

**The Rise of Rural Rhythm:
Music of the National Barn Dance, 1924-41***

by Paul L. Tyler

“I’ve heard the barn dance fiddlers, I’ve heard the square dance call.”
—from “Cowboy Rhythm” by Patsy Montana

On a Saturday in the spring of 1924—April 19th, to be exact—if you turned to a middle section of your newspaper—perhaps the *Chicago Herald and Examiner*—you might have spotted a short article titled “National Barn Dance Tonight.” The announced barn dance was not a soiree scheduled for some farmer’s outbuilding in a rural district somewhere outside Chicago’s city limits. It was, in fact, intended for a nationwide audience that could listen in as an unnamed old-time fiddle band sawed out square dance tunes in a studio recently constructed in the Hotel Sherman in the heart of Chicago. Attendance at this first National Barn Dance would be through a headset or a primitive speaker connected to a radio tuned into WLS, the newest station vying for attention in the bustling airwaves of America’s second largest city. Any dancing would have to take place in the listener’s parlor or kitchen, in close proximity to that newfangled radio set.

WLS’s National Barn Dance was not the first radio program to feature old-time fiddlers. Local masters had already fiddled on stations in Iowa, Atlanta, and Columbus, Ohio. Other significant early radio appearances by fiddlers occurred in Texas. In December of 1922, WFAA in Dallas offered a concert by “Colonel William Hopkins, fiddler of Kansas City.” Col. Hopkins, a 45-year veteran of the fiddle and bow, was accompanied by pianist Charles Krause on such numbers as “Old Southern Melodies,” “Arkansas Traveler,” and “Bows of Oak Hill” (the latter tune was recorded five years later by the National Barn Dance’s Tommy Dandurand under the more usual spelling, “The Beau of Oak Hill”). A month later, in nearby Fort Worth, WBAP

aired a show of square dance music that featured the fiddling of Capt. Moses J. Bonner, a Confederate veteran, and Fred Wagner's Hawaiian Five Hilo Orchestra. Spurred on by the enthusiastic response from a widely-scattered audience, WBAP broadcast old-time fiddlers several times a month on an irregular schedule over the next few years.¹

When the WLS National Barn Dance went on the air in April of 1924—in the station's second week of operations—it was perhaps intentionally following trails blazed by the Texas stations or, closer to home, by KFNF in Shenandoah, Iowa. Most country music historians regard WBAP as the originator of the radio barn dance format, yet it is not clear that WLS borrowed either the format or the barn dance name from the Fort Worth station. But someone in Chicago must have been listening, for by the second week of the National Barn Dance, the local papers listed an appearance on the program by Cowbell Pete. According to WBAP's official history, the Fort Worth station was the first to use an audible logo, a cowbell, introduced in 1922. At WLS, cowbells became a signature sound accompanying applause through at least the first two decades of the National Barn Dance.²

Though it may not lay claim to having been the first radio barn dance, the WLS show soon became a dominant feature of the Saturday radio lineup in Chicago, the Midwest, and across the country. As it evolved, the National Barn Dance proved to be incredibly durable, missing only one or two Saturday nights over the next thirty-six years. As will be shown, it also became immensely popular and extremely influential. But in those early years of radio, when programming everywhere was intermittently scheduled—some cities following Chicago's lead in having “silent nights”—the National Barn Dance was still something of an experiment. WLS's first station manager, Edgar Bill, described how it came about:

The truth is that it just grew up and here is how it happened. We started WLS with a large variety of entertainment programs. We would try anything once to see what our listeners thought about it. We had religious programs and services on Sunday. We featured high-brow music on one night; dance bands on another; then programs featuring large choruses. Other nights, we'd have variety or we might have a radio play. When it came to Saturday night, it was quite natural to book in old-time music, including old-time fiddling, banjo and guitar music and cowboy songs. We leaned toward the homey, old-time familiar tunes because *we were a farm station primarily* [emphasis added].

The Saturday night mix struck a chord with the target audience. According to the *Chicago Evening Post*, within the show's first few weeks "more than a thousand letters have come in from twenty states expressing appreciation of the old-fashioned barn-dance music." Letters came from a variety of listeners young and old, and several quoted in the article were written by folks living within the city limits of Chicago. Because much of Chicago's population was newly arrived from rural districts, WLS's farm-oriented programming became the favorite of many city residents as well.³

This distinctive pairing of a strong, rurally targeted radio station with a potent institutional base in a major metropolis explains much about how WLS and the National Barn Dance, in the years before World War II, came to be the preeminent radio home for what would later be called Country Music. In the crowded field of radio broadcasting in Chicago, WLS offered up programming no other Chicago station had in hopes of attracting an audience that was mostly ignored by its competitors. The other half of this powerful combination was the organizational entity behind the radio station. WLS was owned successively by two large and successful corporations that provided resources sufficient to make the National Barn Dance easily the largest show of its kind before 1942.

Yet, though the National Barn Dance was a towering presence in the emerging commercial field of Country Music in the second quarter of the Twentieth Century, the last echoes of those early Barn Dance fiddlers have long since died away. A substantial paper trail tells us who the stars were, and demonstrates that an extensive audience eagerly tuned in weekly to the broadcasts, traveled to Chicago and other Midwestern towns to attend live shows, and snatched up souvenir songbooks and photo-filled yearbooks. The actual sounds of the National Barn Dance, however, have long been missing from our public consciousness. The artists broadcast live, and recording technology was not regularly employed to capture for posterity the sounds they sent out over the airwaves. A few incomplete aircheck disks have been turned up from the show's second decade, but the playing and singing, the comedy and banter that came into listeners's homes through those early radio sets can only be imagined. Before turning our focus to the main topic of this essay, reconstructing the music of the National Barn Dance, it would be worthwhile to recap the institutional history of WLS's landmark program.

Growth of the National Barn Dance

Through its first four years, WLS was operated by Sears, Roebuck and Company, a Chicago-based retailer that relied heavily on mail-order catalog sales. The station's call letters stood for "World's Largest Store." More accurately, WLS was the responsibility of Sears's Agricultural Foundation, chartered in 1923 to help farmers "farm better, sell better, and live better."⁴ Of course, if farmers were successful at the first two of these items, they would have more disposable income to spend on the last; and if Sears demonstrated acceptable ideals about what living better meant, and offered desirable products, a portion of that disposable income would lead to increased sales of Sears merchandise.

By 1928, because WLS had not yet turned a profit, Sears sold its station to *The Prairie Farmer* magazine. At the time, the cast of the National Barn Dance (hereafter also referred to as NBD or by the show's nickname, the Old Hayloft) included nearly thirty performers. By the middle of the next decade, even so large a cast was dwarfed by the numbers that appeared on Saturday nights: between seventy and one hundred instrumentalists, vocalists, singers, comedians, and other variety artists!⁵ It is important to note that from early on, at least some NBD stars also appeared on other WLS programs throughout the week. In addition, other WLS artists, whose primary responsibilities were on weekday programs, joined the Hayloft Gang on Saturday nights as well.

The *Prairie Farmer*, founded in 1841, was a bi-weekly publication with a mission that meshed well with that of Sears's Agricultural Foundation, especially after Burrige D. Butler, a conservative crusader for agriculture, became the magazine's publisher in 1909. Under Butler's direction, the magazine provided farmers with a steady stream of information about issues facing agriculture and sought to serve by bringing them the best advantages of modernization without endangering the traditional values and meaningful symbols of agrarian culture. The *Prairie Farmer* rose from the pack of nearly fifty farm-oriented journals published in Chicago and Illinois to be the leading agricultural publication in the region, if not the nation. Reflecting Butler's idealistic stance, on the occasion of WLS's ninth birthday, the magazine declared that "America's oldest farm paper considers it almost a sacred privilege to serve as custodian of this powerful 50,000-watt station, acknowledged everywhere as the broadcaster with the greatest audience of the common, everyday folks on farms and in towns and cities."⁶

What Sears had started yielded an amazing harvest under Butler's *Prairie Farmer*.

Always a careful businessman, before purchasing WLS, Butler sent sixty “field men” out for six weeks to discover the radio preferences of over 16,000 midwestern farm families. Their findings, that WLS clearly stood alone at the top of the list, sealed the deal. After eight years as the *Prairie Farmer* station, WLS set a record for the largest mail count received by a station in the country: “more than one million letters in the first six months” of 1936. Combined with increased advertising potential and growing profitability, WLS proved one of Butler’s guiding principles, that “service had its rewards.”⁷

Stuffed mailbags and many listener surveys all attested to the fact that the National Barn Dance was the jewel in the crown of Butler’s media empire. Several important steps were taken in the next few years that assured the continuing prominence of the Barn Dance. In 1931, WLS became a 50,000-watt powerhouse, covering most of central North America. In 1932, due to popular demand for passes to see the show live in the broadcast studio, the station moved the NBD to the Eighth Street Theatre, where they sold out two two-hour shows every Saturday night—starting at 7:30 and 10:00—from March 19, 1932, to August 31, 1937. And then starting in August of 1933, a one-hour segment was broadcast coast-to-coast on the NBC-Blue network. Miles Laboratories, of Elkhart, Indiana, sponsored the network segment in order to promote a new product, Alka-Seltzer.⁸

Other National Barn Dance segments continued broadcasting on the WLS airwaves through the support of a variety of sponsors. A typical Saturday night program lineup in the 1930s looked like this listing from 1933:

7:30	National Barn Dance.
8:00	“Big Yank” Variety Program
8:15	Aladdin Program – Hugh Aspinwall 10/28
8:30	Keystone Barn Dance Party.
9:00	Kitchen Klenzer–Three Kings–WLS Trio
9:15	Mac and Bob
9:30	Cumberland Ridge Runners
9:45	Song Story by the Emersons. (Geppert Studios)
10:00	National Barn Dance (NBC Network for Alka-Seltzer)
11:00	Prairie Farmer Barn Dance.
to 12:00 ⁹	

The mix of sponsors reveals the surprising breadth of the audience for the Barn Dance. A producer of work shirts sponsored the Big Yank program, while Keystone Steel and Wire Company of Peoria, Illinois, sponsored the long-running Keystone segment. The products of the

two companies were presumably useful both to farmers and those engaged in industry. The Aladdin Mantle Lamp Company, on the other hand, manufactured kerosene and oil burning lamps that would have been particularly relevant to farmers and other residents of areas not yet reached by rural electrification projects.

