franklin, Tennessee, where he attended school. He learned his profession of entertaining by the roadside. He broke into radio at Station WCHS and later KWTO before coming to the Opry about 15 years ago. For many years Robert had a five minute program on the Grand Ole Opry devoted to one of the many hundred versions of his own "Talking Blues". He is known as the "Talking Blues Star". His droll humor is very funny both on and off the stage.

In 1931 Robert married Miss Aline Plunkett. They have three children, Robert Jr., Peggy and a brand new baby whose name we do not have at the moment. We know Robert would not mind if we closed our little sketch with one of the verses from his own "Talking Blues".

If you want to get to heaven let me tell  
you how to do it...

Grease your feet in a little mutton suet...

Fly right over in the promised land...

Slip right over in the devil's hand...

Go easy...make it easy... go greasy.

Robert Lunn is one of our very best.

#### BILL MONROE

Many states are represented in the Grand Ole Opry. It long since became one of the largest national centers for American folk music and homespun entertainment. We receive applications from boys and girls from sixteen to sixty and these letters are postmarked from almost every state in the Union. Our regular weekly audition day is Wednesday, beginning about ten in the morning, during which time we try to help young people with their talent problems. They are so eager and hopeful that it almost breaks our hearts to tell them that the Opry is filled to running over, but their names are filed in the office for future reference. In addition to that we try to make helpful suggestions which will enable them to obtain the necessary experience to work in big time radio. Indeed WSM is one of the big time stations of America, employing several hundred people at various times throughout the year.

One morning in October, 1939, a big, good looking fellow came up to see us. He had his own band with him. His name is Bill Monroe and he gave us a sample of folk music "as she should be sung and played". Bill and his boys have been with us ever since as one of the feature acts on the show. Bill came to us with several years of radio and recording experience. He is a native of Kentucky and has been "pickin' and singin'" since he was a small boy. There is that authentic wail in his high pitched voice that one hears in the evening in the country when Mother Nature sighs and retires for the night. His handling of "blues" numbers is stellar and his biggest hit to date on the Opry is "The Mule Skinner Blues," during the rendition of which he hits the top of the barn. For several years his first lieutenant was Clyde Moody, from North Carolina, who is now doing a single act on the Opry. Clyde has a rich country baritone and is doing a fine job. Bill's other boys have come and gone, but he maintains a good act, capable of filling any theatre or auditorium you might mention this side of Madison Square Garden in New York and he could do well there with some help.

Bill Monroe was born on a farm near Rosine, Kentucky, on September 13, 1911. He is the youngest or nearly the youngest of a large family. When each of the boys reached the age of twenty-one their father offered them the choice of a horse or one hundred dollars. If memory serves us right, Bill took the horse. He acquired a small farm and worked it for some time



Kitty Wells

and then struck out for Chicago, where eventually he picked up his mandolin and became a professional entertainer. He worked with his older brother, Charley, as The Monroe Brothers for sometime, but decided to organize his own group, which he did sometime before coming to WSM. Recently another brother, Burch Monroe joined Bill and is a big help to him. Bill Monroe married Miss Carolyn Brown in 1934. They have two children, Melissa, born in 1936 and James William, born in 1941. Mr. and Mrs. Monroe bought a good sized farm just north of the city of Nashville recently and have a very comfortable American home, the kind one reads about but seldom sees. Monroe is a good citizen and the longer one knows him the better one likes him.

#### CLYDE MOODY

The Grand Ole Opry is made up of performers from more than a dozen states. Our North Carolina representative is Clyde Moody, a stalwart young man of excellent character who is genuine in his work and relationship to his fellows.

Clyde Moody has been in the entertainment field for many years. He had his own band over in Carolina. He has written quite a few songs and done considerable recording. He came to the Opry as right hand man in Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys Band. For the past year he has been doing a "single" playing his own guitar accompaniments. His popularity is growing each week. Our best wishes to good "old" Clyde Moody.

#### MINNIE PEARL

About five years ago a young lady, born in Centerville, Tenn., and graduated from Ward-Belmont College, in Nashville, where she studied dramatics, came to WSM and in a short time became one of the brightest stars on the Grand Ole Opry. Her professional name is Minnie Pearl, a composite character of the



Little Jimmy Dickens



Ken Marvin

country girls she taught for several years throughout the South. Her real name is Ophelia Colley, the youngest daughter of a kindly and humorous Tennessee lumberman, who was a very successful business man in Centerville, Tennessee for many years. While Mr. Colley passed on several years ago, Mrs. Colley continues to live in the very comfortable family home in Centerville and keep an eye on her several daughters who have made homes in various points in the South.

'Tis true she keeps an eye on them through the mail but nevertheless she is very much interested in her girls who are teachers or wives of good Americans. Ophelia gave up teaching to become one of radio's leading comedienne. She studied long and hard to become a dramatic actress and as many have done before her, turned out to be a whiz-bang of a lady clown who knocked 'em cold from Cincinnati to Panama and from the Carolinas to Texas. Her well known greeting "Howdee-ee" is a pass word to fun for all who are listening.

It's not the thing to mention a lady's age, so we'll simply say that she is a young lady, which is true. It is also true that she is somewhat over twenty-one, but not near as old as your Uncle Fud. She grew up with all of the advantages of an American girl whose doting parents saw that she lacked nothing one could ordinarily desire. She was an excellent student and developed into a fine teacher of dramatics in the schools of the South. Then she became a traveling dramatic coach. During these years she developed the character of Minnie Pearl, a country girl who pulls no punches. She is sometimes called "The Gossip of Grinder's Switch." And, friends, there really is a Grinder's Switch, a couple of miles from Centerville, Tennessee. There Ophelia's daddy built a good many small and medium sized homes for his employes, whom he cared for as he did his own family. Ophelia told us that many a time, her dad

would get up at two in the morning to help one of his men or a member of his family. Miss Ophelia Colley, as Minnie Pearl, is doing a swell job on the Grand Ole Opry. She has talent and breeding and the ability to get along with people regardless of creed, color, profession or trade, which is a pretty good ticket to give to any conductor. The Grand Ole Opry salutes its queen of comedy, a country gal who is city broke and keeping in the middle of the road.

#### POE SISTERS

From Big Creek, in the heart of the Grand State of Mississippi came the Poe Sisters, Nell and Ruth, two very charming country girls whose parents operate a farm near their home town. Nell, the older, was born May 4, 1922 and Ruth arrived in this world December 2, 1924. Both graduated from the high school in Big Creek, Nell in April 1941 and Ruth in April 1943. Like most of the Opry people they started playing and singing at a very young age. Their first radio job was on Station WICC Bridgeport, Connecticut. They were doing defense work in Bridgeport and decided to take an audition at the station. They tell us that they appeared as guests on the Dumont Television in December 1943 on Station W2XWV, 515 Madison Avenue, New York, which is now Station WABD. The girls came to the Opry in June 1944. Their voices are sweet and carry the flavor of the countryside. They play their own accompaniment. For several months they have been making personal appearances with Ernest Tubb and his Texas Troubadours. The girls are very fine young ladies and it is a pleasure to have them on the Grand Ole Opry.

#### ERNEST TUBB

Ernest Tubb, The Texas Troubadour, is one of the box office sensations of the WSM Grand Ole Opry. His Texas drawl topped off by a twinkle in his eye and a kindly sense of humor plus his ability to interpret the songs of the soil have endeared him to millions of Americans. In addition to being a radio star, Ernest Tubb has worked in several pictures in Hollywood and has made personal appearances throughout America. Ernest is also one of America's most popular recording artists.

Born in Crisp, Texas, a little more than thirty years ago, Ernest grew up in Ellis County which is largely devoted to cattle raising. When he was a youngster his guiding star was the late Jimmy Rodgers whose guitar he now proudly owns. For the benefit of the younger generation Jimmy Rodgers was known as the "Singing Brakeman" and was "tops" in his line before he died a few years ago.

Ernest Tubb made his first appearance in radio at a San Antonio, Texas, station in 1933. However, it was not until 1941 that he entered radio professionally and that was a Station KGKO, Fort Worth, Texas. He made personal appearances all over the Lone Star State. He came to the WSM Grand Ole Opry in January 1942 and has been one of its biggest drawing cards ever since. As a recording artist he is in the top bracket in the field of American Folk Music. He made his first record in 1940 and has been turning them out at regular intervals ever since.

It has been our pleasure to work with Ernest on the Grand Ole Opry and in personal appearances throughout the country. He is very courteous and generous young man, a straight shooter and a mighty fine friend to have. From where we sit it looks like Ernest is really going places.

Ernest Tubb's band, the Texas Troubadours includes Jimmy and his brother Leon Short, Johnny Sapp and Ray Head. They are talented performers and swell boys.

### COUSIN WILBUR

Cousin Wilbur is a product of West Tennessee, a country boy, reared in the vicinity of Jackson. After several years in the entertainment field as a guitar picker and singer of folk music Wilbur turned to comedy. He came to the Grand Ole Opry as a comedian with Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys. A couple of years ago he branched out on his own and came back to the Opry on his own steam about a year ago. Cousin Wilbur's real name is Bill Westbrook. He is a very funny comedian with an utterly ridiculous sense of comedy during the execution of which he uses many "props". His funniest gag is a little dunce cap he wears with a spring in it and of course it never stays on. Wilbur is very generous by nature and has made a great many friends in the business. His band is called the "Tennessee Mountaineers".

### OUR ANNOUNCERS

We wish to acknowledge with a deep sense of appreciation the work done by the WSM staff announcers who have been assigned from time to time to the Grand Ole Opry. For the most part their activities have been confined to reading commercial announcements during the show. In several cases the boys have taken a swing at the Master of Ceremonies job.

In recent years three young men have rendered very valuable service on the Opry and a few more are just beginning and are also doing very well. The veterans are David Cobb, Louie Buck, and Jud Collins. David was with us for several years before he joined the Navy. As we write this story we expect him back in the very near future and we will be very glad to have him. David's length of service tops the rest of the boys. Next in length of service is Louie Buck, a native of Alabama, with a fine sense of humor. He is a very good script writer. Louie has been writing the Royal Crown shows for a couple of years, and now he emcees the Royal Crown show. He has a particular flare for the informal type of programs and is doing an excellent job. Jud Collins just returned from long service as a pilot in the U. S. Air Forces. He is a very capable announcer with a friendly manner and is one of our top mike men. We are very glad to have him back with us.

David Cobb has an excellent voice and pleasing manner, and before he left for military service was one of the most popular announcers we ever had on WSM. These three boys have been in radio for many years and know what the score is.

Recently two younger members of our staff have been assigned to the Opry and are working in beautifully. They are Grant Turner and Ernie Keller. We have come to depend a great deal on these boys to back us up on the microphone.

Now and then our chief announcer of WSM—Ottis Devine—does some pinch hitting on the Opry, but he has such a heavy schedule during the week on the station that he seldom works on Saturday night. Ottis is a very able radioman who has been serving as our Program Director during the absence of Jack Stapp, who was in war service, and has now returned to his desk. We wish to thank all of these fine fellows for their cooperation and friendly attitude.

### OUR EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT AND COMMERCIAL MANAGER

Irving Waugh, executive assistant to the president, John H. DeWitt, Jr., and commercial manager of WSM, has a great deal to do with the policy of the Grand Ole Opry and the commercial accounts which are carried on the show, otherwise known as the sponsors. He is an experienced radio man, coming to WSM as an announcer in 1941. During the last part of

World War II he went into the Pacific area and covered the war news for WSM, recording much of it for use on your station. He was one of our most able announcers. In 1948 he was appointed commercial manager of the station and in 1952 executive assistant to the president, as well. He is a quiet and intelligent man who knows his business and does it.

### OUR VICE-PRESIDENT AND TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

We wish to thank the WSM Engineering Department headed by George Reynolds, Vice-President and Technical Director of WSM, Incorporated, for the wonderful cooperation the Grand Ole Opry has received without a single let-up, during the long years of service on the air. Carl Jenkins, supervisor of controls, has given such friendly service to us. In the years past, Percy White, of the engineering department, handled the control board for us at the Opry. Percy has been in the technical department of our parent company for many years. Garrett Davis rendered excellent service, along with many other members of the engineering staff. These quiet men kept us on the air, rain or shine, and did the job with enthusiasm. Thanks, friends!

### OUR PRESIDENT

John H. DeWitt, Jr., came back home to Nashville and WSM in 1947, as president of WSM, Incorporated, shortly after the station was separated from the parent company, The National Life & Accident Insurance Company, and made an individual corporation.

