



East Texas Historical Journal

A Publication of the East Texas Historical Association

Volume 54 Issue 1

Article 5

2016

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Recommended Citation

Christian, Garna (2016) "For the Love Of A Sweet Country Song," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 54: Iss. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol54/iss1/5>

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For the Love Of A Sweet Country Song

BY GARNA CHRISTIAN

This is a story of a father and a son who lived for music and died from the loss of it. I know the story to be true, as I witnessed much of it and was privy to the rest.¹

Benjamin Theodore Christian was born in or near the central Texas town of Rockdale on June 1, 1885. The family lived on a farm at first, when towns existed mainly as support for agriculture, and the census listed the children, in the fashion of the time, as farm laborers. There were nine children born to Charles and Anne, of whom Ben was fifth, but he rarely, if ever, spoke of his father. I learned almost sixty years after his death that his ancestors had migrated from Saxony in the 1700s and moved from Maryland to Illinois to Texas. The revelation came as a surprise because he never spoke of this either, if indeed he knew, nor revealed an interest in Germany. It was a time when families supplied their own amusements: house parties and local dances provided much of the non-church enjoyment, and the ability to create music was a social necessity. Only Ben and a younger brother entered the music profession, but other siblings picked up the fiddle and other stringed instruments with equal alacrity.²

Growing up in the rural, small town environment, Ben didn't indicate a passion for anything specific, except perhaps for wanting to leave. There weren't many avenues of escape such as presented themselves to promising athletes or singers or dancers of later years. A younger sister attended college, referred to as a normal at the time, long enough to teach for a few years. Most of the family remained in the area, one son devoting a lifetime of duty to the local post office. A daughter married a genial member the Texas Legislature, maintaining a household in the town but standing a social cut above much of the population. When able to do so, Ben moved to a nearby city, returned only periodically to visit, and never again lived in a small town.

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He didn't become the "Uncle Ben" of considerable country music fame until midlife. The genre, known widely as hillbilly music, remained a local and largely unprofessional calling. It was associated with house parties, carnivals, and medicine shows until the advent of radio, the Grand Ole Opry, and the recording successes of Jimmie Rodgers, Vernon Dalhart, and the like, in the 1920s. For all the waiting, that golden age had a shelf life of only a little over twenty years. Nevertheless, it offered a pathway to stardom, however narrow, to plain people of the rural South. The fans loved and identified with the performers and the songs. Ben engaged in various businesses, apparently once involuntarily involved in an insurance bubble, married, became a father and widower, and stood on a hill overlooking Kansas City, reviewing his life. A family story had a relative and Ben working up enthusiasm for military service in the Great War, only to win release with the assistance of an influential citizen when their patriotic zeal wore off the next day.³

Ben had returned to his early affection for music when his life settled into an opportune groove. In the late 1920s he was traveling through East Texas with a medicine show, amusing audiences by holding the fiddle and bow with his feet, when he passed the night at a boarding house in Port Neches. The tall, middle aged stranger piqued the curiosity of a young cleaning lady, Rose Lee Franklin. The attractive hazel eyed brunette failed to get Ben's attention until she employed the time tested procedure of dropping her handkerchief in the hallway as he left his room. In true Hollywood fashion, he hurried after her with the retrieved accessory, a conversation ensued, and they became husband and wife for the rest of Ben's life.

The responsibilities of a husband, and later a father, pushed Ben back into the mundane world of business, where his accounting skills guaranteed a steady, if modest, income. Opportunities and desire for improvement took the couple to Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston. Rose Lee preferred the wide hilly streets of Fort Worth to her perception of the confined thoroughfares of Dallas, but they settled in Houston permanently by 1930. Indeed, many people at the outset of the Great Depression migrated to Houston, drawn by its reputation of employment in hard times. The new family member, Ben, Jr., was born and grew up in the Bayou City. A small remaining snapshot shows a large eyed, smiling, charming boy, predicting the gregarious, handsome adult. An only child for the next five years, Ben, Jr. enjoyed a quick grasp of information, identifying a downtown street after passing it a few times in the family

car and learning the lyrics to a folk song, while too young to pronounce all the words correctly. Surely, thought the father, the boy would follow in his footsteps, prints now beginning to emerge in the field of music.