Time and again, especially during the Butler years, WLS proved to be remarkably effective at building connections with its audience. By at least 1930, the National Barn Dance was being broadcast in front of large live audiences at the Illinois and Indiana State Fairs in what became annual appearances. Early in the *Prairie Farmer* era, WLS Artists, Inc., was formed to book live performances of road shows. One purpose of this venture was to help staff musicians – not all of whom were full time–supplement their incomes, but another reason was undoubtedly to help meet the demand voiced by the station’s listeners. In 1933, the station also began to promote “Home Talent Shows,” in which listeners–usually kids–could imitate their favorite WLS performers on stage and also be entertained by real stars from the Old Hayloft.

For three years, starting in February 1935, WLS published a weekly fan magazine that started out as *Prairie Farmer’s WLS Weekly* and was soon changed, after a naming contest, to *Stand By*. The sixteen-page, large-format magazine contained photographs and features on NBD artists and other WLS personalities, a full broadcast and live appearance schedule, letters from listeners, and several news and queries columns. The longest-lasting artifacts of these relationship-building activities are the *WLS Family Albums*, published annually beginning in November of 1929 for the following year, with the last one appearing in 1957.¹⁰ These slickly produced, forty to forty-eight paged books crammed with photographs and homey introductions to all of the station’s on-air staff can still be found at midwestern flea markets and antique stores.

Several landmark occasions demonstrate the incredible popularity of the National Barn Dance throughout the 1930s. In the fall of 1930 two performances were scheduled for the large International Amphitheatre located at Chicago’s famous stock yards. Ten thousand people were able to attend each show. According to reports, an equal number were turned away from the first show. The crowds were even bigger–20,000 per night–for the NBD’s one-night-per-week appearance during September 1933 at the Century of Progress Exposition, better known as the Chicago World’s Fair. Perhaps the most stunning was the occasion in July of 1939 when 60,000 people from fifteen different states somehow crowded into a public park in the small town of Noblesville, Indiana, for a Sunday picnic featuring WLS’s Little Brown Church of the Air.

Though some churches had canceled services so their parishioners could attend, the real draw was Barn Dance stars Patsy Montana, the Maple City Four, the Hoosier Sodbusters, and comedian Little Genevieve. Patsy Montana remembered singing in front of those 60,000 fans as a “staggering experience. . . . These were farmers, working hard to make their chores work out so they could drive a great distance and still get home in time for evening chores.”¹¹

Understanding the Music of the Old Hayloft

What was it about the music of the National Barn Dance that so endeared it to huge numbers of rural and urban midwesterners? My attempt to reconstruct the nearly forgotten sound of the NBD’s early years, will start with how a WLS publicist framed the very first program of barn dance fiddlers. A glimpse of the show’s future appeal shines through in the “National Barn Dance Tonight” article mentioned at the beginning of this essay. Here is the text in full:

“All hands ’round—swing your partner—sasahay [sic] ’round—do, si, do—balance partners!” The old familiar calls of the barn dance fiddler will reverberate from many a concrete barn tonight, when Sears Roebuck Station W L S conducts its first weekly national barn dance over the radio.

Farmers the country over, heeding the announcement of the Sears-Roebuck Agricultural Foundation, have planned barn dance parties for this evening. Young and old will have their fling from 8 p.m. till midnight, because Isham Jones’ College Inn Orchestra will alternate with the fiddlers and other musicians of yesteryear. This will be the only W L S program on the air today.¹²

This short text signifies a great deal about the substance and style of WLS’s attempts to serve the rural community. Living better, in the view of Sears and, later, the *Prairie Farmer*, involves such decidedly non-material values as community and sociability, reaching out across generational divides, and respect for the old blended with an openness for the new. WLS could benefit farmers’ lives by providing them, in addition to timely information and educational features, the kinds of entertainment preferred by farm folk. The Sears catalog, of course, offered for sale many material accessories related to this vision for living better, including radio sets, phonograph records, and musical instruments. And Sears continued to use WLS and the *Prairie*

Farmer to advertise its catalog and merchandise.

Unfortunately, although the full introductory announcement printed in the *Chicago Herald & Examiner* suggests so much, it did not appear in any other of Chicago's half-dozen daily newspapers. The first post-World War II generation of country music historians all missed the story, which has led to several misunderstandings about the nature of the Barn Dance. For instance, from a local radio host and a NBD memorabilia collector, I have heard recent retellings of the myth of the Barn Dance's accidental beginnings. The contemporary spread of this narrative dates to 1966 when Robert Shelton, popular music critic for the *New York Times*, published *The Country Music Story*. Shelton's source was probably John Lair, an important WLS programmer during the 1930s. The myth went as follows: Saturday night arrived and "there was just nobody to put on the air." The station manager was in Evanston, and Tommy Dandurand, a janitor at the station, brought out a scratchy fiddle and somebody got a cowbell, and off it went."¹³ From the *Chicago Herald & Examiner* notice, it is patently clear that WLS executives were more careful in their planning, and the show was no accident. And although Tommy Dandurand is often named as the first fiddler on the Barn Dance, it is doubtful he was a janitor for the station or the Hotel Sherman. Dandurand had been a streetcar motorman in Kankakee, Illinois, and had moved to Chicago to live with his son after losing a leg in an automobile accident two years earlier.¹⁴

Another confusion surrounds the name of the program, which was dubbed the National Barn Dance at its very beginning. As estimable a scholar as Wayne Daniel has mistakenly claimed that the NBD was known initially as the "WLS Barn Dance," and that "National" was added to the name when the NBC Blue network picked up a segment of the program in 1933. Daniel is justified in the first half of his assertion by the casual way in which the program was named in radio program listings published daily in the papers. Often the show *was* simply called the "Barn Dance" or the "WLS Barn Dance." Through the summer of 1924, WLS's Saturday night program listings included a variety of names, such as "Old time fiddlers program," "National farm barn dance," and "Barn dance fiddlers." For a time in the fall of that year, it appears that WLS might have been trying to shift the program's focus away from the image of the barn dance, and titles like "Saturday night Mardi Gras" and "WLS review night" become more prominent. But by the dawn of 1925, Saturday night at WLS was given back over to a "national barn dance" or to simply a "barn dance."¹⁵

Finally, the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* announcement heralding the first National Barn Dance reveals clearly an essential characteristic of the early programs, a trait that would carry over for the next thirty-six years (the first half of which are covered by this essay). The music of the Barn Dance, and of WLS weekday programs, comprised a very broad range of styles and genres. On that first program, the old-time fiddlers (or fiddle band) alternated with a modern ballroom orchestra, and every Barn Dance program that followed included both pop and country artists—or to use a music industry term from before 1950, “hillbilly” musicians. This basic fact has proved problematic to most postwar country music scholars, and has led, at minimum, to the NBD’s importance being understated and, at worst, to it being misrepresented in scholarly writings on country music.

Wayne Daniel summed up the contemporary heuristic problem succinctly in his opening salvo for the *Journal of Country Music* in 1983:

Drawing from standard country music reference works and WLS publications, several writers have agreed that the National Barn Dance delivered to its audiences “a mixed musical array” that was “decidedly more ‘popular’ than ‘hillbilly.’” New evidence to support this conclusion is put forth in this article . . .¹⁶

Sadly, the consensus that the WLS Barn Dance lacked a certain degree of country or hillbilly authenticity has consigned the NBD to virtual footnote status in the standard country music reference works. cursory treatments of the show highlight the fact that Country Music Hall of Fame members Gene Autry and Red Foley started out on WLS, and do little more than list the names of other key performers. And most histories of country music go little beyond the cursory when discussing the National Barn Dance. Though some recently published and online reference works contain solid entries on key Barn Dance performers, little has been done to integrate their contributions into larger historical narratives. Ivan Tribe’s entry in the on-line *Century of Country* reveals an irony that explains why the NBD has been regularly overlooked in so many quarters: “Overall, it is quite difficult to overestimate the importance that the National Barn Dance played in the growth of Country music on radio in the second quarter of the 20th century. Sadly, no anthologies of the music of performers from that era have ever been released.” The music of the Old Hayloft has been roundly ignored, so it is no surprise that a recently-published encyclopedia of Chicago history, besides getting the show’s name wrong, characterizes the NBD

as “nearly forgotten today.”¹⁷

The Barn Dance is not well-remembered primarily because of the incompleteness of the sonic record. By the time I wrote this essay, I had identified only eight or nine preserved air-check recordings of the Barn Dance from before 1945. Most were recorded during the war years, with only a single program from 1939 surviving from the time period covered by this essay. Apparently all the surviving air-checks from the early years are of the sixty-minute long NBC network segments. Thus only a selective portion of the entire program has been preserved. The National Barn Dance encompassed at least five hours each week, and presented numerous artists who were seldom or never featured on the network segment sponsored by Alka-Seltzer! Fortunately, many NBD artists did leave behind a large body of work of commercial phonograph records. However, very few of these recordings are currently available through record company catalogs. While many rare pre-WWII recordings of rural musicians have been reissued in LP and CD formats over the last four decades, NBD artists have not been fairly represented.

This dearth of National Barn Dance artists on contemporary reissue recordings is both a symptom and a cause of our contemporary amnesia about one of radio’s most storied programs. Consider the case of the biggest NBD stars: Lulu Belle & Scotty, Arkie the Arkansas Woodchopper, and the Prairie Ramblers. In an audience poll conducted in 1937, WLS listeners voted these three the most popular acts on the station. All three are noteworthy for their longevity with WLS. Lulu Belle & Scotty joined the Barn Dance cast separately in the mid-1930s and, except for a two-year hiatus, performed as a favorite NBD duo until their retirement in 1958. The Arkansas Woodchopper had an even longer run, coming to WLS in 1929 and staying with the Barn Dance even after it left WLS in 1960 and moved to WGN. The Prairie Ramblers were also associated with the NBD through the better part of three decades, from 1933 through about 1956, with several short periods off to work at other stations. But only two albums on American record labels were ever devoted to reissues of earlier 78rpm recordings by these artists: i.e., Lulu Belle & Scotty, *Early and Great, Vol. 1* on Old Homestead Records, and Patsy Montana & the Prairie Ramblers on a *Columbia Historic Edition* LP. Recently, the first-ever reissue of the Arkansas Woodchopper’s early recordings appeared on the small independent label, British Archives of Country Music.