When he was a student in Vanderbilt University Engineering Department, he had much to do with the installation of WSM's first transmitter, a one-thousand watt, and when he finished his college work he was appointed chief engineer of the station. He served with distinction for many years and decided to go into research work in the East. Later he distinguished himself as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Armed Forces in radar work. Jack DeWitt was in charge of the famous experiment which turned out so very successfully—he hit the moon with radar waves and received world-wide publicity as one of America's foremost radio engineers. Later he opened an office in Washington, D. C. as a consultant in radio engineering. But when our company decided to make a separate corporation of its radio station, WSM, Mr. Edwin W. Craig, at that time president of The National Life & Accident Insurance Company, and now Chairman of the Board, brought Col. DeWitt back home, in charge of WSM, as president of the station. Under his direction WSM, Inc. has grown remarkably and installed WSM-TV, which serves this area with distinction. Col. DeWitt is one of the most able radio executives in America. He has taken a great interest in the Grand Ole Opry all through the years. We thank him for his intelligent administration of its affairs.

### OUR CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Long before The National Life decided to put in Radio Station WSM, Mr. E. W. Craig, then one of the company's vice-presidents, became interested in broadcasting. He thought that it would be a great help to the company and a big service to this area. He was absolutely correct on both counts. Therefore he became the Daddy of WSM and has remained our big chief ever since. Mr. Craig's great talent for business and his unusual ability to get along with all kinds of people have played a big part in the success of our station. Thanks so very much, Mr. Craig, for your foresight and many kindnesses!

## Part Two

### CHAPTER THIRTEEN

After about twenty years on the air the Grand Ole Opry put on fancy clothes after the manner of the fiestas of Old Mexico and the festivals of Europe. How it happened we do not exactly know. Perhaps the younger members of the cast which numbered more than a hundred wanted it that way. The show was never run with an iron hand. We let it grow in the natural way and this seemed to be in keeping with the progress of country music.

Your reporter always felt that the term "hillbilly" did not fit the dignity of country people who have a slant on the affairs of the day which is shrewd and almost unerring. The name was coined in mild derision as a gag, which we appreciated as such, but it was not right for the Opry, we felt. Along came the term "folk music," which was better but still did not ring the bell. Then, out of the blue from whence all right thoughts come, the term "country music" floated down from the clouds and settled gently upon us. It fits.

While for many years Opry performers had been beating the bushes putting on personal appearances under the trees in large groves, in small high school auditoriums and for picnics in many places, the demand for them became so great that large city auditoriums and ball parks were used to handle the crowds. We remember of one time when several of us played in front of the grand stand in the football stadium of the University of Tampa, in or near Tampa, Florida. That followed many appearances in front of county fair grandstands in the South and Midwest. Admission prices were kept low, so that large numbers of people could attend. The Opry has always been primarily for those of moderate circumstances, which means most of us Americans, who enjoy many freedoms but are not loaded with coin of the realm.

In November, 1946, James R. Denny, who had been in the service of our company for many years, became manager of the Artists Service Department of Radio Station WSM. Employed by our parent organization, The National Life & Accident Insurance Company, in the home office, Jim was called to WSM each Saturday night to handle the crowds who came from many states to attend the Grand Ole Opry. He grew up with the show and has always had the "feel" of it. He is a native of Cookeville, Tennessee, where he finished his high school work and came to work for The National Life as a boy. He knows the country people who love the Opry, because he is one of them. His heart is big and the patience he employs in handling the business for the large company of Opry performers who make their living on the road is truly remarkable. Like the Bible story of the shepherd who left his flock to find one stray sheep and bring him back to the fold, Jim Denny goes to great lengths to help those who fall in the ditch. You see, The Grand Ole Opry is not just a business operation, it is an idea employed to lighten the burdens of millions of people who tune in each Saturday night for a message of good will, which comes in the form of down-to-earth music and the humor of the country. The enjoyment of it is not an intellectual process; rather it is a heart warming response of millions to an effort of brotherly love. Not that our boys and girls get sticky with sentiment, but they sing sacred numbers and heart songs because they love them and nobody in the history of the world has been able to put out that kind of fire.

The radio broadcast of the Grand Ole Opry has been presented for many years on the stage of the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, which comfortably seats about 3,500 people. As many as eight thousand have attended the Opry on one Saturday night. There are two complete shows presented each Saturday night, insofar as the talent is concerned, which allows many to leave about ten o'clock to make way for the long line of people who wait on Fifth Avenue and around the corners of Broadway and Commerce Street for the second show. However, no one is required to leave the house; tickets are good for the entire performance from 7:30 in the evening until midnight.

The programme, during which approximately one hundred and twenty-five performers pick, sing, talk and dance, plus the comedy which takes on rare forms upon occasion, is under the direction of Jack Stapp, program manager of Radio Station WSM. From the opening program of the Opry on November 28th, 1925, until November 1st, 1947, the Opry was directed by George D. Hay, "The Solemn Old Judge," who also acted as master of ceremonies. "The Judge" continues to appear three times each Saturday night to welcome the visible audience and greet the huge radio audience which listens in many parts of America and some foreign countries. He still thinks the Opry is his baby, even though it has grown to enormous proportions during the past twenty-seven years. Opry programming is a large job with many phases artistic and commercial. Most



Moon Mullican



George Morgan

of the staff of WSM is connected directly or indirectly with the Grand Ole Opry, although the station presents many other programmes which are tops in their field. Miss Dorothy Jordan handles the Opry Ticket Bureau and Miss Frances Williams, WSM hostess, has much to do with the greeting of guests from far and wide. These charming young ladies do a beautiful and courteous job daily.

Many people have marvelled at the precision expressed in the production of the Grand Ole Opry. To members of the visible audience the large company on the stage seems to wander aimlessly about as the performers "hit the mikes" with split-second timing. The show is divided into half hours and quarter hours. The huge talent schedule back stage indicates the performers who are to appear on each of the ten or twelve programmes which are broadcast in rapid succession. As one program comes to a close the performers who are scheduled to appear during the next period are waiting back stage to take their places. It is not so difficult because the announcers always open and close a program, which allows approximately a half minute for the change of talent. Seldom in recent years has a cue been missed on the Grand Ole Opry. If it should happen the announcers, all of whom are veterans in the profession, do a quick cover-up job and the show goes merrily on its way.

The key-note of the Opry is friendliness. Your reporter started in radio work back in 1923 as radio editor of The Commercial Appeal in Memphis, Tennessee. In a few months he was appointed Director-Announcer of that station. During the past twenty-nine or thirty years he has been a guest in perhaps a hundred radio studios and took part in two motion pictures in Republic Studios, on the West Coast. Never during all of that time has he seen more friendliness expressed than is exhibited on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville, Tennessee, each Saturday night. There are no false notes in that friendliness. It is the real McCoy. So long as that spirit prevails and WSM wishes to keep the show on the air it will strike a large responsive chord in the American heart. "Smart Alecs" have no place in The Grand Ole Opry.

#### THE JORDANAIREs

(Culley Holt, leader)

Presenting spirituals and heart-songs of yesterday and today, the JORDANAIREs, five young men with several years' experience in professional quartet work, are off to a fine start as features of the Prince Albert Grand Ole Opry, which goes on the air coast-to-coast over NBC, originating in the WSM Grand Ole Opry House each Saturday night for a half hour, beginning at 8:30 p.m. Four singers, the JORDANAIREs have built a large repertoire, under the leadership of Culley Holt. The

members are as follows: Gordon Stoker, first tenor; Neal Matthews, Jr., second tenor; Hoyt Hawkins, baritone; and Culley Holt, bass. Here are a few facts about the boys:

CULLEY HOLT, who sings bass and is the leader, was born in McAlester, Oklahoma, on July 2nd, 1925. After three years in the grade school there his family moved to Steelville, Missouri, where he finished high school. He worked as a welder for about a year and then did a hitch of two years in the U.S. Army. He has been singing since he was a small boy, and did Glee Club work in school. He started as a professional singer in 1948 as one of the JORDANAIREs, when they were with Radio Station KWTO, Springfield, Missouri, for about eight months. In 1949 the JORDANAIREs came to WLAC, Nashville, for about three months, and joined the staff of WSM in September, 1949. In April, 1950, they joined the Grand Ole Opry and have done excellent work. The boys are doing personal appearances and have been on WSM in the early mornings. Culley Holt is happily married to the former Miss Betty Houghton.

GORDON STOKER, first tenor, was born in Gleason, Tennessee on August 3rd, 1924, where he finished high school. Then he joined a quartet as piano accompanist on WSM, and worked with them for about a year and a half. From there he joined the U. S. Air Force for about three years, serving most of that time in the Pacific Theater. When he was separated from the Air Force, he came back to Shawnee, Oklahoma, where his sister lived, and attended the University of Oklahoma for two years, majoring in fine arts. After that experience, he returned to Nashville and professional work, while taking more college work at Peabody. He joined the JORDANAIREs about three years ago. On September 1951, Miss Jean Wilkerson, of Nashville, and Gordon Stoker were married.

NEAL MATTHEWS, JR., who sings second tenor and plays the guitar, was born in Nashville, Tennessee on October 26th, 1929. He was graduated from Hume-Fogg High School in 1947. Neal has been a professional entertainer since he was a boy of thirteen, and has been very much interested in the WSM Grand Ole Opry. He served in the U.S. Army from January, 1951, until October, 1952, part of which time was in Korea where he was presented with a bronze star for bravery beyond the ordinary in action. He is not married.

HOYT HAWKINS, who sings baritone and plays the piano, was born in Paducah, Kentucky on March 31st, 1927. He was graduated from high school in Paducah and attended Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee for three years, majoring in music. He has been a professional since he was sixteen, with two and one-half years' service in the JORDANAIREs outfit. He served in the U.S. Army from June, 1945 until January, 1947. He was married to Miss Dorothy Porter in 1952.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Let's take a look at some of the big shows which have been presented by stars of the Grand Ole Opry in important places during the years since 1945. When the Opry started our boys and girls made personal appearances in country school houses, town halls, courthouses and small auditoriums. Then came appearances in small theatres in many states. From that time on the sky has been the limit. We have shown units at large picnics, where thousands of people have seen the performances. Ball parks and football stadiums have been the scene of many Opry shows. Our people travel in small groups of three or four to large groups of twenty or thirty. Now and then a single star will fill an engagement.

In September, 1947, a group of Grand Ole Opry performers were booked into the world famous Carnegie Hall, in New York City for two night shows. Ernest Tubb and his Texas Troubadors headed the cast, with Cousin Minnie Pearl, of Grinders Switch, and The Solemn Old Judge doing their stuff, backed up by two representatives of country music who had invaded the New York radio stations. One was Miss Rosalie Allen, a country girl who was very popular in New York as a singer of our type of music and the other was a young man well known as a disc jockey. So very sorry that his name was not included on the program, so that we could mention it here, because he did a nice talking job and fit into the picture beautifully. Miss Allen scored a neat hit. We were so glad to have those two young people with us on the show.

Our promoters were Sol Gold and Abe Lackman of New York, and Oscar Davis, a New Englander who had done considerable work with Grand Ole Opry people in various parts of America.

Brother Davis was host at a small dinner given just before the first night's show. Cousin Minnie Pearl and The Judge were somewhat concerned about how the show would be received by a New York audience. In fact, we were so much concerned that each time the waiter brought on a new dish we almost went through the roof of the very nice restaurant in which we were being entertained. Just why it is that seasoned performers who have been in the show business for many years get the "collywobblers" on an opening night we never will know, but some of the biggest of them do it. But here we were in New York City, America's largest town, getting ready to serve plain corn to an audience about which we knew nothing. Somehow or other we got to Carnegie Hall in a cab.

It was my job to open the show with a little talk about the Grand Ole Opry, as it has been my job for twenty-seven years. I knew that God takes care of all of His children at all times, but a moment before Oscar Davis gave me a beautiful introduction to a huge audience in Carnegie Hall, New York City, on that beautiful September night, I almost went through the floor. My cue came and The Lord took me out on that stage. I blew my trusty steamboat whistle several times to summon courage and lo and behold I found out that we were among friends — Americans who were in New York and were homesick for their homes west of the Allegheny Mountains. They gave me a rousing welcome and I was home free for a friendly chat with neighbors who had listened to the Opry for many years. It was a glorious experience. The show went over beautifully both nights, with

a handful of empty seats out of several hundred on the first night and standing room only on the second. I thanked God, from whom all blessings come!

About a month after the Carnegie Hall shows, a large unit of the Grand Ole Opry played two shows in one night in Constitution Hall, Washington, D. C. Our promoter, Connie Gay, who produces and directs a country music show in the nation's capital, reported that the 4500 seats in the hall were filled twice in that one night. The audience was marvelous, similar to the Carnegie Hall crowd; friendly people who had listened to the Opry for a long time.

Eddy Arnold and Minnie Pearl were our stars, with your reporter, The Solemn Old Judge, doing the emcee job, with the exception of Connie Gay's introduction of Eddy Arnold at the finish. Rod Brasfield, one of the Opry's top comedians, did himself proud that night on both shows. Rod is a swell fellow with a delightful sense of humor and the ability to sell it in a friendly and down-to-earth manner. Eddy Arnold's band, known as the Oklahoma Cowboys, did a bang-up job throughout the shows. The original Lonzo and Oscar team went over in a big way.