A new music literally was in the air at the beginning of the Depression, molded largely by James Robert (Bob) Wills, from the dance halls and cotton fields of East and West Texas. Fifteen years Ben's junior, Wills, from Limestone County, put together the blues, jazz, and string tempos that later became known as western swing. He introduced the music to a wider audience with guitarist Herman Arnsperger, vocalist Milton Brown, and himself as fiddler in Fort Worth. Expansion of the Wills Fiddle Band to the Light Crust Doughboys and Texas Playboys made Wills the most recognizable and durable name in the annals of the much performed music. Within several years Wills' band was appearing daily on the Texas Quality Network, reaching enthusiastic and loyal audiences across the state.⁴

There is no evidence that Ben knew Wills in this period, though the former had lived in Fort Worth and played and listened to country music. Their lives displayed striking similarities, though Ben, with essentially non- recording and non- traveling bands, never attained the legendary status of Wills. Both were better managers than musicians, adopted the role of fatherly figures to their musicians, and relied on others as vocalists. Each smoked cigars, developed health and temperance problems in the later stages of their careers, and retired before their deaths. Wills, who often performed in "battle dances" with Ben's band when appearing in Houston, would be a pall bearer at his friend's funeral⁵

While Wills was presenting his new sound where the West began, Ben teamed with two guitarists, Dave Melton and Lynn Henderson, two hundred and fifty miles to the South at Houston house parties. Shortly thereafter, Ben and Henderson, who apparently met while the latter busked on a downtown street corner, organized a band. With fiddle and guitar slots filled, younger brother Elwood (Elmer) Christian left the hometown permanently to play second fiddle, more often bass, and provide vocal harmony. In what constituted an unaffordable action a generation later, radio station KTRH donated free air time to the new aggregation. The agreement enabled the station to strengthen its afternoon schedule at no salary expense while affording the musicians invaluable no-cost advertising for dances within the signal of the 50,00 watt station. Radio announcer Harry Greer named the group, "The Bar-X Cowboys from Sunset Valley," becoming so enamored with his

creation that he pushed unsuccessfully to name Ben's second son. "Bar X." Ben, the business manager of the commonwealth band, meaning every musician received an equal share of the revenue, quickly adopted the spirit. The musicians bought colorful matching Gene Autry-type uniforms and had postcards made at a horseback rental, designated in the photos as "Sunset Valley."⁶

The 1930s curiously mingled hard times and escapism. Despite the sternest unemployment numbers in the nation's history, millions of Americans accessed barely enough money to spend a Saturday night in denial of the moment. They packed movie houses to watch, and sometimes cheer, screen criminals James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson thumb their noses at authority, particularly the unpopular banks. Real life outlaws Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow provided a cheaper thrill for only the cost of a newspaper. Audiences could vicariously view the rich, enacted by William Powell and Irene Dunn, in their mansions with swimming pools and butlers, on the silver screen. Anyone could turn a radio dial and be swept away to country club and grand hotel orchestras, such as Glenn Miller's and Guy Lombardo's. And in Texas they turned out to dance.⁷

The Mississippi River forged a line between danceable and listenable country music. East of the demarcation, people stood or sat for traditional Appalachian ballads or modernized Blue Grass music at concerts, county fairs, and family homes. Religion permeated many of the refrains, hampering any urge for physical contact. To the West folks took to the dance floors to celebrate truck driving, lost love, and crying-in-my-beer songs with a brisk beat. After 1933, the year of the inauguration of the Bar-X Cowboys, customers could legally buy the beer. The Houston-Gulf Coast area propitiously resided in the "wet" region of the state when Texas counties divided over local option. Small European ethnic communities within the signal and driving range of Houston radio stations usually had a large building suitable for dances and few constraints on alcohol. The site owners, as well as those in Houston, provided little beyond the keys and, perhaps, security officers. The bands brought their own instruments—generally a fiddle, guitar, bass, steel guitar, and possibly a banjo and accordion—except for the piano. Many musicians played several instruments, although Ben stayed with the fiddle. They lugged their audio equipment and hired someone, or volunteered their wives, to sell and take tickets. Remuneration was a share of the gate; the owners kept the proceeds from food and drink

sales. The Saturday night receipts determined the success of the band, as other nights often produced negligible results beyond holding public attention and keeping the musicians active. The longevity of the Bar-X Cowboys demonstrated both the band's popularity and Ben's talent for booking and keeping the choice venues.⁸