This lack of representation on post-World War II commercial recordings is even more puzzling when one discovers how prolifically Old Hayloft musicians recorded during the period

covered by this article. The Prairie Ramblers, for instance, recorded 257 pieces between 1933 and 1942, while also accompanying singer Patsy Montana on an additional eighty-seven sides. Another measure of their recording activity comes from their sixth-place standing on a list of country artists with the greatest number of recording sessions—the Ramblers and Patsy made seventy-five visits to the studio. This list, which I compiled from an analysis of the data compiled in Tony Russell’s valuable *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-42*, contains several other Old Hayloft artists. With 115 recording sessions, Gene Autry has a clear hold on third place, while fiddler Clayton McMichen, who recorded with his own George Wildcats as well as with Gid Tanner & the Skillet Lickers is in tenth, but would move higher if the Skillet Lickers sessions were factored in. Mac & Bob, with fifty-three sessions, are ranked eleventh, while the Hoosier Hot Shots, with thirty-nine, finish off the top twenty. It should be noted that some critics regard as suspect the “hillbilly” credentials of four of the artists at the very top of this list—Vernon Dalhart, Carson Robison, Frankie Marvin, and Bob Miller. If this is the case (and I am not comfortable with the argument), then the two most frequently-recorded authentic rural or country musicians up through 1942 are National Barn Dance stars Gene Autry and the Prairie Ramblers.¹⁸

An analysis of Russell’s discography reveals further hints of the importance of the National Barn Dance. Of the 1,588 artists that Russell includes—if their record label marketed them in any way to white, southern, rural, or small-town consumers, they are included—I identified fifty-five as having some tenure on the WLS Barn Dance. According to Russell’s own estimate, there were over 28,000 masters recorded by these nearly 1,600 acts.¹⁹ By my count, at least fifty-five NBD artists recorded 2,333 of these sides, and that total could be increased by several hundred to make up for later Gene Autry and Clayton McMichen recordings. In either case, over 8 per cent of all country music records made between 1921 and 1942 were made by musicians who at one time or another were members of the Hayloft Gang. Included in these ranks are an impressive array of musicians—starting with Chubby Parker and Pie Plant Pete and stretching through the Cumberland Ridge Runners and the Westerners—who were undeniably rural in origin and who played and sang in styles that are today clearly recognized as “Country.”

Nevertheless, not all of the musicians who performed on the Barn Dance were included in Russell’s discography: some because they apparently never recorded, others because their recordings were apparently not marketed for a rural audience. How do we account for the mix of

popular and “hillbilly” styles that constituted the NBD? One place to start is by acknowledging that this mix never appeared to be a problem for either WLS or its audience. When the NBD went on the air in 1924, a rubric for defining the difference between country music and pop music did not exist. Through the 1930s, WLS exhibited no desire to limit its audience to narrowly-defined segments of taste or musical preference. And though the station’s identifiably rural artists appeared right along such urbane veterans of the music industry as Henry Burr, who had “made more phonograph records than any other person,” and Grace Wilson, “the famous ‘Bringing Home the Bacon’ girl,” no apparent attempt was made to educate the audience about which genre each artist represented. There are two noteworthy exceptions to this rule. Bradley Kincaid and John Lair, a WLS producer and organizer of the Cumberland Ridge Runners, went to great lengths to present what they viewed as authentic folk music from the Southern Appalachians. For both men, it was important to distance their representations of traditional folk song from other commercial manifestations of hillbilly music.²⁰

In the annual *Family Albums* that WLS began to publish in 1930, a little more than a year after *Prairie Farmer* magazine purchased the station from Sears, musical acts are not labeled or segregated by type, beyond small hints or suggestive images. For instance, Arkie the Arkansas Woodchopper had actually chopped wood and Gene Autry had been “really and truly a cowboy” before he became a singer of Western songs. William Vickland, on the other hand, was conservatory-trained, and the Novelodeons, who specialized in comic arrangements, were all “highly skilled musicians.”²¹ One might infer that WLS and the *Prairie Farmer* regarded the difference as one between musicians who learned through aural tradition, such as Arkie and Autry, and those who were formally trained. George Biggar, who had a long association with the Barn Dance as an executive for both the Sears Agricultural Foundation and for *WLS-Prairie Farmer*, applied the descriptive “folk” in a non-academic way in talking about the music of the Barn Dance: “We used the terms ‘folk music’ for traditional music, and ‘modern folk music’ for more recently written songs.”²² But the WLS programmers were never explicit, and we are left to wonder whether or not they intended the term “folk music” to expand to cover all the music heard on the Barn Dance.

Place of origin was also deemed important by those who wrote copy for the *WLS Family Albums* and other publications, presumably because it would reinforce connections between the performers and their mostly rural target audience. Thus, the *Family Album* pointed out that the

Three Neighbor Boys “came directly from the farm in Marshall county, Illinois,” while the Rock Creek Rangers, a band made up of Sunshine Sue Workman and her brothers, was from a farm in Iowa. Still, farm origins are not enough to characterize or categorize the music styles of these performers. Rural districts in America, especially east of the Mississippi River and even in the Southern Appalachians, were never totally isolated from the movements of people in and out, from visits by itinerant troupes of performers or music teachers, or from the cultural influences of town-based institutions and commerce. Brass bands, church hymnals, and musical instrument salesmen were not limited to the cities. Thus there was no essential or impenetrable divide between the music styles of the metropolis and the countryside. And while traditional fiddling or older ballads and folksongs may have been more commonly found in a rural musician’s repertoire, some from the country dabbled in newer sounds, such as band music, ragtime, the latest song compositions from Tin Pan Alley, sophisticated part-singing, or even jazz. In short, some rural musicians, from all parts of the United States, have been known to play music that is, according to current definitions, unmistakably *not* country music.

But the question of origin raises another problematic issue introduced by postwar country music scholars: that is, the notion that country music is primarily and, in some way, intrinsically, *southern*. The clearest statement of what I call the southern thesis is in Bill C. Malone’s masterful history, *Country Music, U.S.A.* He began the first edition with the assertion that commercial country music “developed out of the folk culture of the rural South.” For the second edition, Malone’s definition offered more nuance while reasserting even more strongly the southernness of country music, which

. . . evolved primarily out of the reservoir of folksongs, ballads, dances, and instrumental pieces brought to North America by the Anglo-Celtic immigrants. Gradually absorbing influences from other musical sources, particularly from the culture of Afro-Americans, it eventually emerged as a force strong enough to survive, and even thrive, in an urban-industrial society. . . . It was only in the southern United States, though, that dynamic folk cultural expressions, black and white, evolved into viable commercial forms in our own time.²³

There can be no argument that hillbilly or country music is comfortably at home in the South, and that a large percentage of both country musicians and enthusiasts hail from below the

Mason-Dixon line. Similarly, a substantial portion of NBD artists had southern roots, and the program was well-received by southerners who had migrated to Chicago and elsewhere in the Midwest. Yet there is no evidence that regional style was ever *the* determining factor in selecting or rejecting artists to appear on the Barn Dance, at least before World War II, or in the general preferences of the show's audience.

A few years before Malone's history was published, D. K. Wilgus offered an eloquent description of the multiple roots of what became country music:

Early hillbilly performers came not only from the lowland and upland South, but from the Great Plains and the Midwest That the first important hillbilly radio show originated in Chicago cannot be explained solely by the presence of Southern migrants. Its manifestation was of the South; its essence was of rural America. Southern hillbilly music seems but a specialized and dominant form of a widespread music²⁴

Unfortunately, Wilgus's wisdom has been ignored, and the southern thesis has become gospel truth in the scholarly discourse on country music. Occasionally, scholars have had to make some unwarranted assumptions in order to account for the presence or absence of what they view as real country music, the southern variety, on the National Barn Dance. A few examples will suffice. Jeffrey Lange argued that a group like the Prairie Ramblers, Kentucky natives with a smooth sound and a preference for swing, were necessary on the NBD in the mid-'30s to offset the Cumberland Ridge Runners (also from Kentucky), a more characteristically southern—and presumably rougher-sounding—string band. Following this line of thinking, the Ridge Runners' appeal was limited to the southern migrants in the audiences and, by implication, the Ramblers would not be an appropriate hire for a barn-dance show on a southern radio station. And in an oft-made retrospective comparison with the Grand Ol' Opry on WSM in Nashville, Charles Wolfe described the WLS Barn Dance as “‘soft’ country— with a lot of vaudeville, barbershop quartets, polka bands, and ersatz cowboy songs.”²⁵ Wolfe's assertion is correct that such styles were present on the NBD; but the implication that this limited range of styles adequately describes the music of the early National Barn Dance is completely misleading.

Another example of the contortions required to prop up a regional bias stems from a memorable, though regularly misunderstood, statement from a WLS executive. At some point in

the early 1950s, long-time station manager Glenn Snyder—he started at WLS in 1932—proposed the term “hungry hillbilly” as the antithesis of what the National Barn Dance was all about. Beginning with Bernard Asbel’s 1954 story on the Barn Dance for *Chicago Magazine*, most critics have asserted that Snyder equated “hungry hillbilly” with southern styles of country music, and “he’ll have none of it on WLS.” A more careful reading of Asbel’s treatment reveals this equation to be rash and unfortunate. According to Snyder’s colleague, George Biggar, the “hungry” label referred to the southern-style country bands that played taverns and honky-tonks while costumed in “fancy get-ups,” like those fashionable in postwar Nashville. Though this discourse on hungry hillbillies originated in a later period, there is relevance for this essay. Biggar tied the critique of hungry hillbillies to Burrige Butler’s commanding preference for a certain style of presentation, for overalls and calico shirts and a mandate that his WLS artists be natural and “ring true.”²⁶ According to practices established in the 1930s, there would be no Nudie suits on the Barn Dance. But Snyder and company never hung out a virtual sign that read “No southerners need apply.”

One further tangential observation about hungry hillbillies practically cries out to be made. Perhaps only a resident of the Chicago area would catch the possible double meaning of Snyder’s positive term for the music of the Barn Dance: “uptown hillbilly.” The tavern district where Snyder’s hungry hillbillies plied their trade, as described in Asbel’s article, was located on the west side, along Madison Avenue. Uptown, on the other hand, is a north-side neighborhood that has long served as a point of entry for immigrants and, especially in the mid-twentieth century, for white migrants coming to Chicago from the Southern Appalachians and elsewhere in the rural South. Could Snyder’s vision of an “uptown hillbilly” have meant a southern mountaineer newly arrived in Chicago; someone whose musical heritage was closer to the mountain folksongs promoted by Bradley Kincaid and John Lair than to artificial hillbilly songs of the music industry? It is worth pondering.

A critique is long overdue of the southern thesis, and of other essentialist explanations of the emergence of commercial country music from the abundance of rural music styles and traditions found throughout America in the first half of the twentieth century. That, however, is beyond the scope of this essay. Let it suffice that when distinctive, commercial, southern forms of country music developed in the 1940s, especially with the ascendancy of Nashville, some of these styles were alien to the goals of WLS and the *Prairie Farmer*. Still, the dominant

southernness of postwar country music should not grant the southern apologists an exclusive claim to the music's historical roots. The dynamic folk traditions of string bands and songsters from the 1920s and into the early 1930s, and the more professionalized soloists, vocal duos, and swing bands of the late '30s were equally developed by rural musicians from the Midwest, the West, and the North.