The Judge opened the show with a little talk about the Opry and told the audience that "We are not going to tell any jokes about Congress tonight . . . . Congress has a much better show than we have . . ." That broke the ice and away we went to a very appreciative audience. Americans are swell people.

In the spring of 1948 the Opry chalked up another big hit when Ernest Tubb and his boys, Minnie Pearl and Hank Williams played the large auditorium in Kansas City, Mo.

James R. Denny, Artists Service Manager of WSM, reports that the biggest paid admission to date was scored in the Cotton Bowl, Dallas, Texas, where 43,000 attended an all-day shindig. The show included Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys, Minnie Pearl and the Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle. That was in one day.

In May, 1952, in the Coliseum, Houston, Texas, our show played to 46,000 people in two nights. In September, 1951, in Griffith Stadium, Washington, D. C. our show played to 14,000 in the afternoon only and that same night in the Coliseum, Baltimore, Md. our people played to a capacity house of 5,000 with Carl Smith, Moon Mullican, Hank Snow, The Duke of Paducah and Ernest Tubb. On New Year's Eve our show turned them away in Washington, D. C. That was the last night in 1951, with many units playing to capacity crowds in many parts of the country. In April, 1952 the Opry played to capacity crowds in Beaumont and Corpus Christi, Texas, doing five shows per day.

We have mentioned several of the Opry's big appearances in the United States. Now we mention two glorious trips to Europe made by Roy Acuff and his Smoky Mountain Boys. The first was with Red Foley, Minnie Pearl, Hank Williams and Jimmy Dickens in November, 1949, when they played to American Service Men and Women. Roy Acuff made a second trip in 1951. A year earlier Roy took his company to Alaska to entertain American troops. The Opry has covered a great deal of ground with a message of good will to millions of people at home and abroad.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The second generation of Grand Ole Opry stars are coming along with a modern version of country music, which reflects the trend of today. While the show keeps many of the old timers who have done wonderful work for many years, WSM is keeping abreast of the times by engaging top performers in the field of country music and entertainment.

The passing of Uncle Dave Macon, beloved banjo picker and singer of the old numbers, was the saddest day the Opry has experienced since it first went on the air in 1925. Uncle Dave died on March 22nd, 1952, in a hospital in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a few miles from his farm at Readyville. He had been ill about three weeks. A memorial programme was presented on the stage during the Grand Ole Opry that very night, during which many of his friends of long standing on the show, expressed deep sorrow over the passing of that grand minstrel of the countryside, who was over eighty years of age. A week later on his "Strictly Personal" programme, The Solemn Old Judge paid the following tribute to his very dear friend:

### UNCLE DAVE MACON

A week ago today the Grand Ole Opry lost one of its brightest stars, when Uncle Dave Macon, "The Dixie Dew Drop," died after a brief illness in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, near his farm in the Cannon County Hills in Readyville. Funeral services were held in the First Methodist Church, in Murfreesboro on Sunday afternoon. Friends and neighbors in many walks of life attended the services to respect the memory of a man whose delightful sense of humor and sterling character endeared him to millions of Americans. Uncle Dave loved people and people loved him in return. He is survived by his seven sons, who loved and respected him dearly. He was 81 years of age.

Uncle Dave joined the Grand Ole Opry about 26 years ago, a few months after it was started by your reporter, the Solemn Old Judge. He was our brightest star for more than ten years and continued in the top bracket until he passed away. Uncle Dave typified the Grand Ole Opry. He was born on a farm near McMinnville and with the exception of the few years that he lived in Nashville with his parents when he was a boy, he remained a farmer and minstrel of the countryside. When he was a young man he and his wife settled on their own place in Readyville and raised a large family of seven sons. In addition to working his farm he ran a trucking business for many years.

Uncle Dave learned to pick the banjo and sing when his parents ran the old Broadway House in Nashville. They catered to theatrical people who played in the local theatres. He attended what is now known as the Hume-Fogg High School and was a diligent student. He wrote a beautiful hand with his pen.

Underneath the mask of the clown which the public knew so very well, was a Christian gentleman who practiced the Golden Rule to a remarkable extent. The Dixie Dew Drop and your reporter worked side by side for twenty-six years without a cross word, which is truly remarkable in this world. We never heard him express hatred toward anyone. He hated evil wherever and whenever he met it, but he never hated his fellow man. He was always kind and considerate to people in all departments of human existence. He made quite a bit of money during the past thirty years as a star in the field of folk music and entertainment, but it never turned his head. He kept his feet on the ground. He loved his Cannon County

Hills and the neighbors who lived near him. He was a country man who cared little for cities as such but he loved humanity and did a big job in bringing cheer to millions.

Uncle Dave began his professional career as an entertainer when he was forty-eight years of age, when many people think about taking it easy. That career lasted in a blaze of glory for more than thirty years. He had a shrewd, native wit, but was never unkind with it. In some ways his attitude toward life was childlike and without guile. He saw the good in people, but seldom became offended at unkindness in others. He often said "They don't know any better," when once in a great while he was the object of unkindness.

Time will not permit us to write a long story about our dear friend for this broadcast, and words are somehow inadequate to express our feelings, but we do wish to say that millions of Americans, including your reporter, who was so very fortunate in being associated with him for more than a quarter century, are better for having known Uncle Dave Macon.

Through a ridiculous oversight and with no intention to forget the valuable service rendered, your reporter did not mention The Delmore Brothers, Alton and Rabon, in the first part of this book. Rabon's death brought to mind the popularity of the brothers during the 1930's, when they were two of the brightest stars on the Grand Ole Opry. Rabon, the younger brother, passed away in December, 1952, after an illness of about a year.

This book was written without documents, from the acute memory of your reporter concerning The Grand Ole Opry, so we do not have many exact dates, except the starting date of the show, which was on November 28th, 1925, in WSM's Studio "A", the station's first studio, which was indeed a small room. According to memory The Delmore Brothers joined the Opry about 1933 and were here for about six years. The boys not only did a beautiful singing job, expressing the feel of the countryside, but they wrote songs. They were adept in presenting country blues numbers. One of the most popular numbers they sang in those days was "The Brown's Ferry Blues," which had a swing to it that was truly delightful. They had a large repertoire and the perfect approach to the numbers they did.

The boys were kindly and made many friends wherever they roamed. They were on the road most of the time making personal appearances and they did very well. In fact they did more than well, breaking house records in smaller auditoriums. The boys came from Athens, Alabama, where Rabon spent the last few months of his career among the people he loved. They did a fine job on the Opry.

During the past few years many bright stars were added to the already large roster of the Grand Ole Opry Company. They are Bradley Kincaid, Claude Sharpe and his Old Hickory Singers, George Morgan, Hank Snow, Carl Smith, The Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle, Moon Mullican, Martha Carson, Johnny and Jack, The Jordanares, Cowboy Copas, Lonzo and Oscar, Jimmy Dickens, Webb Pierce, Ray Price, Faron Young, Tommy Soseby, Grandpa Jones and Hank Williams.

Practically all of the big names on the Grand Ole Opry are under contract to make records, which sell in wholesale quantities. The growth of country music in America has been phenomenal during the past quarter century.



Carl Smith

Present day travel of Opry performers is made much of the time by air, although the shorter jumps are made by automobiles.

Following are many biographies of the newer stars on the Grand Ole Opry. These were written by your reporter and read on his "Strictly Personal" programme which goes on the air each Saturday morning at 11:00 central standard time. Here they are:

#### CHET ATKINS

From the Clinch Mountains, a few miles north of Knoxville, in East Tennessee, comes one of the hottest guitar pickers in the field of American Country music to lend his remarkable talent to the programme schedule of WSM, in Nashville, the home of the world famous Grand Ole Opry. His name is Chet Atkins, a tall, quiet young man of 28 years, the son of a voice and piano teacher. Chet is an artist who has learned his trade the hard way, without any formal music lessons, but with a love for his work that causes him to sacrifice almost anything for it. He acquired his first guitar when he was seven in a trade for a pistol which would not shoot. From that very moment he was on his way to become the outstanding artist that he is today. He has an individual touch, which cannot be mistaken by the public, and a flare for comedy which is altogether delightful. When Chet Atkins swings into a bunch of blues or any number which lends itself to his exceptional talents his visible and radio audience returns various kinds of applause, all to the good.

Chet Atkins was born in Luttrell, Tennessee, in the Clinch Mountains about twenty miles north of Knoxville, in Union County, on June 20th, 1924. He went to school in many places, in view of the fact that his father's profession called him thither and yon. After three years in high school he decided to quit his formal education and go to work for Radio Station WNOX, in Knoxville, Tennessee. He says that he reads music fairly well, but the way that boy plays it is a treat to the ears. He makes his own interpretations, which is the mark of unusual talent. All of this came about by self-teaching in the great school of trial and error, then correction.

When he was about sixteen he worked for the National Youth Administration, instituted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to acquire enough coin of the realm to buy an electric guitar and sound equipment. Since that time he has used eight or ten of them. At that time he was living in Hamilton, Georgia and there were few, if any musicians around, so he learned hot rhythm from some of the colored people, who seem to be away out ahead of most people in that department.

After a short time at WNOX, Knoxville, he went to WLW, Cincinnati, in 1945, working there and in personal appearances for eight or ten months. He reports that he has made personal appearances ever since he started in radio, which is the practice of most radio artists. Then he went to WPTF, Raleigh, N. C. for a while. Chet is an artist who is a feature anywhere he goes. While he may work with a band now and then, he is distinctly a soloist.

Chet Atkins came to WSM in 1946, with Red Foley, when that great star of country singing became the head man of the Prince Albert Grand Ole Opry. After three or four months he left the Opry for KWTO, Springfield, Mo. Then he went to KOA, Denver, Colorado, and back to Springfield, Mo. . .

Chet returned to the WSM Grand Ole Opry as a feature artist in the spring of 1950. He is spotted on many shows on the WSM schedule, with the Carter Sisters and Mother May-

belle on the Opry; on the Friday night frolics and WSM's early morning shows.

Chet put a Vibrola attachment on his guitar about ten years ago and he says he is almost driven crazy by inquisitive fans who want to know all about it. It does very funny tricks for him.

His favorite guitar players are D'Jango Reinhardt and Merle Travis.

#### THE CARLISLES

A very cheerful breeze swept over WSM a few days ago when Bill Carlisle and his company of country musicians hit the Grand Ole Opry with a bang and captured the audience in the Opry House with their comedy and songs. The Carlisles had been guests on the Opry many times, but now they are regulars on the show and Bill and his charming family have moved into a house in Nashville; Bill, Mrs. Carlisle and the two youngsters, Billy, Jr., eleven, and Sheila, seven, a happy family if we ever saw one. Bill Carlisle is a very popular recording artist and one of the cutest comics in the field of American country music. He radiates good cheer and is very funny.

Born on a farm about seven miles from Taylorsville, Kentucky, in Spencer County, Bill and his brother Cliff later formed the team known as the Carlisle Brothers. They were red hot entertainers for several years, until Cliff decided to retire from the show business. Then Bill added a small company and kept on going with his big smile shining in the footlights and his comedy songs floating on the air so that millions of Americans can hear them and laugh, which is fine medicine for all of us.

Bill's career is a grand American success story. He gathered a common schooling in the country, where the fundamentals of education are taught by kindly teachers, and then went to work on the family farm.

When they were kids, Bill and Cliff spent hours rehearsing their country songs and pickin' guitars. Cliff was a taskmaster; so much so that when Bill got tired the only way he could make his brother stop was to break a string.

The Carlisles started as professional entertainers in the studios of Radio Station WLAP, when it was located in Louisville. Later the station was moved to Lexington, Ky. They worked in and out of WBT, Charlotte, N. C., WSOC, in the same city; WWNC, Asheville, N. C., WAVE and WHAS, in Louisville, and made constant personal appearances from coast to coast. Their first record contract was with Columbia.

Bill Carlisle is a happy guy wherever you meet him. If he ever has a sad moment, he keeps it to himself. It is a privilege to know him. Many performers do excellent work on stage or on the mike, but are very quiet otherwise, but not Bill Carlisle, who broadcasts good cheer and a great big smile wherever he happens to be, which is helpful to the whole wide world and especially to us who are members of the large WSM family, which now numbers about three hundred men and women.

Welcome to the Grand Ole Opry, Bill Carlisle and Company. Hang up your hats and make yourselves at home.

#### MARTHA CARSON

From the blue grass section of Kentucky, not far from Lexington, comes a beautiful young lady, tall, auburn haired with handsome features, who is a bright star in the field of country music, to join the WSM Grand Ole Opry. Her name is Martha Carson, who was born on a farm near the town of Neon. Certainly she is a Neon light. If we may resort to a pun, but what is much more important, Martha Carson has a fine family background and the character it takes to be suc-

cessful in any line of work. We had the pleasure of meeting and visiting with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Amburgey, now living in Cincinnati, Ohio, when they were visiting Martha backstage in the Grand Ole Opry House a few days ago. It was easy to see why Martha is a star in her profession, for her parents are fine American citizens, who have raised a family in the best American fashion.