The convenient relationship between radio stations and dance bands accounted for the proliferation and durability of local country music groups in the depression and war years. The Bar-X Cowboys, who ultimately appeared on each station -KTRH, KPRC, and KXYZ- customarily performed three afternoons a week in fifteen minute segments. Ben opened the program with a fiddle tune, known in the trade as a breakdown or rag, and the band shifted to more modern selections, including pop or swing. There was little of the cowboy genre, though photos show the musicians dressed in full western regalia in the studios, and less of traditional mountain music. True to form, they played upbeat dance music, even to sad lyrics. Broadcasting no commercials, Greer and later announcers read the week's dance schedule, the *raison d'être* for the program. High spirited, Ben and the band schemed at pranks to cause announcers to lose their composure on the air, a popular off-scripted feature of early live radio.⁹

The symbiosis led to recording sessions for the band, as the radio programs which stimulated the dances created an appetite among the audiences for more music. Recording companies sought new talent to fill the growing demand, scheduling "field trips" across the country to tap local talent. The Bar-X Cowboys never attained star status as recording artists but eagerly accepted a Decca contract. A few members were capable writers, particularly after Ted Daffan, of later "Born to Lose" fame, joined the group, and even Ben wrote one tune, "The Rockdale Rag." In those pre-Nashville, low tech recording days, local bands rented a Houston or Dallas hotel room and gathered around one microphone with no chance for error to produce a 78 rpm record that shattered at the touch and hissed like a snake after a few plays from a metal Victrola needle. Miraculously, many of the records have survived, have been restored, and sell particularly well in European markets.¹⁰

Indeed, the achievements of the Bar-X Cowboys, under Ben's management, border the amazing. Despite the severe limitations of the economy, Ben, retaining only one share of the band's earnings, set aside other employment and cared for his family, now containing two sons, throughout the depression. A generation later, in more prosperous

times, most local musicians would require a day job to subsidize their music. The hard times accounted for only one of the impediments to the band's survival. Other musical groups entered or organized in the area, received free air time from radio stations, and enjoyed the same booking opportunities. The competition attempted to entice away musicians, a notoriously independent-minded lot. Other musicians proved unreliable, perhaps given to drink or simply eccentricity, presenting a persistent challenge to delivering a competent, rehearsed organization to the scheduled sites. Ben had come into the business without experience in the peculiar art of maintaining and nourishing a band. Cars broke down, dance halls went out of business, and band members did not arrive home until wee hours of the morning. Ben's children were hushed into silence until after noon, when his routine began again. Yet, the Bar-X Cowboys more than held their own against better known recording artists, Leon "Pappy" Selph, Cliff Bruner, Moon Mullican, and Shelley Lee Alley. They endured while other organizations came and went as Ben's stock as a bandleader rose and the economy continued to improve in the late 1930s.¹¹

Despite the accomplishments of the Bar-X Cowboys, Ben opted to make a major career change at 50 plus years of age. As business manager of a commonwealth band, he felt he lacked the control he needed over the organization. Both first fiddler and actual leader, he performed two important functions, yet received only one share of the proceeds. That share had fed and dressed his family and covered the expenses of rental houses in respectable working class neighborhoods, but Ben was doubtless impressed by counterparts Adolf Hofner, of San Antonio, and Jesse James, of Austin, who directed their bands with their names above the groups. In 1940, with the nation essentially recovered from the depression, Ben turned management of the Bar-X Cowboys over to his brother, Elwood, and formed the Texas Cowboys, with his name heading the title. One of his first discoveries, Richard (Jerry) Jericho, from Millican, Texas, caught Ben's attention while performing at a Houston root beer stand. "Smilin'" Jerry Jericho, exuding star quality, promptly filled the vocalist position, assumed a relationship with Ben comparable to that of singer Tommy Duncan to Bob Wills, and became a lifelong friend.¹²

Little more than a year after the inauguration of the Texas Cowboys, the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, pushing the United States into a nearly five year war. Although Ben was well past the age for military

service, some of his musicians were young and fit enough to serve, most notably Jericho. His departure for the duration of the war created the most crucial void in the new band, as Ben could never replace him with a singer of equal talent. In common with other band leaders, Ben patched together as many acceptable musicians as were available and struggled within the confines of government imposed rationing. The fuel allotment of three gallons per week and the availability of only used cars after American industry turned to defense manufacturing severely cut the travel schedule. Customers experimented with a variety of colas to substitute for the favorite BYOB mix, Coca Cola, after the military monopolized the soft drink. Conversely, the flow of money from Houston area shipyards and defense plants created customers eager to spend, even for a less desirable product than in the past. The Texas Cowboys led the local ensembles, taking in more revenue than at any time in Ben's career.¹³