But if none of the definitions or genre labels offered up thus far by scholars (popular versus hillbilly) or by the NBD's marketing department (folk and modern folk, songs of the mountains and plains) are adequately descriptive, how do we understand the distinctive character of the music of the Old Hayloft? I believe an answer can be found in the merging of the existential dynamics of the radio medium and WLS's reliance on the old and the familiar to win a place for itself in the homes of rural Americans. Once again, the *Chicago Herald & Examiner*'s announcement of the first show provides a clue: WLS's strategy highlighted "the old familiar calls of the barn dance fiddler" and relied on the appeal of pleasurable experiences and nostalgic memories associated with a real barn dance, a widespread institution of communal sociability that many commentators of the time feared was passing from the scene. While the station's executives initially envisioned that rural folks would actually hold a dance on Saturday nights to music supplied from the WLS studios—and some apparently did—it did not take long to realize that this was not the best use of the new medium.²⁷

Old-time fiddling and square dance calls, nevertheless, continued to be potent symbols for WLS and the National Barn Dance. For four months beginning in the summer of 1924, the station conducted a fiddle contest during Saturday-night broadcasts with the listening audience serving as judges. First prize was awarded to George Adamson of Kenosha, Wisconsin, at one of the NBD's first remote broadcasts from the Illinois State Fair in September. In 1926 and 1927, the NBD conducted similar on-air contests for square dance callers. There were thirty-one contestants in the 1927 contest, but no announcement of who the winners were either year has yet surfaced.²⁸ Through the 1930s, the Hayloft Gang always included several old-time fiddlers, but by 1939 (the date of the earliest recorded broadcast I have been able to hear), square dance calling had been relegated to a symbolic and transitional role. On the NBC network segment, the Arkansas Woodchopper delivered rapid-fire patter calls that faded out as the program went to a commercial break. A union-mandated, staff orchestra supplied the fiddle breakdown for this network broadcast.²⁹

Through their experiments in programming, WLS discovered that the old familiar music that worked best on radio was music better suited for the more intimate domestic spaces of the parlor or kitchen, not the public hall. Old-time fiddling and its associated dance forms belonged primarily to what folklorists have called “public” or “assembly” traditions. “Domestic” traditions, on the other hand, included the customary contexts for the singing of traditional folksongs and for family music-making.³⁰ In the latter part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, domestic music traditions increasingly featured parlor performances made possible with purchases of merchandise from a music dealer, including sheet music, song folios, and relatively affordable mass-produced instruments like guitars, mandolins, and especially the piano. WLS and the Barn Dance found a comfort zone by concentrating on such domestic traditions, which led to a shift to smaller and more intimate acts: solo performers, vocal duos and trios, and jocular conversational skits involving the announcer, as straight man, and one or two comedians.

Soloists, like Bradley Kincaid and Grace Wilson, and small ensembles, from the Girls of the Golden West to the Maple City Four, all became as familiar as friends to the listeners at home, because they fit well with the dynamics of the new medium. Radio receivers came to be housed in large cabinets, usually crafted as attractive pieces of furniture for a family residence. Audiences listened in the comfort of their living rooms, parlors, or kitchens. In addition, the audio fidelity of radio sets after the mid-1920s far surpassed that of the phonographs of the day. The radio singer’s voice was more immediately present in the listener’s home than the voice of the phonograph-recording artist. The NBD played up this familiar, homey quality, and asked its performers to be natural, unassuming, and friendly. In constructing their virtual and musical “Old Hayloft,” WLS began by modeling it as a public assembly, an old-time social dance in a rustic outbuilding. But they reached their greatest levels of success when they reconfigured the presentation to suggest surroundings as comfortable and as homey as the parlor or living room. The Old Hayloft—the barn that housed the Barn Dance—thus became, not a public venue, but an extension of the home, of the hearth.³¹

Furthermore, the seemingly natural merger between the intimacy of radio and the familiarity of old-time songs provided a way for urban popular song artists to fit in seamlessly with the rural musicians of the Barn Dance. Based on the photographic evidence of the *WLS Family Albums*, at least some of the pop music acts reconfigured their presentation for the

domestic setting of the Old Hayloft. A key element for making the transition: the use of one of the countless guitar-strumming members of the station's cast. Slim Bryant, guitarist with Clayton McMichen's Georgia Wildcats, was asked to be the accompanist for one of station's popular songs artists in 1932. On the Barn Dance, the staff pianist—Ralph Whitlock in the 1920s and John Brown during the '30s—may be all the accompaniment a singer used, suggesting a setting like a family parlor.³²

To better understand the import of this reconfiguration, consider that since at least Stephen Foster's era (the decades leading up to the Civil War), the American popular song tradition was centered on public, staged performances. Star singers, who helped the music industry by promoting the latest hits from Tin Pan Alley composers, performed to orchestra accompaniment in concert settings in the popular theater and vaudeville. When the recording industry broke upon the scene, people went to public arcades where they could drop a coin in a cylinder machine and hear a singer backed by a studio orchestra. When the phonograph itself was domesticated, the music on the discs played at home continued to represent the performance practices of the assembly tradition. With the development of radio broadcasting—direct competition for the record industry—popular singers were presented a new venue with its own set of new challenges and demands. WLS and the Barn Dance met those challenges with astounding success by erasing the social distance between the performer and audience, a separation that characterized the assembly tradition. They turned pop singers into friends who had come into your home to visit.³³ Other radio stations, of course, worked similarly successful strategies. The National Barn Dance led the way by using the symbols of rural sociability and old-time music to draw into its embrace music and musicians from more formal and urbane performance contexts. Popular songs could be remade as folk songs, or at least be imbued with the rural values of the Old Hayloft.

The first identifiable pop singers on the National Barn Dance were the duo of Ford & Glenn (Ford Rush and Glenn Rowell), who station manager Edgar Bill discovered in a theater on Chicago's north side during WLS's first few weeks of operation. For the next few years they appeared weekly on the Barn Dance and also hosted a "Lullaby Time" for a half hour prior to the start of the NBD proper. Ford and Glenn were the first in a long line of small vocal ensembles in the Old Hayloft who specialized in close harmony. The list includes such groups as Ingram & Carpenter, the Harmony Girls (1924); Three Hired Men, "Swedish boys with plenty of 'mean'

harmony” (1930); the Milk Maids, including Juanita (Mrs. John) Brown, a native of Adrian, Michigan (1930); Three Neighbor Boys, “their singing has never lost its sweetness and simplicity” (1935); and the Girls’ Trio, “three little girls from Des Plaines . . . perfect harmony” (1939).³⁴ Was the repertoire of these vocal groups country or pop? Such labels apparently did not matter to WLS and its audience. What was important is the easy familiarity with which they brought music into one’s parlor. These singers, starring on a nationally prominent radio show, were like . . . well, more like neighbor kids, or hired hands, or other familiar members of your community.

Homey and domestic presentations were not the entirety of the National Barn Dance. Many acts still clearly represented the assembly traditions of public performance. These acts ranged from string and swing bands like the Georgia Wildcats and the Westerners to raucous novelty groups like the Four Hired Men and the Hoosier Hot Shots. Also, the Barn Dance always had some sort of staff band. Starting in 1924, it was the generically titled “old time fiddlers.” In the early ’30s, Rube Tronson’s Texas Cowboys—featuring two real country fiddlers along with accordion, clarinet, and other brass—filled that role. In 1932, there was no staff orchestra, and with several organized string bands in the cast, the bands took turns playing for the square dance troupe for its turn on stage.³⁵ By the end the 1930s, a staff orchestra—with union-card-carrying violinists, not country fiddlers—was on stage for at least the NBC network segment of the broadcast. Network shows from that era started and ended with big production numbers featuring the orchestra and the many-voiced Hayloft Chorus. But the heart of the Barn Dance was in the intimate and familiar presentations of small groups like Mac & Bob, Jo & Alma, Karl & Harty, the Flannery Sisters, Lulu Belle & Scotty, The Girls of the Golden West, Linda Parker with the Cumberland Ridge Runners, The Three Maids (the Overstake Sisters), and Winnie Lou & Sally (named for WLS). Notice how many of these artists are women. What could be more homey and domestic than that for 1930s audiences?

The Rural Rhythm of the Hayloft Gang

The actual sounds of the National Barn Dance before World War II are quite elusive, for the words and pictures of the *WLS Family Albums* carry no audible signal. For readers able to render music notation into a musical performance, there are several dozen song folios published by NBD artists before 1942 that contain lyrics, piano arrangements, guitar chord symbols, and, in

one case, numbers and symbols indicating where and when to draw or blow on a ten-hole harmonica. Songbooks like these would have been helpful for playing along at home with an artist heard regularly over the airwaves. But today, separated by many decades, such published arrangements are by themselves insufficiently descriptive to enable an accurate re-enactment of the music of the Old Hayloft.³⁶

A few examples will disclose some of the challenges encountered. When compared to their phonograph records, the song folios published for Bradley Kincaid, Mac & Bob, and others contain quite accurate transcriptions of the lyrics of the songs. Other artists' songbooks show more lyrical variation, but the differences are still relatively minor. More crucial are the differences in form that can be found by comparing printed scores and recorded versions of the songs. For instance, the songbook version of the Arkansas Woodchopper's "The Bronc That Wouldn't Bust" gives no indication that the fourth and final stanza was used by Arkie as a refrain after each of the other three stanzas on the recorded performance. In addition, for this song and another cowboy song, "Texas Cowboy," the songbook supplies yodels that are less elaborate and only half the length of what is heard on Arkie's phonograph records.³⁷

The most glaring inaccuracies in the song folios are found in the musical notations themselves. Vocal harmonies are entirely missing in the folios published for Mac & Bob and Karl & Harty, duets whose characteristic styles were built on close harmony. Examples of melodic imprecision can be found time and again in the songbooks. It is admittedly difficult to clearly and cleanly transcribe the vocal nuances of a traditional folk singer who employs slides, scoops, and other vocal ornaments in moving from note to note. (Such features epitomized the emerging distinctiveness of country music, including the styles heard on WLS, and were often contrary to the strictures and conventions of formal music training in the first half of the twentieth century.) Still, the published song folios often miss basic melodic steps and turns of the performance practices heard on records made by NBD artists.³⁸