Martha Carson was born with a song in her heart. She specializes in sacred and heart songs and the proudest moment she has experienced to date in her work was when a minister of the gospel asked her to autograph his Bible, because he said her performances had been an inspiration to him. In fact, he said that her records have been a blessing to him. In addition to sacred numbers, Martha sings folk ballads and songs for children. She says she loves to make personal appearances, because she loves people, which is one hundred per cent insurance for success in the entertainment business. In fact, we don't see how anyone can win, if he or she does not like people. We must all get along in this world together and cooperate; without that we miss the boat which takes us to the enjoyment of a full life.

Martha Carson started to sing from the heart when she was about six years of age. When she was ten she began to play an old-fashioned peddle-organ and about four years later she acquired her first guitar, but that act required a heart-rending decision. She owned a pet calf on the farm, which she loved very much. But, and now comes the tough part, she saw a guitar in the window of a store which hit her right between the eyes. How to get that guitar, that was a burning question. Her main asset was that dearly beloved calf. After much pondering she asked her mother if she might trade the calf for the guitar. Her mother finally consented and Martha was off in a bunch on the first lap of her race to success. There were six children in the family and they used to have social gatherings, during which Martha and her two sisters sang for the enjoyment of all concerned. She and her two sisters later formed a singing act, called the Sunshine Sisters, who broke into the radio game at Station WLAP, Lexington, Ky. The girls stayed there about eight months; then to Station WHIS, Bluefield, W. Va., where they worked for about six months. Then they joined the famous Renfro Valley Barn Dance, near Mt. Vernon, Ky., headed by John Lair, an authority on American folk music. About the time John Lair was called to Station WSB, in Atlanta, Ga., to organize the barn dance there, Martha Carson joined the show. She was a star there for nine years, making personal appearances far and wide. Then to Station WNOX, Knoxville, Tenn. for about two and one-half years, doing personal appearances along with her radio programmes.

Martha Carson was engaged by our own Station WSM and did her first show on the Grand Ole Opry on April 26th, 1952. She has been doing a swell job ever since, on the air and on the road under the Opry banner.

Shortly after Martha joined the Opry she was booked as part of the Grand Ole Opry unit on the Astor Roof, in New York City. The lower part of the stage at the Astor was electrically controlled to move out onto the dance floor. Often our show would play close to the audience in that manner, especially when the show was not on the air. Martha says her most embarrassing moment as an entertainer for many years came when she was introduced to sing one night. She rounded the curve to step on the platform only to slip on the dance floor and fall. Several members of the audience helped her to her feet. When she had collected herself somewhat she said into the mike "I've always wanted to make a hit on Broadway, but I didn't know it would hurt that badly."

Martha's records have sold well for several years. She signed with Capitol Records in 1947 and has been under that banner ever since.

#### THE CARTER SISTERS AND MOTHER MAYBELLE

The Grand Ole Opry has presented hundreds of performers since it first hit the air in November, 1925. Almost all of them were and are people from American farms and small communities. The first requirement to become a member of The Opry is to be able to present vocally or instrumentally the music of the countryside. Never during the past twenty years has the Grand Ole Opry been represented by a group which expresses more wholesomeness, charm and beauty that is more than skin deep than The Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle. Helen, June, Anita and their mother, Maybelle, sing heart songs and comedy numbers which are delightful, clean and amusing to the vast audiences which tunes into one of America's oldest radio shows with a loyalty that is truly amazing. In addition to the Opry's radio audience, the congregation which packs the Grand Ole Opry House each Saturday night, with very few exceptions for Santa Claus and very bad weather, gets a first hand, visible enjoyment of four members of a lovely family. The other member, E. J. Carter, the papa of the girls and the husband of Mother Maybelle, looks after his folks with diligence and pride, so right and proper under the circumstances. He is business manager of the act.

E. J. Carter is a brother of the famous A. P. Carter, head of the Carter Family, which attained a national reputation as singers of country music a few years ago. Mother Maybelle met her husband when she was a member of the original Carter Family. E. J. and Maybelle, with their lovely daughters, maintain a beautiful country home at Maces Springs, Virginia, where the three girls were born.

The girls came into a home where country music is just about as important as food. Helen, the oldest, started to play piano and guitar when she was a small child. Now, she devotes her attention largely to the accordion, because they use it in their act. It's not always easy to find a piano that is in tip-top shape when one is on the road. June, a couple of years younger, followed with the autoharp, and Anita, the baby of the family, who is now a striking beauty, spans the big bass fiddle, sometimes referred to as the "bull" fiddle. With Mother Maybelle handling a guitar, the four give out with heart songs, novelty numbers, sacred songs and every type of number common to the presentation of country music. That is in group work. Mother Maybelle presents in solo heart songs from the deep country, which often bring tears to her audience. Along comes June, the comedienne of the group to replace the tears with laughter which goes below the surface and erupts with glee. Anita is making a big hit with country love songs, which will probably be in much demand as long as the human race is racing. Helen directs the rehearsals with her aptitude for instrumental work and there we have a group which is in the top bracket in the field of American country music.

The Carter Sisters and Mother Maybelle have been in the entertainment business for many years, having been connected with several important radio stations. Their personal appearances have covered much of America. They joined the Grand Ole Opry in June, 1950 and have done a beautiful job here. They are strictly on the beam and a pleasure to work with no matter what the occasion demands.

## COWBOY COPAS

One of the most colorful and positive characters on the payroll of the WSM GRAND OLE OPRY is a native of Oklahoma, who began plunking a five string banjo at the tender age of five and has been a professional folk musician and singer since he was seventeen. His name is Lloyd Copas, known to lovers of homespun music as Cowboy Copas. He is one quarter Indian, a tall, black haired kindly fellow with a nice sense of humor, a handsome man nearing the age of forty. Recently Lloyd has taken his daughter, Cathy, into his act and the two of them have made many records which are moving over the music counters in brisk fashion. He came to the Grand Ole Opry in 1945, as a feature man with Pee Wee King and his Golden West Cowboys. When Pee Wee moved to Louisville a year or so later, Cowboy Copas stayed with the Opry as a single and in about a month or so he organized his own band. He has been a valuable member of the company ever since.

Lloyd Copas was born on a ranch near Muskogee, Oklahoma, on July 15th, 1913, in what was formerly the Indian Territory. He attended school in Muskogee for about three years, at which time his family moved to a farm near Portsmouth, Ohio. He finished one year in high school at the age of fifteen and worked on the farm for a couple of years. Lloyd told us that his family is musically inclined and that in the evening after supper they would gather in the living room or on the porch to sing and play until the troubles of the day faded away. The banjo was his pal and he gave it many a spanking to bring out that lusty and colorful voice that pours into the Opry microphones each Saturday night.

After two years on the Ohio farm, which helped him in many ways, Lloyd Copas decided to be a professional musician and entertainer. He joined the act of Natchee, the Indian, as a singer and instrumentalist. He sang duets with Natchee, one of America's champion old-time fiddlers, who won many contests. They travelled all over the nation, promoting and presenting old-time fiddlers conventions and appeared in radio through many stations.

Cowboy Copas decided to go on his own and appeared as a single in 1940 at Station WNOX, Knoxville, Tenn., on the Midday Merrygoround for about two years. In the spring of 1942 he left Knoxville for New York City, where he worked for about three months. He did not care for America's largest town, so he got a job at WLW, Cincinnati; later he joined the staff of WKRC, Cincinnati.

In 1945 he joined Pee Wee King and his Golden West Cowboys, as a featured entertainer. When Pee Wee took his band to Louisville about a year and one half later, Lloyd Copas made arrangements with WSM to stay on the Opry, as a single. In about a month he organized his own band. Brother Copas has been making records since 1944. More than 150 numbers are on the credit side of his ledger. His daughter, Cathy, a charming young lady in her teens has been singing with her dad since February, 1951. They record for King.

Lloyd Copas and his family have a lovely home in the Nashville area. He makes frequent personal appearances in many parts of the United States, does a swell job on the Grand Ole Opry and records for King.

## JIMMY DICKENS

One of the brightest young artists on the WSM GRAND OLE OPRY is a young man very short physically, but with a voice one can hear up the hill and down the other side. In fun it might be suggested that he move the microphone aside and

open the windows and let it go at that, which brings forth a big smile and a song.

Jimmy Dickens' famous number is "Old Cold Tater." The rendition of this number often brings to Jimmy a good sized bunch of the well-known vegetable, which makes him feel proud on two counts; the first is that it shows that he has lots of radio listener friends and the second is that potatoes have been first class food for quite a few years or they would not send them to someone they like so well.

Little Jimmy Dickens' birthplace is Bolt, in Raleigh County, West Virginia, a state which has big riches in coal. When he was seventeen he got a job in radio in the city of Beckley. We do not know just how long Jimmy has been playing the guitar and singing mountain songs, but we imagine since he was a small youngster.

Jimmy joined the OPRY in the autumn of 1948. Before that he went on the air from several stations in Michigan and Ohio. He has been very successful in his personal appearances. Dickens is heard on Columbia records, for which he did "Old Cold Tater" and "Pennies for Papa."

## ANNIE LOU AND DANNY

*(Mr. and Mrs. Danny Dill)*

Two American farm youngsters, of West Tennessee, each one having finished high school, started to work as entertainers in the studios of Radio Station WTJS, in Jackson. Annie Lou Stockard came to work one day and spied Danny Dill prone on the floor trying to write a poem to use in his act. She said "howdy" but Danny was so busy expressing his literary talent that he scarcely noticed that the girl he later married was anywhere in the world. That soon changed for on May 27th, 1945, Annie Lou became Mrs. Danny Dill and they formed a double partnership as husband and wife and teamed in an act which has given many people grand entertainment. On the Grand Ole Opry we call them our sweethearts. About six weeks ago they became the very proud parents of a baby girl and will soon move into a comfortable home near Granny White Pike here in the Nashville suburbs. Annie Lou and Danny are true representatives of the best in American country music and all of their friends are better for knowing them. They sing and pick and have a delightful sense of humor and fine talent for entertaining.

Annie Lou Stockard was born on a farm near Bradford, Tennessee, in a community, which bears the shocking name of Skull Bone. We do not know just how it got the name; whether the faint remains of some prehistoric animals were found or may be the skeleton of a cow who lived in this era; but Skull Bone it is. The date of her advent into this world is July 27th, 1925. She attended the eight grades of grammar school in Skull Bone and four years of high school in Bradford, about four miles away; she was a regular American kid.

She started to play the guitar at the age of nine; soon after that she worked on the mandolin and began to sing naturally with the sweet voice which is hers. She appeared in school entertainments and community shindigs, which brought out her talent to a remarkable degree.

Danny Dill was born on a farm near Clarksburg, Tennessee, in a community known as Dollar Hill, on September 19th, 1924. His pals called him "Danny Dill from Dollar Hill." He attended grammar school and finished high school in Clarksburg, a town of about 400 inhabitants a few years ago. Danny started to play the guitar when he was about ten years old, and like Annie Lou he sang with a natural flavor and



Webb Pierce

friendliness that is now known to millions of American radio listeners. He says that he would perform anywhere, anytime to all who would listen and you can't beat that, can you? He worked at WTJS during the vacation at the close of his third year in high school and wanted to stay with the station, but his folks made him finish high school, which was very right and proper. Then he went back to WTJS as a regular entertainer.

Annie Lou and Danny formed a professional partnership a few months before they married. Some time later they joined the Duke of Paducah's road show and he encouraged them to give an audition here at WSM. They were accepted for early morning shows and in a few months were put on the Grand Ole Opry. They have done very nice work for about seven years and are very popular with their associates and a large portion of the American radio public. Their little girl, Ava Tyanne Dill was born on November 3rd, 1952, here in Nashville, and is their pride and joy.

#### RED FOLEY

A country boy from Kentucky started to be one of the most popular entertainers in the field of American folk music, when he acquired his first guitar in Blue Lick, Kentucky, when he was about five years of age. His name is Red Foley, a man with a large talent for singing homey songs and making friends by his genial manner which is straight from the heart.

Red is the star and master of ceremonies of THE PRINCE ALBERT GRAND OLE OPRY, which is carried by The National Broadcasting Company. The broadcast takes place at 8:30 each Saturday night during the summer and at 9:30 each Saturday night during the fall, originating in the Ryman Auditorium, in Nashville, the home town of the WSM GRAND OLE OPRY, and runs for thirty minutes.

The OPRY itself opens at 8 o'clock and runs until midnight at the Ryman, after which a similar program is presented from the studios. Recently Ernest Tubb has broadcast from his record shop after midnight. But the "P. A." show is the choice spot. Red is a grand master of ceremonies. He grew up with American folk music and is a born showman.