The four years following the end of World War II crowned the golden age of the first generation of country music in Houston and elsewhere. Previously a rural, Southern-based music, it spread into the North and West with the integration of Americans into a national military and the movement of civilians to new job locations. Elton Britt, an Arkansas yodeler and tenor, had topped the hit list during the war with a patriotic country song, "There's a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere." California hosted the large western swing bands of Spade Cooley, "Tex" Williams, and, for a time, Bob Wills. With the resumption of large scale recording, Eddy Arnold, Ernest Tubb, and Roy Acuff reached new fans. Dance bands headlined by Floyd Tillman, Dickie McBride, and Hank Locklin joined the trek to prosperous Houston. Notwithstanding the brisk competition, Ben had Jericho and other first rate musicians back and he held on to Cook's Hoedown, in its new downtown location, as the most coveted Saturday night venue, strongly supplemented by Eagle's Hall, the Polish Hall, and Dokeys Hall. As a sign of the times, Ben brought home a shiny two-toned green Buick, virtually new. Wills and other prominent bandleaders dropped in occasionally to share the bandstands. A friendly radio rivalry developed between Ben's Texas Cowboys and Ellwood's Bar-X Cowboys, featuring singer-songwriter Jerry Irby. Ben signed a record contract with a company so recently in business that his family participated in gluing the labels to the disks. Firmly established as one of the most recognizable musical figures on the Gulf Coast, Ben heeded Rose Lee's longstanding plea to buy a home

of their own, a comfortable, but unpretentious, late nineteenth century house in the Houston Heights.¹⁴

Unfortunately, Ben's health failed to keep pace with his success. Heart trouble seemed to plague the male side of his family, and he suffered chest pains, tempered by pills and whisky toddies. Ben had fought asthma since childhood and sought relief in an atomizer. An enlarged prostate caused such pain and blockage that only a catheter brought relief before he finally agreed to surgery. More than dread delayed the operation, though Ben's generation regarded hospitals more as final resting places than health centers. Health insurance was as rare as home air conditioning, credit cards as exotic as cartoon detective Dick Tracy's wrist radio, and, as employer of his musicians, Ben could not qualify for social security. Medical expenses came out of dwindling savings. One lengthy illness caused virtually every member of the Texas Cowboys to request a bedridden Ben to release them for other employment.

A new wind blew out of the East at mid- twentieth century in the form of a thin, young Alabaman named King Hiram "Hank" Williams. He quickly topped the record charts with mournful tunes, "Cheatin' Heart," "Cold, Cold Heart," and "I'm so Lonesome I Could Cry," as well as lively renderings, "Jambalaya," "Hey, Good Lookin'," and "Mind Your Own Business." Williams unwittingly changed country music fans' preferences. The proliferation of recording companies, abetted by the phenomenon of disc jockeys, permitted music fans to stay by their radios for stretches of hours, avoiding the smoky dance halls. A Houston postwar radio station, KNUZ, filled daily mornings and afternoons with country and pop music introduced by "Biff" Collie and Paul Berlin. They became wildly popular in their own right, matching radio trends in other cities. The programming profoundly impacted the local dance bands, as free air time diminished and then expired. Recording stars, providing yet more competition, placed the Bayou City on their itineraries for concerts and special events. Previous dance hall fans, if tiring of radio, now enjoyed the option of watching variety shows, sports, and movies on TV channel two, KLEE. By 1954 Elvis Presley and the new genre of rock-and-roll had devoured most of its local and national musical competition and subsequently ended the pop music format of TV's "Your Hit Parade."¹⁵

The succession of blows to Houston dance bands were not immediate knockout punches. Ben and Ellwood had established themselves as leaders in the music scene and, after all, had survived the Great Depression. They and several other band leaders for a time acted

as their own disc jockeys and announcers of their dance schedules on a Saturday morning radio program. Mimicking the Grand Ole Opry and Louisiana Hayride, a local station put together a weekly radio concert of Houston country talent. Promoters held weekend dances at Magnolia Gardens on the banks of the San Jacinto River, at which Hank Williams and Elvis Presley appeared on stage with Ben and the Texas Cowboys. Nevertheless, the tide of change proved irreversible. When Ben turned the Texas Cowboys over to Jerry Jericho in 1954, other bands had already left town or were in the process of breaking up. Floyd Tillman and Ted Daffan had returned to their songwriting and singing careers, while Cliff Bruner and Leon Selph had entered other professions. Jericho fought gamely as bandleader, even recording several sessions before appearing as a solo act on Louisiana Hayride and re-forming a band for a time in San Antonio. Similarly, Tommy Duncan's western swing band, formed after separating from Wills in the late 1940s, eventually failed as the genre lost its audience.¹⁶