Irish Washerwoman



1: from *100 WLS Barn Dance Favorites*

A telling instance is found in the notation for the fiddle tune, “The Irish Washerwoman,” credited to Tommy Dandurand. The version printed in a landmark 1935 anthology (see Figure 1) is nearly identical to other published settings of this standard piece. My transcription of an actual Dandurand performance—recorded in the Gennett studios in Chicago in August of 1927—shows some notable differences that reflect Dandurand’s personal shaping of the tune (see Figure 2). In the first strain he preferred a gently curving melodic contour over the repeated jumps of the conventional setting. His second strain comprised a melodic idiosyncrasy in the first half, and a distinctive rhythmic shift in the descending figure leading to the final notes. And finally, Dandurand’s record featured square dance calls sung by Ed Goodreau, in what is likely the earliest recorded example of a “singing call,” a style of calling that would come to rival the older style of chanted and rhymed calls known as “patter.”³⁹

The Irish Washerwoman



2: Supertone 9160, by Dandurand & His Barn Dance Fiddlers

Discs made for the record industry provide the best opportunity available today to hear something resembling the sounds of the early National Barn Dance. Still, it must be remembered that such recordings do not represent performances in front of a radio microphone, but rather in the studio of a rival business concern. During the 1920s and '30s, record companies’ profits dipped sharply, due in large part to the formidable competition afforded by radio. Bill Malone, for one, has argued that commercial country music developed out of the kinds of rural folk music the record companies turned to in order to develop new markets and reverse their slumping sales. Sears, on the other hand, saw an opportunity to work both sides of the aisle and entered into a complicated agreement with the Gennett label—affiliated with the Starr Piano Company of Richmond, Indiana—to produce budget records featuring Barn Dance artists on the Challenge and Silvertone labels. In later stages of the five-year deal, the WLS material recorded by Gennett was issued on Supertone and Conqueror.⁴⁰

By the start of 1928, four Barn Dance acts—Walter Petersen, the Kentucky Wonderbean, Tom Owen’s Barn Dance Trio, Tommy Dandurand & His Gang of WLS, and Chubby Parker—

had recorded at Gennett's studios in Richmond and Chicago. Sears sold these records through its ubiquitous catalog. Weekly appearances on one of the most popular shows on radio undoubtedly provided the kind of publicity that other rural recording artists envied. Even after Sears sold WLS to the *Prairie Farmer*, Barn Dance artists Bradley Kincaid, the Arkansas Woodchopper, and Pie Plant Pete continued to record at Gennett for labels featured in the Sears catalog.⁴¹

The commercial alliance between Sears, WLS, and a record company reached a most interesting, and perhaps most profitable, convergence in 1931, when Sears hired Gene Autry to broadcast regularly on "Conqueror Record Time," a show sponsored by the retailer on WLS. Because of his growing popularity, Autry had just been signed to a contract by the ARC group of record labels, which then included Sears's own Conqueror label. For its part, Sears loaded its catalog with Gene Autry merchandise, including a signature-model guitar, song books, and a section of Autry records on Conqueror. Topping it off was the fact that Autry became a regular guest on the National Barn Dance. The irony is that Autry, who became perhaps the most famous and successful performer associated with the Barn Dance, was not an employee of WLS, but of Sears!⁴²

Here, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is difficult to fathom the earlier rivalry between the phonograph and broadcasting industries. Nevertheless, at some stations—most notably, WLW in Cincinnati—broadcast performers were prohibited from making records. Other professional country musicians who worked in radio never bothered to record, because the financial returns were minimal. Conversely, many of the rural string bands and songsters, who were the first wave of country music on record, never really became professional entertainers. To have a career in country music in the 1930s, it was virtually an absolute necessity to get a good foothold in the broadcast industry, and most radio jobs for country musicians were non-paying. Regular radio air time allowed a barnstorming act to publicize its public appearances in the station's listening area. It was through admissions and the sales of souvenir photographs and songbooks that a band of young country musicians could make a living.⁴³

For several reasons, the National Barn Dance proved to be the pinnacle of the country music field before World War II. Perhaps most importantly, broadcasting on WLS was a paying gig. George Biggar claimed the average WLS staff musician's weekly salary was \$60; those who appeared only on the Barn Dance got union scale or about \$20. As Patsy Montana would

disclose, however, WLS was not willing to pay female artists the same scale. Only when she relied on the bargaining power of a recent hit record and threatened to quit did WLS executives agree to a \$60 salary, half again the size of their original offer.⁴⁴ Furthermore, because Chicago was an important center of recording for major labels (Columbia and Victor), the independents (Paramount, Gennett, and ARC), and the new budget labels (Bluebird and Decca), NBD artists had enhanced opportunities to make records.

And record, they did! Through a concerted effort over the last few years, I have been able to listen to nearly seven hundred sides—out of the 2,333 referred to earlier—recorded by Old Hayloft artists.⁴⁵ I have heard at least one recording by nearly two-thirds of the fifty-five NBD country artists who also made records between 1924 and 1942. The musical examples assembled comprise one to three CDs worth of material (from twenty to seventy pieces) for each of the following major NBD artists: Arkansas Woodchopper, Gene Autry, Girls of the Golden West, Hoosier Hot Shots, Karl & Harty & the Cumberland Ridge Runners, Bradley Kincaid, Lulu Belle & Scottie, Mac & Bob, Louise Massey & the Westerners, Clayton McMichen & the Georgia Wildcats, Patsy Montana, Little Chubby Parker, and the Prairie Ramblers. At the other end of the scale, I have sampled only a few songs by artists like the Happy Valley Family, Lonnie Glosson, Jo & Alma (the Kentucky Girls), Fred Kirby, Pie Plant Pete, Blaine & Cal Smith (the Boys from Virginia), and the Smoky Mountain Sacred Singers (a quartet that included Mac & Bob). Some NBD artists who made records are still aural mysteries to me: Dixie Mason, the Flannery Sisters, the Dean Brothers, Sally Foster, the Hill Toppers, the Maple City Four, Tom & Don, and Romaine Lowdermilk.

Two discographical reference works have been published recently that provide complementary tools for assessing the repertoires of early country music artists, including these performers from the Old Hayloft. Russell's *Country Music Records*, already introduced, provides chronological lists of each artist's recorded masters, grouped by session. Guthrie Meade's posthumously published *Country Music Sources: A Biblio-Discography of Commercially Recorded Traditional Music*, contrarily, is organized by song, which Meade painstakingly sorted into a taxonomy of song families and types. Meade's magnum opus does not include every country song recorded before 1942—as does, at least in theory, Russell's—only those that he deemed traditional according to the following criteria: “those recorded songs that have appeared in published folk song collections, as well as those songs copyrighted or

appearing in print prior to 1920.” Meade estimated that the entirety of recorded country music was 20,000 masters. Further, he claimed that his definition of a traditional song covered “around 90% of the recorded repertoires of the early country entertainers, but less than 50% of later performers.” The majority of the Barn Dance artists listed in the previous paragraph belong to the latter category.⁴⁶

In what follows, I will briefly summarize the biographies and recorded repertoires of the early Barn Dance’s most important rural musicians and will further attempt to draw stylistic connections to other members of the Hayloft Gang by grouping the artists in rough chronological order in these categories: fiddlers, folk song artists, modern folk song artists, western song artists, and novelty musicians. These categories are for convenience and are by no means to be regarded as mutually exclusive. The repertoires of many NBD performers contained material that belongs in more than one category. Nevertheless, my hope is that this scheme will help reveal the both the breadth and depth of rural rhythm heard in the Old Hayloft.

Fiddlers

In 1935, both George Biggar and John Lair published nostalgic remembrances of the beginning of the National Barn Dance, and both identified Tommy Dandurand as the show’s first old-time fiddler, or as leader of the first fiddle band. However, there is no evidence to verify this claim. The second week the Barn Dance was on the air, one Chicago newspaper listed the scheduled performers as follows: “Evening barn dance; special music by old-time fiddlers; features by Timothy Cornrow, violinist; Kentucky Wonderbean, harp; Cowbell Pete, bells.” It is possible that Dandurand may have been the leader of that anonymous band of fiddlers, or the real person behind the pseudonym Timothy Cornrow (another paper reported that Cornrow was “from Ioway”). Yet, through the first half-year of the NBD, twenty other fiddlers’ names are listed in the Chicago papers as making an appearance. The name “Fiddling Tommy Danduran” [sic] does not appear until January 3, 1925. Ironically, that was an evening when Dandurand was back home in Kankakee competing in a fiddle contest.⁴⁷

Throughout that first summer of 1924, the National Barn Dance was devoted to an on-air fiddle contest. Contestants were nominated by their local communities and were named each week in the *Chicago Evening Post and Literary Review*: e.g., C.A Pemwright of Mt. Ayr, Indiana; N.G. Aldrett of Morrison, Illinois; Chester Crandill of Hebron, Wisconsin; W.

Goatschel of Oak Park, Illinois; Thomas Frill of Mason, Illinois; and unnamed fiddlers from the Iowa Farmers Union. The contest was for teams that were to include a lead fiddler, a second fiddler, and a “caller who knows what real calling means.” Not all entrants met these criteria, and even the winning team from Kenosha, Wisconsin included only on George Adamson on fiddle and George Murdick on piano.⁴⁸

Irish Washerwoman



3: Silvertone 3106, by Tom Owen's Barn Dance Trio

In February of 1926, the NBD’s resident square dance caller, Tom Owen, a native of Missouri, recorded eight fiddle tunes with calls at the Gennett studios in Richmond, Indiana. In the absence of any concrete data, most historians have attributed the fiddling on those discs, once again, to Tommy Dandurand. But a comparison of a transcription of the “Irish Washerwoman” recorded at that session (Figure 3) with Dandurand’s recording of a year later (Figure 2), suggests that these are performances by two different fiddlers. (Further comparisons of other tunes common to both session provide additional support for this conclusion.) The identity of the fiddler in Owen’s Barn Dance Trio will probably never be known. A small likelihood exists that it is one of two fiddlers in a photograph printed several times in early promotions of the Barn Dance: Illinois fiddlers Frank Hart of Aurora and William McCormick of Marseilles are pictured along with guitarist James E. Priest (Figure 4).⁴⁹



4: J.B. Priestly, Frank Hart & William McCormick

Tommy Dandurand—born in 1865 in Kankakee County, Illinois, third generation of a pioneer French family that settled in “Le Petit Canada” in Bourbonnais Township—did appear regularly on the Barn Dance from the fall of 1924 through at least 1930.⁵⁰ In 1927, he made two trips to the Gennett studios in Chicago and recorded fourteen sides, thirteen of which had square dance calls. The remaining side was a medley of waltzes. These performances by Tommy Dandurand & his Barn Dance Gang were in accord with the stated rules of the 1924 fiddle contest on WLS: Dandurand and Rube Tronson, a native of Wisconsin, fiddled in a rarely recorded, archaic, regional style in which the lead fiddler plays the melody along with chordal accompaniment from a second fiddler. The caller on these sides was Ed Goodreau, also from Kankakee. On a few pieces in 6/8, or jig, time, a banjo can be faintly heard.