When Red had finished the fourth grade the family moved to Berea, not far from Blue Lick. There another step was waiting for the very young man, in the way of music — the harmonica which he discovered in his father's store. The story goes that Red played the fire out of them — the harmonicas — one after the other.

Red was an all around American boy, going in for sports when he attended Berea High School, winning prizes for his activities in track and basketball. But he did not let his music drop. Red did not care so much for music as it was taught, when he was a youngster, we are told, and the same may hold good for him today, for the reason that he loves to let his voice pour out in a way that feels good to him. It seems to us that folk music should be handled that way because it is essentially heart music.

Finally Red landed at WLS, Chicago, after a talent scout found him. He did a fine job on the WLS Barn Dance. By the way, Red studied one semester at Georgetown College, after finishing his high school work. He started for Chicago with his knees knocking because he had heard that it was a cold place where most unusual things happened. We'll bet that later he found out that Chicago is a good old town with its faults like other cities and towns the world over.

Red did make personal appearances with his wife, the former Eva Overstake, who had been a member of The Little Maids,

one of the feature acts of WLS. We had the pleasure of working with Mr. and Mrs. Red Foley at a large festival, near the Atlantic Coast in one of the Carolinas a few years ago. Their act was delightful. Mrs. Foley passed away in November, 1951.

#### JOHNNY AND JACK

Two farm boys from Middle Tennessee, with a yen for pickin' and singin' have worked their way to a place in the sun as two very popular exponents of country music. Johnny Wright and Jack Anglin did odd jobs and hard labor during their early youth, after finishing grammar school. Johnny was a mechanic in a garage and Jack did almost anything he could get his hands on; but that was in order to eat. However, in the back of their heads they hoped some day to become professional entertainers in the broadening field of country music. Today the team of Johnny and Jack is heard on RCA-Victor records and in hundreds of places throughout America by personal appearances. This is because they have become stars in their line of work and are featured on the WSM Grand Ole Opry, which is the World's No. One Country Music Show. The Opry draws thousands into the Ryman Auditorium here in Nashville each week and portions of it are sent by short wave and transcription to American Service Men and Women in many parts of the world. Johnny Wright and Jack Anglin are big husky fellows in their thirties, with broad smiles and a talent for singing and playing the tunes of the soil, which puts their services in demand in auditoriums and on the air almost anywhere folks get together for a shindig.

Johnny Wright was born near Crittendon's Bend, in the deep country near Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, on May 13th, 1914. He is exactly two years older than his partner, Jack Anglin, who was born on a farm near Columbia, Tennessee, on May 13th, 1916. Johnny finished the eighth grade in the Green Hill School and got a job as a mechanic in a garage in the neighborhood. He worked as a mechanic until 1932 and then got a job as a furniture maker. He has definite ability in arts and crafts.

Like most of the Grand Ole Opry people, he started to play a musical instrument at an early age. In his case Johnny was twelve when he acquired his first guitar, the playing of which was accompanied by his own voice. His dad played a five-string banjo and his grand-dad played a fiddle at country dances. Johnny went along for the ride and played with them. He became a professional in 1939 with his own act, known as Johnny Wright and the Harmony Girls, who were his wife, now well known as a singing star under the name of Kitty Wells, and his sister, who married his partner, Jack Anglin. Mrs. Wright's maiden name was Muriel Deason. They have three children: Ruby Jean, 13; Johnny, Jr., called Bobby, 10, and Carol Sue, 7. They have a comfortable home in Northeast Nashville.

Johnny and Jack joined hands in 1938 to play for Radio Station WSIX, Nashville. For the next few years they played in a half dozen studios and made personal appearances throughout the country. They joined the Grand Ole Opry for the first time in 1947 and were here about a year. The second engagement began on January 5th, 1952, almost a year ago. They want to make it their home for a long time and we certainly hope they do that very thing.

Jack Anglin was born on a farm near Columbia, Tennessee, on May 13th, 1916. His family moved to Athens, Alabama, when he was about four years old. He finished the eighth grade at the Green School there. From that time on until he became a professional entertainer, Jack worked in many lines, which gave him fine experience.

Jack started to play the French harp at the age of 12 and performed in his classrooms without too much provocation. Then he picked up the guitar, which his older brother, Van, bought for him for the large sum of four dollars. Since that time he has been pickin' and singin', without benefit of a single music lesson and is doing very well, if you should ask us.

The family moved to Nashville in 1932. Van and Jack Anglin played at parties and anywhere they could find. WSM put them on the air for the first time professionally in about 1933 on an early morning show we had then called "Rise and Shine." Then another brother, Jim, joined the act. Jim now writes songs which Johnny and Jack use in their act. Van joined the Armed Forces and is now recovering from that experience in a Veterans Hospital in Chicago. We hope that he will be back on his feet soon.

When the Anglin Brothers decided to break up their act, Jack joined his brother-in-law, Johnny Wright, and the team has been making nice progress ever since. In addition to their work on the Grand Ole Opry they make personal appearances under the banner of the WSM Artists Service, managed by James R. Denny of our staff. They record for RCA-Victor and have many hit tunes on the market.

#### GRANDPA JONES

If we look at the register of successful men and women in America we will probably find that a goodly portion of them were born and reared in the country. Old Mother Nature has a beautiful and kindly way of preparing us to do the jobs assigned to us when we grow up. She softens the growing pains and puts stiffening in our backbones. One of our most successful comedians on the WSM Grand Ole Opry is Louis M. Jones, known professionally as Grandpa Jones, whose sense of humor is so rich and delightful that he "rolls 'em in the aisles" on his personal appearances. Not long ago he headed a company of performers to entertain the boys in Korea, where he put on one show about two hundred yards behind the front lines. He and his troupe got over there just before the U. S. Army began to rotate the boys, who had been on or near the firing lines for about eight months. In fourteen days he put on 34 shows to about 38,000 service men. During his first day in Japan he put on 15 shows in hospitals. He knew what the boys like and he gave out with his heart and unusual talent. Grandpa served in the Army as an M. P. during the last war, at home and in Europe. Later he entertained the boys in Europe. Recently he was asked to entertain service men in Egypt, but he says they need it sorely in Korea and if he takes another jaunt like that he would prefer Korea. He has a big heart and shoots straight at the hearts of his audiences always; therefore his work goes over in a very big way. To say that Grandpa Jones is a swell fellow would be putting it mildly. Your reporter has worked with him on personal appearances and we found that he is all wool and a yard wide.

Louis M. Jones was born on a farm in Henderson County, near Niagara, Kentucky, on October 20th, 1913, which makes him almost 39 as we hit the air. He attended the country schools there and when his family moved to Akron, Ohio, he finished high school there. His first musical experience, always in the country groove, came when he got his hands on an ukulele at the age of eight. A saw mill was put up near his farm and one of the operators of it brought along a guitar. He was about eleven then. He worked on his brother to buy it for him, which he did for the large sum of seventy-five cents. He gave that guitar a fit for quite a while. In March, 1929

he won an amateur contest, which was conducted by Wendell Hall, "The Red Headed Music Maker," one of radio's big stars a quarter century ago, whose big hit tune was "It ain't gonna rain no more." Your reporter worked with Wendell Hall many times in those early days of broadcasting. The first prize which he won was \$50.00 in gold, which he used at once to buy a better guitar.

Grandpa Jones played straight in those days, singing ballads and novelty numbers. In 1936 he got a job with Bradley Kincaid, who was one of the biggest stars in radio then. They toured New England and it was there that Bradley called Louis Jones "Grandpa" for the first time in his professional career. Straight way, Brother Jones bought some false whiskers and some appropriate clothes, while Bradley bought him a pair of old country boots, which Grandpa says were about thirty years old at that time. He has used them ever since and they are more comfortable than ever, even though they are a trifle large for him.

Grandpa says he played on the air for nothing for a long time. Finally he got a sponsor; fact is he got two sponsors; one was a so-called "painless" dentist who charged his clients fifty cents per visit, fill or pull, and the other was the owner of a radio store. In 1933 he became a valuable member of the Lum and Abner show at WTAM, Cleveland, Ohio, which was called "The Friday Night Social." The show was broadcast on a network of 44 stations. He was with it for about a year, doing yodels and novelty numbers. In 1936 he went with Bradley Kincaid for a year or so in New England. In 1937 he went to WWVA, Wheeling, West Virginia, where he started an act called "Grandpa Jones and his Grandchildren." In 1938 he went back to New England, with Bradley Kincaid, playing at WTKC, Hartford, Connecticut.

In 1940 Grandpa made a deal with WMMN, Fairmont, West Va., and in 1941 he joined the staff of WLW, Cincinnati, where he made a big hit for about three years. In 1944 he joined the U. S. Army and was soon made an M. P. In '45 he was stationed in England and Germany, during which time he entertained for the American Forces Network in Munich. He returned to the States in '46 and joined the WSM Grand Ole Opry for the first time in March, 1947. He did a beautiful job on the Opry for about two years, at which time he received a very attractive offer to join Connie B. Gay's radio show at WARL, Arlington, Va., just a few miles from Washington, D. C. Not long after that he moved to WRVA, Richmond, Va. In April, '51 he headed the trip to Korea, which we mentioned. In April, '52 this year, he entertained the service men in Germany, Austria and Italy. He came back to the Grand Ole Opry on July 15th, of this year.

During his first engagement with the Grand Ole Opry, Grandpa Jones met a lovely girl, a member of the company, whose professional name is Ramona. Shortly thereafter they were married and now have two children. They are very happy.

#### BRADLEY KINCAID

Here is a member of the WSM GRAND OLE OPRY staff who learned folk music, of the pure American variety, at his home in Kentucky when he was a youngster; not dreaming perhaps that he would ever use it commercially.

Bradley Kincaid, who has for many years graced the top bracket in his line of work, did not have much formal schooling until he was almost grown, but how that boy did go for an education when he got started. He took his college work in Chicago, studying to be a YMCA secretary.

Dean Upson, a former member of the WSM staff, told us

that Bradley and he attended a convention about the time the latter was winding up his college work. Dean, by the way, was a member of the famous Vagabonds, composed of Herald, Dean and Curt, who were so very popular at WSM a few years ago.

One evening at camp, the story goes, Brother Kincaid took out his guitar and sang quite a few songs. They were folk songs he had probably known for many years. Dean Upson, who has business sense, took him to Station WLS, Chicago, or suggested that he go there. WLS was at that time under the direction of Ed Bill, a keen judge of what the farmers like in the way of entertainment, and before long Bradley was a sensation on the air with his own programme.

He got so many letters and cards from fans in many states that he got out what is generally regarded as the first book of folk songs to be offered as a result of radio. They sold by the thousands. That was twenty odd years ago.

Mr. Kincaid has appeared on network shows and on several large radio outlets. His voice goes over the air beautifully. It is a bit on the high side with a sweet tone and his performance of the old ballads is authentic and delightful.

Joining WSM in 1945, he has been a regular feature of THE GRAND OLE OPRY since and has appeared on other programmes. Not long ago he bought a farm near Nashville. Mrs. Kincaid was a teacher and she is a great help to her husband in his profession. They have four children, twin girls and two boys.

#### LONZO AND OSCAR

with

#### COUSIN JODY

Two Kentucky farm boys and a Smoky Mountain, Tennessee, woodcutter, known on the air as Lonzo and Oscar and Cousin Jody are going great guns on the Grand Ole Opry today after many years hard work in the field of American country music. These three comics pack a terrific wallop, and we use the word "terrific" in this case advisedly, because by personal observation we have seen members of the visible audience in the Grand Ole Opry House weep from laughter at the antics of these boys who never waste a minute when they are on stage. Their performance is filled with sly humor and their parodies of the popular country songs, which they call their No. 2 songs are as cute as they come anywhere.

The Sullivan Brothers, John, aged 36, and Rollin, 34, play the parts of Lonzo and Oscar, respectively. Lonzo is the rough straight man who emcees their act and Oscar uses a red or yellow wig and country britches with patches to bring out his fast comedy. The boys were doing very well on the Opry and on personal appearances, when they invited one of our old Opry performers, Tex Summey, to join them as Cousin Jody. Cousin Jody is a sight for sore eyes and a cure-all for most kinds of "blues." We have seen people literally go into hysterics because of the pantomime of Cousin Jody, who can do more things with a guitar than Buffalo Bill could do with two six-shooters. These three monkeys are a tonic to millions including your reporter.

The Sullivan boys were born on a farm near Edmonton, Kentucky, about nineteen miles from Glasgow. They attended the grammar school at a neighborhood community known as Cedar Flat, and they went to high school for a short time in Edmonton. They started their music career when they were six or eight years old with John playing the guitar and Rollin the banjo. They started their professional career with Radio Station W'I'JS, in Jackson, Tennessee, working for Bill West-

brooks, known a few years ago on the Grand Ole Opry as Cousin Wilbur, who by the way is a very funny man. That beginning was in 1939 and the act was known as The Kentucky Ramblers. The boys played personal appearances in high school auditoriums and at country dances, playing for both round and square dances.