Ben's musical career had ended but, in the absence of social security or a pension, his need for employment continued. Disappointed that new Houston mayor and former radio announcer Roy Hofheinz failed to extend any patronage, Ben took a series of minor jobs, including night watchman at a downtown office building. The dancers had permanently left the floor and the applause silenced. Rose Lee returned to service work as a waitress and the younger son went into the army. Ben's health declined. The toddies intended to relieve chest pains gave way to ubiquitous half pints of whiskey. Ben and Rose Lee quarreled more frequently. One March evening in 1956 Rose Lee returned from work to find Ben lying still in bed and could not awaken him. In her anguish she cried out to him to help her. Ben, Jr. hurried over, called the medics, and unobtrusively removed the small whiskey bottle from his father's hand.

Ben's death washed away the last bitter years. He was again recognized as the leader of the most popular dance band on the Gulf Coast. The modest funeral brought out the elite of country music: Bob Wills, Hank Thompson, and Floyd Tillman joined local celebrities and friends as pallbearers. For years afterward, fans approached the younger son, away on duty at the time of the funeral, with tributes of affection for his father. Sadly, little remained to archive; records, photographs, and most memorabilia of Ben and his bands escaped the immediate family during the distractions and confusion following his death and were lost to history.

Ben, Jr. early learned the difficulties of meeting the expectations of a successful father. The precocious child developed into the popular young man and he was interested in little beyond music, to which he listened intensely on the radio and phonograph. Ben and Rose Lee encouraged him with the purchase of a piano, though the son never expressed a desire for one. Strains of "The Marines' Hymn" echoed throughout the house as Ben, Jr. struggled to master it. Ben proudly called for command performances when other musicians or relatives visited but voiced his disapproval if the son missed a note. The boy began to neglect practice and school work. Perplexed, Ben loved his son but could not understand his apparent lack of ambition. Ben, Jr. wanted to emulate his father's music career but had not found the path.

Outside the family Ben, Jr. enjoyed an active social life. He made friends readily, some early friendships lasting throughout his life. He was particularly proud of his promotion to chief usher at the Metropolitan Theater and the neat dark blue uniform with a pants stripe and brass buttons that accompanied it. The younger brother would stand by the street door and wait for Ben, Jr., squeezing every second of drama from the moment, to motion him into the movie house without paying the requisite nine cents. The siblings' roles had been established years earlier with the older son acting as consultant to the younger on vital issues, such as movies, music, comic books, and professional wrestling. Then the war in Korea broke out and Ben, Jr. received the familiar "Friends and Neighbors" summons to duty. The army sent him to Oklahoma for training and to a tent in France for permanent duty. Photographs show the new direction in his life: playing a guitar and singing with a likeminded comrade. Ben, Jr. had found his calling.

Ben, Jr. returned home when Ben and his music were in sharp decline. The son married, fathered two children, and held a variety of manual jobs while awaiting an opening in the music business. It came in an undesired manner, with the death of his father. He seized the opportunity to perpetuate Ben's memory by gathering some of his father's best musicians. It would be a reincarnation of Ben and the Texas Cowboys, with Ben, Jr. as lead vocalist and guitarist. He managed some impressive bookings, particularly a nightclub owned by the now independent Jerry Irby at San Leon in the Clear Lake area. The music was good and Ben's singing was fine, as attested by a former manager of Jim Reeves. But the crowds wouldn't come. Ben, Jr. confronted the same public indifference that stifled the other local dance bands. He struggled,

used up all available funds, and eventually gave up. The musicians went back to their day jobs and the prospective revelers stayed at home with "I Love Lucy" TV reruns and Elvis Presley records.