Since Guthrie Meade included all of the tunes recorded by the Owen and Dandurand band in his *Country Music Sources*, they are traditional according to his definition. The same can be said for eleven of the twelve fiddle tunes, with calls, recorded in 1933 in Chicago for Bluebird by the National Barn Dance Orchestra. None of the musicians—two fiddles, two guitars, and a mandola—have been identified, and in truth, only the band name connects these recordings to the WLS show. The mandola was not all that common an instrument, however, and a mandola player, Chick Hurt of the Prairie Ramblers, had just joined the Barn Dance that year. A picture of Rube Tronson’s Texas Cowboys printed in the 1933 *WLS Family Album* provides another tantalizing hint. It shows two fiddlers, both natives of Wisconsin: Tronson, the orchestra leader, and Leizime Brusoe, from Rhinelander.⁵¹ Another puzzling fiddle band, with possible ties to WLS, recorded in Chicago in 1934, when the Rustic Revelers cut eight sides for Decca (five of which were classified as traditional by Meade). The only possible connection, the name of the band, is in this case quite a bit more tenuous. Still, the Hoosier Hot Shots, an immensely popular novelty band that joined WLS in 1933, were the direct offspring of a barnstorming comic group known as Ezra Buzzington’s Rustic Revelers. Fiddler Buddy McDowell, a native of Van Wert, Ohio, who later joined the NBD in a reconfigured lineup of the Cumberland Ridge Runners, was another Buzzington alumnus. Was McDowell the fiddler in the Rustic Revelers 1934 session? Could Tronson and Brusoe have led an actual National Barn Dance Orchestra through its paces in that 1933 Bluebird session? I doubt we will ever know for sure.

From the mysterious Timothy Cornrow, to the unnamed fiddlers of the National Barn Dance Orchestra, most of the Old Hayloft’s fiddlers toiled in anonymity. Though they were the

sparks that originally ignited the National Barn Dance, they were clearly never the stars. There were a few exceptions, such as Lily May Ledford, a nineteen-year-old fiddler, banjo-picker, and traditional folksong artist from Lombard, Kentucky, who appeared on the Barn Dance in 1936 before heading off to Cincinnati with John Lair the next year to form the celebrated Coon Creek Girls. Homer “Slim” Miller was a baggy pants comedian and versatile fiddler for the Cumberland Ridge Runners. Upon hearing preserved transcriptions of the Pinex Merry-makers, it is evident that Miller was equally adept with old-time square dance tunes and more modern styles of fiddling, influenced by jazz and swing. Slim only recorded two fiddle tunes on commercial discs: “Roundin’ Up the Yearlings,” which Meade classified as traditional, and his signature piece “Goofus,” which was too recent a composition for inclusion in Meade.

Another fiddler in the same mode came to the Barn Dance in 1933. Clayton McMichen had recently quit one of the most commercially successful rural string bands in the United States, Gid Tanner & his Skillet Lickers, who recorded over a hundred sides for Columbia between 1926 and ’31. McMichen, however, had grown weary of straight ahead, old-time fiddling and was “determined to forge a new string band music that borrowed heavily from Big-Band Swing.” Over the next few years, he would make strides toward that goal with his new band, the Georgia Wildcats, which featured a young, jazz-adept guitarist and fellow Georgian, Slim Bryant.⁵² But based on the thirty-four pieces the Wildcats recorded in the two years before they came to Chicago, they were still firmly grounded in traditional old-time music. The path McMichen would follow toward the hot sounds of jazz and swing are prefigured in a couple of these recordings: e.g., “Wild Cat Rag”; “Yum Yum Blues” (a Slim Bryant composition); and a western song composed by two Chicagoans, “When the Bloom Is on the Sage,”

McMichen’s vision was partly shared by several other National Barn Dance fiddlers: Tex Atchison and Alan Crockett, early and later fiddlers with the Prairie Ramblers, and Curt Massey of the Westerners. (All three will be introduced more fully in the treatments of their bands in following sections.) The blending of old-time fiddling with the hot licks of jazz and swing was achieved soonest, perhaps, by the Prairie Ramblers, with Atchison leading the way. Nevertheless, Massey, Atchison, and Crockett could fiddle an old-time breakdown with the best. Massey’s 1934 “Brown Skin Gal Down the Road,” and Atchison’s 1937 “Raise the Roof in Georgia” and “Kansas City Rag”—with dance calls—would be driving enough for any floor filled

with square dance sets.

In 1941, as a nationwide square dance revival was gathering steam, Alan Crockett went into the studio with the Arkansas Woodchopper’s Square Dance Band to record tunes and calls for seven square figures and an old-time “circle two-step.” Crockett played “Walking Up Town” for the latter, a variant of a widespread tune commonly known as “Twinkle Little Star” (not the same as the children’s song). Meade identified all eight of the tunes fiddled by Crockett as traditional.

Folk Song Artists

Little Chubby Parker—his given name was Frederick—was perhaps the National Barn Dance’s first true folksinger. Nearly a decade after he left the program, John Lair described him as “the first to bring to radio the home songs of America.”⁵³ His name first appeared in program listings for the Barn Dance on July 18, 1925, but disappeared sometime in 1927. Between 1927 and 1930, he recorded thirty-six sides for Gennett (and Sears), and he recorded nineteen more for Sears’ Conqueror label in 1931. Parker also recorded two sides for Columbia in New York in 1928. One of these, “King Kong Kitchie Kitchie Ki-Me-O,” a version of a satirical English ballad commonly known as “Froggie Went a-Courting,” was included in the influential *Anthology of American Folksong*, issued in 1952, and was the first introduction of an early National Barn Dance artist to most postwar folk music revivalists.

Beyond these basic facts, little more is known for certain about Chubby Parker, though conjecture is plentiful. Clayton Jackson, a Gennett Records sales manager in Chicago, claimed to have tracked Parker down in a speakeasy to sign him to a Gennett contract after the company had signed its deal with Sears. Charles Wolfe asserted that Parker was a native of Kentucky, that he left WLS out of jealousy over Bradley Kincaid’s success, and that in the 1930s, he was still living in Chicago but no longer in the music business.⁵⁴ There is also some confusion about Parker’s banjo playing, as it bears no sonic resemblance to more common traditional styles,

Gennetts of Old Time Tunes



CHUBBY PARKER

EACH week from radio station WLS, Chicago, Chubby Parker sends his messages of mirth and song to thousands of unseen admirers. These radio fans as well as his Gennett friends make him one of the country's most popular artists.

Chubby has asked us to tell everybody that he has a lot of new songs for the new year.

BIB-A-LOLLIE-BOO—Old Time Singin'—Banjo Acc.	6077
NICKETY NACKETY NOW NOW NOW—Old Time Singin'—Banjo Acc.	.75
OH SUSANNA—Old Time Vocal—Tenor Banjo Acc.	6097
I'M A STERN OLD BACHELOR—Old Time Vocal—Banjo Acc.	.75
WHOA MULE WHOA—Old Time Vocal—Tenor Banjo Acc.	6120
LITTLE BROWN JUG—Old Time Vocal—Banjo Acc.	.75
UNCLE NED—Old Time Singin' & Playin'—Banjo Acc.	6287
OH—DEM GOLDEN SLIPPERS—Old Time Singin' & Playin'—Banjo Acc.	.75

5: Chubby Parker & his 5-string banjo

clawhammer (down-picking) and two- or three-finger up-picking. My ears hear a plectrum, rather than fingers on the strings, and a picking style similar to early-country guitar playing. Russell and Meade must have heard something similar, for they both list Parker as playing a tenor (or four-string) banjo. But a picture in a Gennett catalog showed him holding a five-string banjo.

Harry Steele, writing in 1936, claimed that when Parker was pressed into service as a folk singer—he was already singing on WLS—it was a role for which he was ill-suited. A more recent critic averred that Parker played the stereotypical role of “backward hillbilly.”⁵⁵ An aural examination of Parker’s recorded repertoire offers a contrary appraisal. The singer was comfortable with a variety of old-time songs, including songs from blackface minstrelsy, abolitionist songs, sentimental songs, and comic songs. On all his recordings, his singing was accompanied by his banjo. On some he added harmonica or whistling. His most famous song, “Little Old Sod Shanty on the Claim,” was a remake of Will Hays’s well-known “Little Old Cabin in the Lane,” first published in 1871. One of the newer compositions Parker recorded, “See The Black Clouds A’ Breakin’ Over Yonder,” was evidently written for Huey Long’s populist campaign for the governorship of Louisiana. The fifty-six masters recorded by Parker comprised only twenty-nine different songs. Many songs he recorded at three or more of his nine recording sessions. Of these twenty-nine songs, only four were not classified by Meade as traditional.

Bradley Kincaid’s musical career, on the other hand, has been well-chronicled. Born in 1895 in Garrard County in the Bluegrass region of eastern Kentucky, he was raised in the foothills of the Cumberland Mountains. His family and neighborhood both were full of singers. His father swapped a foxhound for the guitar on which Bradley learned to play. The first phase of his musical education was thus rooted deeply in the folk music traditions of his home and community. The next phase was as well. At age nineteen, he entered the Foundation School at Berea College in neighboring Madison County, where, after serving in the army during World War I, he finished his High School degree at the age of twenty-seven. Berea College is well-known for its institutional interest in traditional culture, and Bradley’s experiences there certainly solidified his respect for the folk songs he learned at home. Yet when he arrived in Chicago in 1924 to attend the YMCA College (later renamed George Williams College), he

busied himself directing glee clubs and church choirs and became a member of the YMCA College Quartet.⁵⁶

The YMCA quartet opened the door for Kincaid to become part of the Barn Dance in 1926. When the quartet performed on a weekday show at WLS, the group's manager told Don Malin, the station's music director, about Kincaid's folk-song repertoire. Malin invited him to come back on Saturday and sing a few "old timers" on the Barn Dance. He did and soon became one of the first big radio stars in the United States. However, Kincaid had in fact aimed his career down a different path, toward formal music education. He even had to borrow a guitar for his Barn Dance debut. But the \$15 weekly paycheck that came with being on the NBD was too much for a 1920s college student to refuse, and the hundreds of appreciative letters from listeners, which began arriving immediately, convinced him to give radio a try.⁵⁷

Bradley Kincaid, "the Kentucky Mountain Boy" with his "hound dog guitar"—a replica of which was soon offered for sale in the Sears catalog—was a big favorite on the Barn Dance for the next four years, until he left for WLW in Cincinnati. During his time at WLS, he discovered—upon urging by station manager Edgar Bill—that a lucrative market existed for his mountain folk songs. In April of 1928, he published a songbook containing twenty-two of *My Favorite Mountain Ballad and Old Time Songs*, which proved to be so popular with Barn Dance listeners that it required five additional printings in the next sixteen months. Two additional volumes were printed at WLS, and ten more followed in the next fifteen years, during which Kincaid worked mostly in the Northeast. He also discovered, again to his surprise, that scores of people wanted to hear him in person. He told of arriving in Peoria for his first booking through the WLS Artists Bureau only to see people lined up for several blocks outside the theatre, having no inkling they were there to see him. He made several hundred dollars that night, and after a few years of radio work, he had achieved a previously unimaginable level of financial comfort.