The boys served a hitch, one in the U. S. Army and one in the Navy and resumed their work in the show business some time later in Sheffield, Alabama. From there they went to Louisville to join Cliff Gross and his Texas Cowboys. Rollin, who plays Oscar, joined the Opry as a member of Paul Howard's outfit in 1944. Then with Ken Marvin he worked with Eddy Arnold, who named the boys Lonzo and Oscar. John played with Eddy and emceed his stage show on the road. After considerable success, the first Lonzo, now known as Ken Marvin, decided to leave the act and do a single. Then John Sullivan joined his brother Rollin to form the present team of Lonzo and Oscar. Both boys are married. John has two boys and Rollin one girl.

Recently Tommy Warren, of Nashville, a singer of country music, joined the act, doubling on the guitar and bass fiddle. He is now recording as a singer for Columbia records and is doing well.

#### KEN MARVIN

One of the newest stars in the folk field today, Ken is recording under the R. C. A. Victor label and turning out such hits for them as "Afraid," "I Love You a Thousand Ways," "Let's Take The Long Way Home," "I'm Waitin' Just for You," "Half As Much," and "More Pretty Girls." His current best selling records are "When I Stop Loving You" and "How Much Can a Heart Ache."

Ken was born in Haleyville, Alabama on June 27, 1924. He made his first radio appearance over WMSD in Sheffield, Alabama. Since then he has appeared on WAPI in Birmingham, WLAC and WSIX in Nashville and of course, WSM's Grand Ole Opry where he has been for the past ten years. He originated the "Lonzo and Oscar" team in 1944 as a part of the Eddy Arnold show and was famous for his portrayal of Lonzo. Eighteen months ago, Ken became a featured folk singer in his own right, realizing his lifelong desire and is currently touring as a featured singer with Grand Ole Opry units.

Ken stands 5' 11" tall, weighs 165 pounds, has brown wavy hair and grey eyes. He has an eye catching wardrobe of western suits which are tailored for him by Nudies of Hollywood. When his musical schedule permits, Ken relies on golfing and fishing for his relaxation.

#### GEORGE MORGAN

In September, 1948, there came to WSM a tall lad with a very colorful voice, a quiet and pleasant manner and some radio experience behind him to join the WSM GRAND OLE OPRY. His name is George Morgan, who has made rapid strides since that time. His voice is clear and his enunciation and interpretation are excellent. In addition there seems to be a plaintive note there that lends itself well to folk music.

George was born in Waverly, Tennessee, not far from Nashville, on one of the highways leading to "Memphis Down in Dixie," on June 28th, 1924. Later his family moved to Barberton, Ohio, where George attended high school.

He began his radio career in Akron, Ohio, by way of a local talent show, which was put on for the purpose of dis-



Hank Snow

covering promising performers. From there he went to Wooster, Ohio, and Wheeling, West Virginia.

It wasn't long after he joined the OPRY that he organized a band to back him up. The members are: Hal Smith, fiddle; Don Davis, steel guitar; Velma Williams, and Bill and Jack Drake. All of these people are good performers, who can do plenty of tricks of their own while George is catching his breath.

George is married and has a lovely family. His outside interests are nature study, drawing and soft ball.

During the first part of 1949, George signed with Columbia records and during the first engagement made "Candy Kisses," which he uses as a theme. It is a very popular number for him. Later he did "Please Don't Let Me Love You," "Rainbow in My Heart" and "All I Need Is Some More Lovin'".

#### MOON MULLICAN

A tall, heavy-set, blue-eyed, blond-haired slightly bald Texas rancher with a friendly smile and an inexhaustible fund of human interest stories is Moon Mullican, a star of the Grand Ole Opry who plays piano, organ and guitar and sings blues with a Texas drawl to the extent that he is one of the biggest recording stars in the field of American country music. Moon Mullican is more than that; he is a philosopher from the Texas plains who has a great capacity to get along with his neighbors anywhere he may roam. Fact is, Moon Mullican has been roaming for almost twenty years, as this story goes to press and on the air. He is easy going, hard working and kindly. Moon and his wife have a nice little home with plenty of land around it, near Goodlettsville, a few miles north of Nashville, where they entertain their friends, which are many. Moon is a great pal of former Governor Jimmie Davis, of Louisiana, who is secondarily a big star in the entertainment field, plus his marked ability in the fields of politics and education. The governor appointed Moon a special investigator but Brother Mullican likes people so well he didn't care much about investigating them, so he hit the road with his own band to entertain millions of people by way of radio and personal appearances. All of us, of course, are individuals, but that Mullican guy is an exception. He has his own way of doing almost everything from wearing a Texas sombrero and string tie to beating the daylights out of a piano and singing with a country wail to the delight of young and old. Moon is in the middle, being forty-three years of age.

Moon Mullican was born on March 29th, 1909, about five miles from Corrigan, Texas, on a farm. He says that the town of Corrigan had a population of 1401 and when he left to play music in many parts, Corrigan still had 1400 folks. Nothing could shake it as it lay in the sunshine about 93 miles north of Houston. His dad had a farm and Moon loved that farm. He did a big plowing job just before he shook his dad's hand to embark on a career that has been rich in experience and coin of the realm.

He attended the Friendship School and Church, which combined religion and education. His little settlement was called Rock Island. He finished the tenth grade, but he said he passed the ninth and tenth grades largely because he was a hot man on the basketball team, which was unbeaten for five years. They only had six boys on the team, five regulars and one substitute, but they took their opponents, coming and going.

When he was six years old, his dad brought home an old organ. Moon played the fire out of it. Some time later he said his

dad gave him a five dollar bill and told him to take some music lessons from a lady who taught the art in a nearby community. She listened to him play a few minutes and said: "You have learned everything wrong; there is nothing I can do for you; here is your five dollar bill; you never will do any good with music." However, since that time Moon Mullican has done much good with the music which comes from his heart, even though to this day he reads only a few simple chords. So the river flows down stream regardless of the boulders that might be in the way and life goes on no matter what presents itself in the way of an obstruction.

When he was sixteen an old colored man gave him a guitar, the back of which was held fast with shoe tacks. He learned how to play it in his own way. He started as a professional musician with a guitar when he was twenty-five, after he caught a freight train to Houston and got a job in a night club from six in the evening to six in the morning. No salary, just tips from the customers, but they ran high. Soon he switched to the piano and saved up a few dollars to buy a half interest in a little band. In 1937 he started working as a "single." Since that time he has made over 600 master records for King and has played on the air from many stations, plus his personal appearances, which were the main source of his income and still are that. The story of the life of Moon Mullican is a long one, filled with human interest, but our time and space will not permit us the pleasure of its telling. We would like to add that Moon Mullican is one of the most colorful characters in the field of country music, so far as this reporter's experience goes and is has covered more than a quarter century.

#### WEBB PIERCE

Along comes a big, husky American citizen from Louisiana, who was reared on a farm near Monroe, one of the most promising of the second generation of Grand Ole Opry stars, to add his lustre to the largest show of its kind in the world. For several years a star of the Louisiana Hayride, Webb Pierce joined the Opry on September 13th, and has been shooting them straight over the plate so far. He looks like a young banker, but entertains the vagueries of a typical artist; so much so that if his head were not fastened securely on his shoulders by Mother Nature he would undoubtedly walk off and leave it hanging in mid-air. And that, if you please, in spite of the fact that he was successful as a business man before he went into the business of entertaining professionally. Webb likes people very much, added to which he has unusual talent as a singer of country music. That combination is surefire in the show business.

Webb Pierce was born on a farm near Monroe, Louisiana, on August 8th, 1925, where he lived until he was nineteen. He attended a country grammar school, where he became familiar with the three R's and then went to the Okaloosa High School for a while, after which he became a student and graduated from the Ouachita Parish High School. He says frankly, that he was more interested in playing volley ball, which is a big game there, than he was in academics.

He started to sing and play on his own guitar, kid-fashion, at the age of twelve, which is the case with most of our prominent performers. After high school, Webb served two years and eight months in the U. S. Army, stationed most of that time in Camp Polk, Louisiana. After he was honorably discharged, or separated, as they call it now, from the Army, he went to work for Sears, Roebuck & Company, in Shreveport, Louisiana, as a salesman. In a few weeks he was appointed a department

Miss Frances Williams, WSM Receptionist



Miss Dorothy Jordan, WSM Ticket Bureau



James R. Denny, Artists Service Manager



Jack Stapp, WSM Program Manager

manager in their retail store there, where he worked happily for about five years.

Then one fine day he decided to audition for Radio Station KWKH. Horace Logan, the program director, turned him down. Horace now laughs at his own mistake, which has been made by many an executive in radio since the time KDKA first went on the air back in 1920. Webb was somewhat discouraged, but after a couple of months he tried it again. He says he firmly believes that Mr. Logan put him on the Louisiana Hayride to stop him, but after the first performance he told him that the audience seemed to like him, so he could come back the next week. The show is presented in the Municipal Auditorium in Shreveport, each Saturday night. So he worked on a week-to-week basis for some time, doing a few personal appearances, which did not interfere with his regular job. In about six months he felt that he was set to be a professional entertainer, so he quit his job at Sears and shortly thereafter organized his own band, with which he toured what is known as the "Ark-La-Tex" area, of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas.

Webb Pierce records for Decca. He writes songs as well as sings them. He has four numbers which stand out among a long list in his repertoire. They are "Wondering," "That Heart Belongs to Me," "So Used To Loving You" and his latest hit, "Back Street Affair." The second and third were written by Webb Pierce.

#### RAY PRICE

There has been a great bond of blood and friendship between Tennessee and Texas, since the days of Sam Houston, former governor of the Volunteer State, who became the political daddy of Texas. WSM has enjoyed the friendship of thousands of Texas who have listened to our station since it first went on the air in October, 1925. Many Texans have taken a particular interest in the WSM Grand Ole Opry. It seems to appeal to those who live in the wide open spaces and some of the most successful appearances made by Grand Ole Opry artists have been in the Lone Star State during the past quarter century. Ernest Tubb, the Texas Troubadour, is a splendid representative of Texas, who has been a bright star of the Opry for about ten years.

Along comes another Texas boy, who is the subject of our short biography today. His name is Ray Price, who was born on January 12th, 1926, on a farm or ranch near Perryville, Texas, about a hundred miles east of Dallas. Ray is doing a fine job on the Grand Ole Opry and other WSM programs, plus personal appearances, which are giving him fine experience to add to the many years of music study which he took as a boy.

When he was a small boy, Ray moved to Dallas with his mother and spent his summers on the ranch near Perryville. His first experience in music came when he borrowed his elder brother's guitar, at the age of nine, and picked out a few simple tunes on it to his own vocal efforts. A few years later he began the study of voice in earnest and continued the formal lessons for eight years. Ray finished high school in Dallas and studied to be a veterinary surgeon for about three and one half years in the North Texas Agricultural College. He gave it up because his heart was in music.

Ray Price sang in the high school choir and took part in many activities in the field of music.

He joined the U. S. Marines in August 1943, and was in that sturdy branch of the Armed Forces for two and one half years.

Ray has been a professional singer, specializing in folk music, for four years. During that time he has handled some of the popular tunes as well. He organized his own band for personal

appearances and travelled in Texas and Louisiana. He began recording for Bulleit Records in 1949. A few years ago Ray Price played the rodeo circuits as a sure-enough "bronco buster" and not as an entertainer, and stayed with it for three years. Ray signed with Columbia Records in March, 1951.

As strange as it may sound, in these days of radio, Ray did not enter the field of broadcasting until he joined the WSM Grand Ole Opry in January, 1952. His first appearances under the Opry banner were made with Hank Williams in Virginia. He says he loves radio work and dreamed about getting on the Grand Ole Opry when he was a youngster. He says he is so happy that he has to pinch himself now and then to see if he is dreaming. But he is not dreaming, because a man in a dream does not deliver the goods like Ray Price does when he is before the mike in radio or personal appearances.

Ray Price is a very serious young man with great ambition to get ahead in his chosen profession for which he is well equipped. It is a pleasure to have him here with us at WSM.

STRICTLY PERSONAL extends best wishes to Ray Price, a Texas Cow-poke, who believes in the motto "Live and Let Live".

#### CLAUDE SHARPE'S OLD HICKORY QUARTET

WSM, sometimes referred to as "The Air Castle of the South," is the home of many fine musical organizations. One of the most colorful and talented groups which appears on many radio productions emanating from WSM is Claude Sharpe's Old Hickory Quartet, which gives very intelligent and artistic interpretations of the hymns of many churches, heart songs dear to the American public and old popular numbers which have become classics in their field as a result of public demand over a long period of years.

Claude Sharpe has been a member of the WSM staff for many years. About a dozen years ago he organized the Old Hickory Quartet, composed of four talented singers who have studied music formally and informally for twenty or more years. Mr. Sharpe is the first tenor; Ross Dowden, second tenor; Luther Heatwole, the first bass, and Joseph Macpherson, second bass.