Ben, Jr. never recovered from the failure to redeem his father's legacy and prove himself to the deceased man. He continued to perform for family and friends and occasionally for pay. On one occasion he and other musicians went out on a New Year's Eve, the most lucrative night of the year for entertainers, and returned immediately for lack of a single customer. To make a living he drove a truck, worked at a warehouse, and won and lost a series of unimaginative jobs. At length he gave up, his idleness losing the home and the family. A position as county health inspector carried Ben, Jr. through a new career, until he filed for early retirement and moved in with his ailing mother. After Rose Lee's death, Ben, Jr. found comfort with alcohol but never relinquished his determination to keep Ben's reputation alive. He supplied source material for numerous articles on the history of Houston country music and was interviewed by historian Bill Malone. In one of his last decisions, he moved the remains of his parents to the same resting place. One spring day in 2004 Ben, Jr. telephoned his brother that he was entering the hospital because of pneumonia and would be out soon. He died a few days later.

History is not inevitable, but neither is it open ended. Some actions that are possible at one time are impossible in another. The confluence of changing music tastes, institutional policies, and technology overwhelmed all resistance and brought to an end the first era of country, big band, and, eventually, pop music. Historians have taken greater note of events and their causes than the impact on the affected individuals. While some musicians were able to refashion their lives after the music revolution, others saw no viable options and, like their music, became casualties of the times.

ENDNOTES

Missing Endnote 1

2 Garna L. Christian, "Christian, Ben" in Roy Barkley, et al (eds.), *The Handbook of Texas Music* (Austin, Texas State Historical Association, 2003), 50; Interview of William Holford by author, Houston, July 31, 1984, in possession of author. Uncited text is based on the author's personal unrecorded knowledge.

3 Christian, *Stay*, 3.

4 Ruth Shelton, *Bob Wills Hubbin' It* (Nashville, Country Music Foundation, 1995) first published in 1938 covers the early years of Wills; Charles R. Townsend, *San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1976) 1-50 is the standard work on Wills; Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1985), 170-174; John Mark Dempsey, *The Light Crust Doughboys Are On The Air: Celebrating Seventy Years of Texas Music* (Denton, University of North Texas Press, 2002), 58-65.

5 "Battle dance" was a term used for two or more bands appearing in the same venue at the same time. The publicity implied they were competing.

6 Christian, *Handbook*, 50. Similarly, Entrepreneur Jesse Jones, owner of KXYZ, named Selph's Blue Ridge Playboys after one of his oil properties. See Malone, *Country*, 164; Christian, "It Beats Pickin' Cotton: The Origins of Houston Country Music," *Red River Valley Historical Review*, vol. 7 (Summer, 1982), 37-38; Christian, "They Brightened the Corner: The Era of Gulf Coast Texas Swing," *The Houston Review*, vol. IX, no. 1 (1987), 25-38.

7 John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny, "The Film Business in the United States During the 1930s," *Economic History Review*, LVIII, no. 1 (2005), 92, 96-97, 106.

8 Interview of Laura Lee McBride by author, Houston, January 11, 1984, in possession of author; Malone, *Country*, 164.

9 Christian,, *Handbook*, 50; Christian, *Stay*, 3.

10 Gary S. Hickinbotham, "Recording Industry" in *Handbook*, 255-256.

11 Michael Erlewine, et al (eds.), *All Music Guide to Country* (San Francisco, Miller Freeman Books, 1997), 8, 58, 319; Nick Tosches, *Country, The Biggest Music in America* (New York, Dell Publishing Company, 1979), 188-191; Gilbert C. Fite and Jim E. Reese, *An Economic History of the United States* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 629.

12 Christian, *Handbook*, 50; Christian, *Stay*, 18; Interview of Jerry Jericho by author, Houston, July 18, 1980, in possession of author; Jeffrey J. Lange, *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2004), 118-20.

13 Fite and Reese, *An Economic*, 644-645.

14 Irwin Stambler and Grelun Landon, *The Encyclopedia of Folke, Country & Western Music* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1984), 71-72; Erlewine, *All*, 1, 102, 113-114, 274, 472, 516, 518; Christian, *Stay*, 23, 30.

15 Malone, *Country*, 239-243; Interview of Herbert Remington by author, Houston, December 28, 1984, in possession of author; Interview of Leon Selph by author, Houston, September 28, 1977, in possession of author; Colin Escott and Kira Florita, *Hank Williams, Snapshots from the Lost Highway* (Cambridge, Da Capo Press, 2001), 78; *Houston Chronicle*, December 17, 2004; www.celebritynetwork.com/watch/QGLbL_ZNFE/biff-collie; *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1990.

16 Jericho interview; Interview of Floyd Tillman by author, Houston, March 17, 1985, in possession of author; Interview of Ted Daffan, Houston, October 24, 1977; Erlewine, *All*, 134.

17 The remainder of the story was personally witnessed by the author or related by observers.