During his four years on WLS, Bradley Kincaid recorded eighty-five pieces, and another fifty-five before 1942. Like Parker, he recorded many songs at more than one session, often for different labels. In the final count, he recorded ninety-five songs, eighty-five of which are classified as traditional by Meade. His biggest hit was the traditional ballad, "Barbara Allen." Several other British ballads were in his repertoire, as well as a broad sample of American ballads, lyric folksongs, frolic songs, sentimental songs, and comic songs. All were recorded with Bradley's spare but solid guitar accompaniment.

Arkansas Woodchopper was the stage name for Luther Ossenbrink, but the Hayloft Gang more often called him 'Arkie'. Born in 1906 in the town of Knob Noster in central Missouri (not, as often reported, in the Ozarks), Arkie had a thoroughly rural upbringing that introduced him to both the pleasures of country life—hunting, fishing, fiddling, and calling square dances—and the drudgery. “The last real labor I did on the farm was to clear 10 acres of honey locust,” he told the *Prairie Farmer*, when he was brand new to the Barn Dance. He started in radio on KMBC, the Sears station in Kansas City, in 1928. He joined the National Barn Dance the next year, and stayed through the 1960s. Affable and multi-talented, he was a favorite of both listeners and fellow cast members. A *WLS Family Album* listed his talents as “plunking the guitar to accompany his cowboy or comedy songs; playing ‘lead fiddle’ in the barn dance orchestra; ‘seconding’ fiddlers with his banjo’ or ‘calling off’ for square dancers.”⁵⁸ All of Arkie’s talents were of a rustic variety. He was pictured playing his fiddle while holding it down against his chest, rather than in a conventional violinist’s hold on the shoulder.

Between 1928 and 1931, Arkie, with just his guitar, recorded forty masters, comprising thirty-six songs. Thirty-two of his songs are classified as traditional by Meade, including a smattering of old-time cowboy songs, like “The Cowboy’s Dream,” and comic songs, e.g., “(Who Threw the Overalls in) Mrs. Murphy’s Chowder.” Most of Arkie’s recorded songs were on sentimental themes of home, “Sweet Sunny South”; family, “Write Me a Song of My Father”; and love, “Prisoner at the Bar.” Arkie did not return to the recording studio again for another ten years, when he recorded the eight square dance calls discussed in the previous section.

Mac & Bob were established stars of both radio and phonograph records when they joined the Barn Dance for the first time in 1931. Their initial tenure lasted until 1933, when they moved on to other stations. They returned to WLS in 1939, and stayed until their partnership broke up in 1950. Mac was Lester McFarland, born in 1902 in Kentucky, and Bob was Robert Gardner, born five years earlier in Tennessee. They met in 1915 at the Kentucky School for the Blind in Louisville, and embarked upon a full-time career in music in 1922; within three years they were favorites on WNOX in Knoxville, Tennessee. Multi-instrumentalists, their recordings, nevertheless, featured Mac on mandolin and Bob on guitar. They are often credited as being the first close harmony duet in country music and therefore as pioneering a sound that became

prevalent in country music later in the 1930s with the emergence of many popular brother duets, like the Delmore Brothers, the Blue Sky Boys (the Bolick Brothers), the Callahan Brothers, and the Monroe Brothers. (The latter may have performed some vocal duets on the Barn Dance during their time as members of one of the NBD's square dance troupes—a time period that coincided with Mac & Bob's first tenure.) Still, In Charles Wolfe's assessment, "most of their music sounds too restrained and polite to modern ears."⁵⁹

It is true that Mac & Bob's duets clearly lack that intangible vocal affectation that eventually pervaded southern-style country vocals—in recent years it has been dubbed "twang" and is now regarded by many as an essential element of authentic country music. But their stature as broadcast and recording artists before 1942 demands for them a respectful hearing. They recorded 241 separate songs on 282 masters. In addition, McFarland recorded fourteen numbers with George Reneau, as the Gentry Brothers, and at least one solo. Mac & Bob were also half of the vocal quartet, the Old Southern Sacred Singers (for which they also provided instrumental accompaniment), which recorded thirty sides between 1926 and 1929.⁶⁰ At least 150 of the songs recorded by Mac & Bob, and Meade classified all but three of those waxed by the Old Southern Sacred Singers as traditional.

A further analysis of Mac & Bob's repertoire is long overdue but is beyond the scope of the present essay. Still, I would add one observation, that there is a noticeable overlap between their recorded body of work and that of the original Carter Family of Maces Springs, Virginia, one of country music's most preeminent vocal ensembles. At least thirteen songs made famous by the Carter Family were first recorded by Mac & Bob, including "Are You Tired of Me Darling," (Bury Me Beneath) "The Willow Tree," and "When the Roses Bloom Again." Conversely, only one song the two groups had in common was recorded first by the Carter Family.

Modern Folk Song Artists

In 1930, John Lair brought the first southern string band to the National Barn Dance, the Cumberland Ridge Runners. The first lineup—Kentuckians all—included Lair, the group's manager on jug, Gene Ruppe on fiddle (and perhaps banjo), Doc Hopkins on banjo (and perhaps guitar), Karl Davis on mandolin, and Hartford Taylor on guitar. A year later, Slim Miller, a native of Lizton, Indiana, had replaced Ruppe on fiddle, and Hugh Cross, an established

recording artist from Atlanta, took over on banjo for Doc Hopkins. By the time another year had passed, Clyde Julian “Red” Foley, had joined the Ridge Runners on bass, and within the next year, Hugh Cross departed, leaving banjo-less this manifestation of the Ridge Runners.⁶¹

In fact, the Ridge Runners were an umbrella group for a variety of smaller performing units. The most important of these was Karl & Harty—Karl Davis and Hartford Connecticut Taylor, both born in 1905 in Mt. Vernon near Kentucky’s Eastern Coal Field—who initially broadcast on WLS and made records as the Renfro Valley Boys. Their close vocal harmony with guitar and mandolin accompaniment followed the same arc that began with Mac & Bob and led to the Monroe Brothers. Red Foley, from Madison County in the Eastern Knobs region of Kentucky, joined the band in Chicago in 1932, when he was only twenty-two years old. Lair quickly paired him with another rookie, nineteen-year-old Myrtle Cooper, to form the comic singing duo of Lulu Belle and Burrhead. Then, perhaps to balance Lulu Belle’s gum-smacking, boy-chasing, manic, and sassy persona, Lair added a sweet-voiced, contentedly domestic, and purely virtuous “Sunbonnet Girl,” whom he named Linda Parker. Parker’s real name was Jeanne Muenich; and though Parker’s signature song on the Barn Dance was a gem of Victorian sentimentality, “Bury Me Beneath the Willow,” Muenich had gotten her start in music as a night club singer.⁶²

When Linda Parker died tragically from an infection contracted while on a WLS road tour in 1935, the whole Barn Dance family mourned in a sustained public display. Karl & Harty recorded a tribute piece, “We Buried Her Beneath the Willow (Ridge Runners’ Tribute to Linda Parker),” which was quickly covered by another WLS artist, Sally Foster [Louise Rautenberg], accompanied by the Travelers. Within a short time, the Cumberland Ridge Runners went their separate ways, and even Karl & Harty left WLS for local rival WJJD’s Suppertime Frolic. Red Foley became a featured artist, along with Slim Miller and the Girls of the Golden West, on the Pinex Merry-makers, a series of transcribed programs perhaps managed by John Lair. By 1937, Lair, Foley, and Miller had relocated to WLW in Cincinnati, where Lair began to develop his own empire, The Renfro Valley Barn Dance. Miller would stick with Lair for the rest of his career. Karl & Harty, on the other hand, returned to WLS and the National Barn Dance in 1941, where they again used the name the Cumberland Ridge Runners for a quartet that included a reunion with Doc Hopkins and added fiddler Buddy McDowell.

Between 1931 and 1942, Karl & Harty recorded a total of seventy masters comprising sixty-six songs. The fourteen recordings made in 1935 and 1936 were issued as by Karl & Harty “Of the . . .” or “Acc. by the Cumberland Ridge Runners.” Six additional numbers were issued under the band’s name, and four others by the band featured Linda Parker. Of this array, Meade classified as traditional seventeen numbers by Karl & Harty, four by the Ridge Runners (counting Meade’s obvious oversight of “Nobody’s Darling on Earth), and only one of Linda Parker’s songs. According to Charles Wolfe, the daily grind of radio forced Karl & Harty to hunt up more songs, learning many new pieces from Carter Family records and old hymnals. They also turned to writing their own songs, at which they both proved adept. Karl Davis penned their first big hit, “I’m Just Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail,” and the later, often-covered, “Kentucky.” They also had a silent partner in Frank Johnson, who signed his songs with the name “Pat McAdory. He collaborated with the duo on their second hit, “The Prisoner’s Dream.”⁶³

As for Karl’s and Harty’s associates in the Ridge Runners: Doc Hopkins recorded thirty-five total songs, in 1931-1932, 1936, and 1941. Since Hopkins was later known as “America’s Favorite Folk Singer” on his own radio show on WJJD, it is somewhat surprising that Meade classified only a dozen of his recorded songs as traditional. Red Foley recorded five traditional songs, out of the twenty he waxed in the mid-’30s. Hugh Cross made no records while a member of the Ridge Runners.