Claude Sharpe is a native of Maynardville, Tennessee, where he was born on July 20th, 1906. He was educated in the public schools and at George Peabody College, in Nashville. He took two years conservatory training in Nashville and studied voice in New York City. He is director of music in McKendree Methodist Church, Nashville. He reports that he has sung in many groups but considers his Old Hickory Singers tops. He owns and operates a farm near Nashville, which he loves to supervise. His favorite sports are fishing and quail hunting and he has seven champion bred bird dogs.

Ross Dowden was born in Sebree, Kentucky, on April 17th, 1914. He has two degrees, B. S. and M. A. from George Peabody College, Nashville. He taught in three colleges and headed the music department in one of Nashville's high schools. He has been a member of the Old Hickory Singers since its organization, with the exception of 1943 and '44, spent in the U. S. Army. Ross Dowden likes quartet work and the heart songs which mean so much to many. His hobbies are hunting, fishing and bird dogs. He has a rustically beautiful home near Nashville in the middle of a patch of woods, where relaxation comes easily.

Luther Heatwole not only sings, but is familiar with the piano, cello and bass violin. He was born in Virginia on July 15th, 1902. He finished high school and attended Shenandoah College, in Virginia, and Peabody Conservatory of Music, Balti-

Ottis Devine, Chief Announcer



Vito Pellettieri, WSM Music Librarian



David Cobb, WSM Announcer



Louie Buck, WSM Announcer

more, Maryland. He played in musical comedy and served in World War No. 1 as a sergeant in the Headquarters Company, 116th Infantry, 29th Division. He is a member of the quartet of the Westminster Presbyterian Church. He owns and operates an antique shop one mile out of Nashville, on the Airport highway. He likes fishing, hunting and other sports.

Joseph Macpherson was born in Nashville, Tennessee, on June 7th, 1899. He attended the public schools and two years in David Lipscomb College here in Nashville. He studied voice and piano in Nashville and was a leading basso in the Metropolitan Opera in New York City from 1926 to '32. He was an original member of the Old Hickory Singers. He has a decided preference for hymns and the old songs of the South. He is an insurance man working in the Nashville area.

The Old Hickory Quartet made records for Columbia for seven years. Mr. Sharpe reports that he recently signed with Dot records, owned by Randy Wood, of Gallatin, Tennessee, and is very much pleased with the new deal.

#### MARTY ROBBINS

A son of the gorgeous state of Arizona, who grew up where nature is very kind and the wide open spaces punctuated here and there by stately mountains furnish a zest for living that is truly unusual, joined the WSM Grand Ole Opry in January 1953, to represent his state on a show that is known around the world as tops for its presentation of country music. Marty Robbins, who came into this world as Martin Robinson, but cut it short for professional reasons, was born in Glendale, Arizona, on September 26th, 1925, and is doing very well, thank you, for a young man of 27. Of course, he's only getting a good start and we expect to hear much from him as the years roll by.

Marty Robbins attended grammar school in Peoria, Arizona, and high school in Glendale, after which he worked on several odd jobs in his home town before he joined the U. S. Navy shortly after the outbreak of World War II. He served three years, two of which were spent in the South Pacific. It was then and there that he bought his first guitar and decided to concentrate on music as a career. That is a departure from most of the boys and girls on the Opry, who began pickin' and singin' when they were very young. However, there is no hard and fast rule about such things. The question is, can we deliver the goods.

When he finished his hitch in the Navy, Marty started his professional work as a country music singer playing his own guitar accompaniment with Radio Station KTYL, in Mesa, Arizona. It was a small outlet, but it gave him a chance to gain the experience so vital to season a performer so that he can smooth out his work and gain the necessary poise to deliver in the pinches. He did a quarter-hour show there and his work helped him to get a bigger job: in Station KPHO, in Phoenix, Arizona, where he was given a half-hour show in the mornings, five days a week, called "Chuck Wagon Time." He organized his own band, the K-Bar Cowboys, and after gaining a large following, was rewarded with a quarter-hour television show in KPHO-TV four days a week.

During that time Marty Robbins was invited to appear as a guest artist on the Prince Albert Grand Ole Opry, which is carried by NBC each Saturday night on a nation-wide hookup. In addition the Arizona lad made several records which enabled him to gain a regular place on the Grand Ole Opry, where he made his first regular appearance on January 19th, 1953. In addition Marty appears several times each week on other programs here at WSM, featuring country music.

When Marty gets a little time off, he jumps on his motorcycle for a cross-country run. That was his favorite sport in Arizona, but here in Tennessee the traffic may slow his motorcycle down somewhat. He also says that he is a "hot-rod" fan. In spite of the fact that he and his wife and three-year-old son, Ronnie, like their home in Tennessee, it is not likely that they will forget Arizona, because his wife has the unique name of "Marizona," a combination of Maricopa, her native county, and Arizona.

For Columbia records, Marty Robbins has made "Love Me or Leave Me Alone," "Tomorrow You'll Be Gone," "Crying 'Cause I Love You," "I Wish Somebody Loved Me," and his biggest hit till now, "I'll Go On Alone."

#### CARL SMITH

A tall, fine looking young man in his early twenties, a native of the Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee, who recently served a hitch in the United States Navy, joined the WSM Grand Ole Opry in May, 1950, and has zoomed in popularity until he is in the top bracket of American folk singers. His name is Carl Smith, who sings from the heart with a natural voice which strikes a responsive chord in millions of lovers of homespun music and entertainment. Recently Carl signed a contract with the Kellogg people, manufacturers of cereals, to do two shows by transcription which are carried by many stations throughout the states. One is carried by WSM at 1:55 to 2 P. M. Mondays through Fridays. Both shows are produced here at WSM. Carl is now the star and master of ceremonies of a half hour of the Grand Ole Opry, which goes on the air from 9:30 to 10:00 each Saturday night.

Carl Smith was born in Maynardville, Tennessee, the home town of Roy Acuff, on March 15th, 1927. He finished high school there and joined the U. S. Navy on the day of his graduation, in the spring of 1945. He took training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, near Chicago, and was sent to California for about four months on Treasure Island, near San Francisco. Then he went to sea, making four trips to the Philippine Islands. He was in the Navy eighteen months, his grade being seaman second class.

He started singing at the age of ten. When he was seven he acquired his first guitar and after three years picking he was able to accompany his own voice. He listened to the Grand Ole Opry regularly. Carl did professional singing during his junior and senior years in high school, appearing with a band during the summer months. He worked for Radio Station WROL, Knoxville, Tennessee, following his third year in high school. Unlike most performers, Carl did not play during the time he served in the Navy.

After his separation from the Navy, he went back to WROL to work as a member of the Brewster Brothers' Band. He became a vocal soloist, working with bands, which appeared on the air from Stations WWNC, Asheville, N. C., and WGAC, Augusta, Ga.

Carl Smith joined the WSM Grand Ole Opry, as a single, singing folk music. He says that love songs are the most popular for him, and we might add that he sings them so well that lovers, young and old thrill to his colorful voice, which he keeps in the country groove.

He has made a number of records for Columbia, among the most popular being "Let's Live A Little," "Mr. Moon," "Overlooked An Orchid," and "Let Old Mother Nature Have Her Way." He makes frequent personal appearances. He dresses with excellent taste, usually appearing on the stage with sports coat and slacks in quiet colors.

Grant Turner, WSM Announcer



Jud Collins, WSM Announcer



Tom Hanserd, WSM Announcer



Vic Batson, WSM Announcer

## HANK SNOW

Hank Snow, The Singing Ranger, one of the bright stars of the WSM GRAND OLE OPRY, arrived in the realm of fame and fortune the hard way by years of struggle, punctuated by many hard breaks. Aided by the love and loyalty of his charming wife, Hank has overcome difficulties that would have knocked out a man of less courage many years ago. From cabin boy on an ocean-going ship at the age of twelve to one of America's most popular singers of folk music, Hank Snow's life story is intensely dramatic and very interesting.

Clarence Eugene Snow was born on May 7, 1914, in Liverpool, a small town in Eastern Canada in the Province of Nova Scotia. He lived with his parents and three sisters and went to school there until he was eight years old. The family then moved to Lunenburg, a small town about seventy-five miles east of Liverpool, near the Atlantic Ocean. In 1926, when a severe depression hit the country, Hank had to quit school, at the age of twelve, because of the family's financial situation. He went to sea as a cabin boy.

When Hank returned from his first trip across the Atlantic, he found his family enjoying a more profitable year. While he was away they had purchased a second-hand Gramophone and some records of Vernon Delhart, a singer who was popular in that section of the country and elsewhere. Hank had loved music since he was a small youngster. He heard a guitar for the first time while listening to the new Delhart records, and decided that he would become a singer and guitar player. Two of the numbers Delhart sang, he said, were "The Wreck of the Old 97" and "The Prisoner's Song." He went back to sea dreaming of music and the part he hoped to take in the presentation of it.

Some time later Hank was practicing with his guitar when his mother came home with a new record, but the singer was not Vernon Delhart. It was a new American singer and the label on the record said "Jimmie Rodgers." When Hank put that record on and started it to play and first heard Jimmie Rodgers singing "Moonlight and Skies," he knew that nothing short of a singing career would ever please him. He vowed he would be as near like Jimmie Rodgers as he could make it. By then he was sixteen and had completed four years on the sea.

After several years of working in the fish industry and lines of business requiring hard labor of a physical nature, in spite of his slight physical build, Hank landed a job singing at Radio Station CHNS, Halifax. Shortly thereafter he was presented by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in a coast-to-coast hookup across Canada. He became very popular on the air and began to breathe a little easier. He auditioned for RCA-Victor Records, writing two numbers for the occasion, "Lonesome Blue Yodel" and "Prisoned Cowboy." Victor released the numbers in about three months. He was only twenty-two years of age.

Through the help of Ernest Tubb, "The Texas Troubadour," whom he met in Fort Worth, Texas, Hank Snow joined the cast of the WSM GRAND OLE OPRY on January 6th, 1950. Both Ernest and Hank are great admirers of the work of Jimmie Rodgers.

Hank Snow is a big hearted, courageous artist and a man who has overcome difficulties that seemed to be insurmountable. His wife, Minnie Blanche, whom he married shortly after he entered radio work, is a lovely lady who has encouraged him at every turn of the road. Their only child, Jimmie Rodgers Snow, is now fourteen and has much talent as an entertainer. The Snows have a charming home near Nashville.

## STRING BEAN

The WSM Grand Ole Opry is one of the most colorful radio shows in America. We might even go so far as to include the world, but we haven't been that far yet, so we'll stick to the mountains and valleys and plains of our own land, which during the past quarter century has given out with a great surge of country music and entertainment. There are more than one hundred performers on the Opry and each one is a distinct individual with regard to talent and personal habits. One of the most strikingly individual performers on the show is the subject of this little story. His name is David Akeman, but he is known in radio as "String Bean," a tall, lean East Kentucky mountaineer, who yearns for a farm similar to the one on which he was born near Annville, Kentucky, not so very far from Lexington, the capitol of the famous blue grass country where some of the world's finest race horses are bred. On the Grand Ole Opry we call him just plain "String." He is a quiet, easy-going, kindly and shrewd man of about thirty-seven years, who has a lovely wife and comfortable home in Madison, Tennessee, about ten miles north of Nashville. String Bean is one of nature's noblemen. He said he only went to the sixth grade in the mountain school near Annville, because he just couldn't learn anything from books. Fortunately, however, there are many other ways to learn things, the chief of which is by patience and experience. String has acquired both of them, with a sense of humor and homely philosophy that is rich in wisdom. The boys and girls on the Opry love him as a man who minds his own business but is always friendly to others.

String Bean, otherwise known as David Akeman, was born on a farm near Annville, Kentucky, on June 17th, 1915. He attended the mountain school for about six years, long enough to learn how to read, write and figure and decided to help his dad on the farm as a regular job, but mountain music was what he yearned to play.

When he was thirteen he and another boy made a crude banjo which, lo and behold, would carry a tune. String loved that banjo perhaps more than his buddy did, so he bought his half interest in the project for the price of two chickens ready for cooking. That put him in business, sure enough, and from that day until this he has whipped a banjo until it whines for mercy. He helped his dad plant and care for corn and tobacco in the daytime and played at all of the country shindigs he could dig up in the evening. Money was scarce, but he and his pals had a barrel of fun, which was shared by hundreds of his neighbors.

When he was about twenty years old he got a job at Radio Station WLAP, Lexington, Kentucky, with Cy Rogers and his Lonesome Pine Fiddlers. He stayed with them for about four years, during which he picked up such old favorite tunes as "Pretty Polly," "Suicide Blues," "Crazy War," "Mountain Dew" and "Get Along Home, Cindy." He still uses those numbers on the Opry, with a mountain wail in his voice and his red hot banjo picking in the background. Then he joined Charley Monroe and his Kentucky Partners. Charley is an older brother of Bill Monroe, who has been a star of the Opry for many years. He was with Charley for about three years, doing rural comedy and black-face comedy. They were stationed at WBIG, Greensboro, North Carolina.

David Akeman got his professional name from Acey Martin, an announcer for WLAP. Acey didn't know his name, so he said "Come here, String Bean." String came and he has been going very well ever since.

String Bean joined Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys on

the Grand Ole Opry in July, 1942. It was your reporter's pleasure to introduce him to the Opry audience for the first time. That was the beginning of a business association and friendship which has gone for ten years without a bobble. About three years later he teamed with Lew Childre and the two comedians toured the country for another three years. The boys had a wonderful act; Lew, the short dynamic performer, one of the fastest talking men on the Opry, and String, the tall, easy-going man of few words off stage, but when he is on the mike he bats a thousand. String Bean has been featured on the Prince Albert Grand Ole Opry for about three years and does a beautiful job with his country singing and banjo picking. Now and then he makes personal appearances as a featured performer with one of the many units of the Opry. He is a grand entertainer and one of the finest men on the show. It is always a pleasure to work with him and travel with him.

#### KITTY WELLS

A young lady who started to pick the guitar and sing homespun songs at the age of fifteen right here in Nashville has blossomed forth as one of the most popular stars in the field of American country music after quite a few years steady experience in radio and personal appearances. Her name is Kitty Wells to the huge American radio audience. In private life she is Mrs. Johnny Wright, wife of the senior partner in the team known as Johnny and Jack, stars of the WSM Grand Ole Opry. As we write this little story, Kitty Wells, a bright star recording for Decca, is a new star in her own right on the Grand Ole Opry, featuring sacred numbers, love songs and novelty tunes in an individual manner which is gaining for her thousands of new friends each time she appears on the World's No. 1 Country Music Show, the Grand Ole Opry. Miss Kitty is tall, dark and beautiful, with a quiet manner and a warm smile.

Long before she acquired her first guitar, as a small child, Muriel Deason, now known as Kitty Wells, sang to herself as she went about the tremendous business of going to school and being a regular American girl. She had a natural, sweet voice, which has grown into one of beauty and warmth with experience. On the stage of the Grand Ole Opry, Kitty Wells commands attention for two reasons: first she is a grand performer and second she is a very beautiful girl with dark hair and eyes that twinkle as she gives out with a heart song or a comedy number. Her latest recordings for Decca are "Honky Tonk Angel," which is a big hit, and two later ones, "A Wedding Ring Ago" and "Things I Might Have Been," which are coming along very well.

Before she signed with Decca she recorded eight numbers for RCA-Victor, most of them religious numbers.

Muriel Deason started professionally with her cousin, Bessie Choates. The act was styled The Deason Sisters. The girls played their first radio engagement with Station WSIX, here in Nashville, appearing on a show called "The Old Country Store." They were with WSIX for about a year. Then she met Johnny Wright and his sister, Louise, and they formed an act known as Johnny Wright and the Harmony Girls. A few months later she became Mrs. Johnny Wright. They have three children, Ruby Jean, 13; Johnny, Jr., called Bobby, 10, and Carol Sue, 7.

Kitty Wells has been travelling with her husband for many years. When they were playing for Station WNOX, in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1942, she started to do a single and took the name of Kitty Wells, which is the name of an old American

folk song, that the Pickard Family and others sang on the Grand Ole Opry twenty-odd years ago. After about three years they moved to Station WPTF, Raleigh, North Carolina. Then they joined the Louisiana Hayride at Station KWKH, Shreveport, where they played for three or four years.

Johnny and Jack and Kitty Wells are real Grand Ole Opry people. They hope to make their home here for a long time to come, because it is headquarters for American Country Music.

#### EDDIE HILL

The Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee, covered with wooded beauty and a dreamy haze which is glorious to behold, have furnished so many artists in the field of American country music. That is as it should be, because they put forth a warmth, beauty and friendliness that is a great credit to our nation. The WSM Grand Ole Opry is indeed fortunate to have in its company several stars whose background is there. Along comes the subject of our short biography today in the person of Eddie Hill, a tall, husky farmer with an ingratiating smile and manner which comes straight from the heart—a friendly manner which helps many of us get through the day with more ease and comfort and gratitude for the knowledge that we are citizens of a great nation where each individual has the freedom to express his talents, as long as that does not hamper his neighbor.

Eddie Hill was born in Delano, Tennessee, in the Smoky Mountain country, not far from Knoxville, on July 4th, Independence Day, 1921. His father was a farmer and textile worker who loved his family and worked hard to support it. The family moved to Springtown, Tenn. in the Smokies when he was about six, where he entered and finished the grades.

Eddie said his introduction to country music took place when he was six or seven, as a buck dancer to the expert fiddling of his dad, who was very talented with that No. One instrument. His grandfather played a five string banjo. Eddie played with his family at country dances, strutting his stuff with great glee and gusto. Eddie's father taught him harp singing when he led a choir and soon thereafter Eddie became his assistant. Eddie won his first amateur contest at the age of seventeen in Chattanooga, as a singer. He carried his own band but the boss man would not hire anyone but Eddie, so he went back to the farm, because he felt that he and his boys were working together for better or worse. He worked on his father's farm for about two years. A country man loves his country.

Eddie Hill's first professional engagement came with Cas Walker, a fine character who helped many a country performer to get a start. That was at Radio Station WROL, in Knoxville. Shortly thereafter Eddie, who is a born salesman, sold himself to a sponsor and went to Station WNOX, in Knoxville, where Lowell Blanchard, an executive of the station told him that the station handled its own business and sold its own commercial accounts. However, Mr. Blanchard gave him his own early morning show at 5 A.M. to try him out. He had a band of five boys, including himself. After about two months, he got a spot on the Midday Merrygoround at WNOX, which is a very well known program devoted to homespun music. He stayed there about two years. Rejected for military service on account of flat feet, he barnstormed for six or seven months.

After hitting the road he got a job at Station WAPO, in Chattanooga, in charge of the Saturday night shows as master of ceremonies and singer, where he worked for about a year. From there he joined Johnny Wright and his Tennessee Hillbillies, going to Knoxville for about two years. After trouping

with Johnny Wright and Mack Anglin, known on the Grand Ole Opry as Johnny and Jack and considerable experience in Memphis, he joined the Grand Ole Opry in January, 1952. Shortly thereafter he was sent to the Astor Roof in New York as master of ceremonies and singer of the basic unit which WSM maintained there during the engagement which lasted four weeks.

Returning to WSM Eddie has been doing very nice work as a disc jockey and handling early morning shows. Following the Grand Ole Opry and the Ernest Tubb Show which starts at midnight and runs for an hour into early Sunday morning, Eddie Hill does an hour of records which he calls "Opry Echoes," from one until two each Sunday morning.

Eddie's latest show is "Breakfast at the Opry" which is broadcast each Saturday morning at 8 o'clock from the Noel Hotel Dining Room.

As a singer of country music, Eddie Hill records for Mercury. He is very popular with his fellows and does a jolly job of emceeing.

Eddie Hill was married when he was only 17 and his wife 15. They have six children, five girls and one boy. He says he wants to get a farm for his family because he thinks youngsters belong there; at least his youngsters. We are inclined to agree with him, which is neither here nor there.

STRICTLY PERSONAL extends best wishes to Eddie Hill, a swell young man and fine artist in the field of country music, and to his interesting family, for happiness and success!

#### HANK WILLIAMS

Uncle Sam may not know it but one of his strongest admirers is a young man by the name of Hank Williams, one of America's most talented singers and writers of modern folk music. Recently Hank entertained members of the American Armed Forces in Europe and "wowed 'em." While in Europe he was treated beautifully but he swore that if he ever returned to his native land he would kiss the ground he walked on. A short time later he landed from a plane at an airport near Nashville and did just exactly that. It was so typical of Hank, an American boy with a wallop in his voice that makes a rabbit spit in a bull dog's face. A tall, thin man of about thirty, Hank shoots 'em on top of the table, looks you straight in the eyes and loves the American way of life, which he proves each day to be a success.

Hank Williams was born in 1922 in Georgiana, Alabama. He and his family moved to Montgomery before Hank was old enough to go to school. He still considers it his home town. His first vocal expressions of a public nature were delivered on the streets of Montgomery when he sold newspapers as a wee youngster.

His talents, like those of many other gifted people, began to show when he was very young. When Hank was eleven, his parents managed, through sacrifice, to provide him with an inexpensive guitar as a Christmas gift. Things were pretty rugged back in 1933, so it was no easy job to buy what could be called a luxury when the need for necessities was so pressing. But that investment has since paid dividends beyond their wildest dreams, perhaps, for it started a chain of events which has led Hank Williams to the top bracket of his beloved profession of pouring out his heart in homespun music.

The parable of the talents written in the New Testament applies to this young man, who is one of Alabama's favorite sons. Hank Williams has used his talents and by so doing their unfolding has been very remarkable. As a singer, he

has been for some time in the first American group in the field of folk music. As a composer, he is one of the most prolific in the history of the GRAND OLE OPRY. And only recently he signed a four year contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to appear exclusively in that motion picture company's productions. It would be unfair to ask more of a young man who developed his vocal chords hawking newspapers on Court Square in Montgomery, Alabama.

His first recording for MGM, "Move It on Over," was a hit and it brought, among other things, an offer from Station KWKH in Shreveport, Louisiana. Hank accepted and he's been rising ever since. He joined the WSM GRAND OLE OPRY in 1949. By 1950 he was a nationally known figure in the field of folk music. Before that year had ended, a Williams tune invaded the popular field with the Polly Bergen recording of "Honky Tonkin'." That set a pattern for other popular artists. In 1951 Tony Bennett recorded the Williams "Cold, Cold Heart" and sent it sailing squarely to the top of the popularity poll. This was followed by Jo Stafford and Frankie Laine picking up "Hey, Good Lookin'" for a hearty waxing.

Hank's wife, Audrey, is a charming young lady who has helped him at every turn in the road. They have two children.

#### HANK WILLIAMS MEMORIAL

On New Year's Day 1953 we received the tragic news of the death of Hank Williams, who was for several years one of the brightest stars on the WSM Grand Ole Opry. Last week's transcription of this program had already been made, so now is the time to say a few words about a young man whose memory is dear to the hearts of millions of Americans and not a few people in other lands. More than twenty thousand people walked the streets of Montgomery, Alabama, during the funeral services which were held in the city auditorium, unable to be seated in the hall. We have worked with many stars in the entertainment business during the past thirty years, but never have we seen an artist who got under the skin of the public further than did Hank Williams, who took very little formal education as a youngster and hawked newspapers on the streets of Montgomery, the capital of Alabama and the former capital of the Confederacy.

Hank Williams was a poet of the countryside, with a keen insight of human nature and a flashing wit. He wrote more than a hundred songs which were used and probably many more just for the fun of it. He was loved deeply by the people who work hard for a living. In his short career, for he was only thirty when he passed, he grossed more than a half million dollars, but that never changed his attitude toward his friends, which were numbered in the millions. This tall, lean country boy, born in Georgiana, Alabama, in 1922, loved people. He would go to almost any length to show his appreciation to his fans. The performers who worked with him had great respect for his talent and they loved Hank for himself.

We remember Hank when he was a youngster, about ten years ago, when our Opry units made personal appearances in the City Auditorium, in Montgomery, the same building which housed the funeral services. He had a little band of kids who would play a few tunes with us. Later, after he had joined the Opry he told us something of the struggles he had to get started in radio. "I used to write a new song each week and take it up to one of the program directors and sing it," Hank told us. "He would say: 'Not good enough, boy.' Finally I believe he put me on the air to get rid of me."

Hank loved America. A couple of years ago he was one of the Opry stars who flew to Europe to entertain the American

service men and women, which he did beautifully. He swore that if he ever got back home he would kiss the ground. When he got off the plane at the Nashville Airport, having returned home safely, he did just that — he knelt over slowly and kissed the ground.

Such inspiration for writing music we have never seen. He would sit down and dash off a hit tune in a few minutes. He wrote in the vernacular of the day, which was the way he talked. His lines carried a terrific wallop of wit and wisdom.

Perhaps his heart songs, the most popular of which is his famous "Cold, Cold Heart," which hit the top in the country field and repeated in the popular field, were the expression of his greatest talent. However, he had a delicious sense of humor, which came out in "Hey, Good Lookin'" and many other tunes. The word genius has been used too much, we believe, but if Hank Williams was not a genius we never saw one. The Grand Ole Opry lost one of its brightest stars when Hank passed away.

#### THE JORDANAIRE

Gordon Stoker  
First Tenor



Neal Matthews  
Second Tenor



Hoyt Hawkins  
Baritone



Cully Holt  
Bass and Leader



"The Solemn Old Judge" As He Is Today