Lulu & Scotty, Myrtle Cooper and Scott Wiseman, were both born in North Carolina; she in 1913, and he in 1909. But they met in Chicago as fellow cast members of the National Barn Dance, and it was in the Old Hayloft that they became musical partners *and*, later, husband and wife. Young Myrtle Cooper’s family was constantly on the move but settled in Evanston, Illinois, when she was sixteen. Just three years later, Cooper’s father brought his big-voiced daughter down to WLS and pestered the station’s executives until they auditioned and hired his daughter. She was immediately given the stage name of Lulu Belle—which Myrtle Cooper Wiseman carefully spelled as “Lula Belle” for the rest of her days. Her mother helped design her first costume, which also proved to be long-lasting: a gingham dress with pantaloons and high-topped shoes. John Lair completed the construction of her stage persona by sending her off to a theatre to observe the rube starlet in the popular vaudeville act, the Weaver Brothers &

Elviry. Following Elviry's lead, Lulu Belle became feisty, smart-alecky, mischievous, and boy crazy. The Barn Dance audiences loved it! In 1936, Lulu Belle was voted "Radio Queen," in a popularity poll run by *Radio Guide* magazine.⁶⁴

Scott Wiseman, on the other hand, was shy, soft-spoken, and serious. He learned to play guitar, banjo, and harmonica, and fell under the influence of Bradley Kincaid. Like Kincaid, Wiseman began to collect traditional songs from mountain singers near his home in Boone, North Carolina. He even met Kincaid on one of the latter's song-collecting trips, and the radio star told him he had a future in radio. But Wiseman wanted to finish his college education first, which he did at Fairmont State College in West Virginia. While a student, he got his first radio job announcing at WMMN in Fairmont and adopted the nickname Skyland Scotty. In 1933, he successfully auditioned for the Barn Dance and joined a long line of traditional folk singers on the show that stretched back through Arkie and Bradley Kincaid to Chubby Parker.⁶⁵

Shortly after Wiseman arrived in the Old Hayloft, Lulu Belle's comic partner, Red Foley, married Eva Overstake of the Three Little Maids. The new wife's jealousy broke up the Lulu Belle and Burrhead team. John Lair instructed Lulu Belle to work up some routines with Skyland Scotty. They clicked with each other and with their audiences, and a decades-long radio partnership was on its way. When they married in an on-air ceremony in 1934, Lulu Belle no longer had to try to catch a man. So the theme of her feistiness shifted to the comic "battle of the sexes," and audiences loved it even more.⁶⁶

In 1933 and '34, Scott Wiseman recorded fourteen sides in Chicago for the Conqueror and Bluebird labels. Meade classified ten of these pieces as traditional. Then from 1935 to 1940, Lulu Belle and Scotty recorded thirty-one more pieces for various labels in the ARC family. Of these thirty-one, Meade classified nineteen as traditional. Many of the newer pieces—i.e., modern folk songs, to use George Biggar's label—that worked so well in their act were novelty numbers, such as "When I Yoo-Hoo in the Valley" and "Daffy Over Taffy" (which Lulu Belle had originally recorded with Red Foley). Scott Wiseman also proved to be a very capable songwriter. Besides having a hand in composing—along with Bascom Lamar Lunsford of the Asheville area in North Carolina—the classic "Mountain Dew," Scotty's most popular hit from this era is the bittersweet love song "Remember Me," which the duo recorded in 1940.

If ever a group in country music history deserved the serious attention of journalists, scholars, and reissue producers—but was instead almost completely overlooked—it was the Prairie Ramblers. Formed originally as the Kentucky Ramblers around the talents of boyhood friends Charles “Chick” Hurt and Jack Taylor—both born in 1901—they combined, respectively, mandola and tenor banjo, guitar, and bass. They soon added another musician from their home region of the Pennyriple in south-central Kentucky: Floyd “Salty” Holmes (born in 1909) on jug and harmonica. Perhaps the key addition to the group was the versatile young left-handed fiddler, David Shelby “Tex” Atchison, born in 1912 on a farm near Rosine (Bill Monroe’s home area.) in Kentucky’s western coal field. Atchison was an impatient teenager who, because of a broken wrist, learned to play left-handed on a right-handed fiddle. Before his twentieth birthday, Atchison was performing live on radio in Evansville, Indiana. Besides fiddle, he also played clarinet and sax in a band that did both old time country- and jazz-influenced pop music. He joined the Ramblers in time for that band’s radio debut in 1932 on WOC in Davenport, Iowa.⁶⁷

The next year, the Ramblers moved to Chicago, joined the cast of the Barn Dance, and changed their name to the Prairie Ramblers (perhaps in deference to the *Prairie Farmer* company that issued their paychecks). They were initially teamed with female vocalist, Dixie Mason. Although she recorded two sides in 1933 with just guitar accompaniment, she never recorded with the Ramblers. But by the end of the year, when the band headed to the Victor studios in Chicago for their first recording session, they were joined by Patsy Montana, who would work with them steadily for the next seven years—on the air, on records, and on personal appearances. In 1934, Patsy and the Ramblers headed for New York to make records for Vocalion and the ARC labels.

Looking back, Atchison claimed that their year-long New York hiatus was quite beneficial to the band: “We left Chicago as an Old-Time string band and we came back from New York as a cowboy band.”⁶⁸ Perhaps the greatest benefit was that the Ramblers became more professional and were better able to market themselves using their new cowboy image. Did they remake themselves into a western swing band, as some historians have suggested? The western swing sound was emerging in Fort Worth and Tulsa, just as the Ramblers headed off for New York; and they clearly became one of the first bands east of the Mississippi River to promote a similar merger of swing music and rural sensibilities. However, the swing tendencies had always been present to some extent in the playing of Tex Atchison. Swing was simply an

addition to their bag of tricks, for when they returned to Chicago, they picked right up again with the old-time frolic songs, fiddle breakdowns, and gospel numbers they had always played. The biggest change to the sound of the Prairie Ramblers came when Tex Atchison left WLS in 1937—he did his last recording sessions with the Ramblers in 1938—to find work in the music and film industries of California. Atchison was soon replaced by Alan Crockett, a young fiddler who had grown up in the California country music scene as part of the Crockett Family Mountaineers.⁶⁹

The Prairie Ramblers recorded 257 masters that yielded 228 different songs. Meade classified less than half of them as traditional. It is worth noting that a lot of the old-time frolic and gospel songs that they recorded were later covered by the Monroe Brothers, such as “Gonna Have a Feast Here Tonight” and “What Would You Give in Exchange for Your Soul.” The Prairie Ramblers also had an alter ego, the Sweet Violet Boys, under which name they cut some rather risqué material that probably was never performed in the Old Hayloft.

The Massey family, known as the Westerners on radio and most often as Louise Massey & the Westerners on phonograph records, arrived at the Barn Dance in 1933 as seasoned veterans. They started out as a family band, led by fiddler Henry “Dad” Massey, who soon retired to his ranch in Roswell, New Mexico. The Massey children who carried on, included Louise (born 1902), the lead singer and sometimes pianist, Allen (born 1907) on guitar, Curt, also known as Dott (born 1910) on fiddle and trumpet, and Louise’s husband, Milt Mabie (born 1900) on bass. After a few years of touring for the Redpath Lyceum Bureau, they landed a radio job in Topeka, and then at KMBC in Kansas City. They stayed at KMBC for five years, adding accordionist Larry Wellington to the band, and were heard by George Biggar, who brought them to WLS in 1933. After two years of weekday programs and the Saturday night Barn Dance, the Westerners moved on to New York City, where they joined the cast of NBC’s popular variety program, *Show Boat*. By 1940, they had come back to Chicago for a second and longer stay in the Old Hayloft.⁷⁰

Between 1933 and 1942, Louise Massey & the Westerners recorded 138 masters of increasingly sophisticated and pop-influenced modern folk songs. Meade classified only twenty-seven of their recordings as traditional, and a large share of these were instrumental dance tunes. While in New York, they brought Dad Massey into the ARC studios to record seven traditional fiddle tunes (one disc was a medley of two hornpipes). In 1939, they did the same in Chicago,

and the senior Massey recorded four more hoedowns, which, sadly, were never issued. The Massey's are best known for their modern folk songs, like "Huckleberry Picnic," "The Honey Song," and the most famous of all, "My Adobe Hacienda," written by Louise.

One of the most distinctive musical acts to join the National Barn Dance was a pair of sisters raised on a farm near Royalton, in the center of the state of Minnesota. Carolyn (born 1919) and Mary Jane (born 1917) were part of a musical family of Dutch heritage that included a fiddling father, an accordion-playing brother, and five sisters (out of six) who could sing and play the guitar. While doing chores, the sisters' ears were open to the natural music made by animals around them. They incorporated imitations of these sounds into elaborate trick yodels and novel harmonies that won them many amateur talent contests in central Minnesota. A representative from the WLS Artists Bureau caught their act and invited them to Chicago, where they were hired for the Barn Dance in November of 1936. Their stay was lengthened when Carolyn wed Rusty Gill, a staff guitarist and member of the Hoosier Sod Busters, in 1940. Less than a month later, Mary Jane married Augie Klein, a WLS staff accordionist who appeared on the NBD with the Hill Toppers.⁷¹

But the DeZuriks' stay in Chicago became more complicated when they were engaged by Purina Mills in 1937 for a series of transcribed programs called Checkerboard Time. Because of contractual agreements, the DeZuriks appeared on the transcriptions as the Cackle Sisters. Several other NBD artists—the Maple City Four and Otto & the Novelodians—joined the Checkerboard cast as well, for it was broadcast in all forty-eight states. In 1938, the DeZurick Sisters recorded six songs for Vocalion, the only commercial records they made before 1942.⁷² Meade deemed only one of these songs traditional.

A couple of lesser-known modern folk song artists who were part of the Barn Dance in the mid- to late 1930s should also be mentioned. Eddie and Jimmie Glosup were two brothers from Posey, Texas, who used the stage name Dean. Eddie came to Chicago in 1926, seeking a career in music. After a sojourn in Shenandoah, Iowa, and radio work in Yankton, South Dakota, and Topeka, Eddie reunited with his brother and returned to Chicago in 1934 to join the National Barn Dance. They stayed in Chicago until 1937, when Eddie left for Hollywood and a new career as a singing cowboy in the movies.⁷³ In 1934 and '35, the Dean Brothers recorded twenty-nine sides in the Windy City. Only a few of them were western songs. Meade classified

even fewer as traditional songs, four (five, if we add in Meade's omission of "Get Along Little Dogies") in all. Fred Kirby, another singer of new country songs, came to the Barn Dance in 1940 from North Carolina, where he had recorded as Fred Kirby & his Carolina Boys. Earlier in the 1930s, he had worked with Cliff Carlisle. Between 1932 and 1938, Kirby recorded forty-eight songs, only five of which were deemed traditional according to Meade's criteria.⁷⁴

Western Song Artists

As should be expected, Gene Autry's name has been mentioned frequently in this essay. He was one of the dominant figures in the field of country music before World War II, and even after the war. Accordingly, he is the most famous performer who was ever a part of the Hayloft Gang. It seems strange, then, that there is so little institutional memory of Autry on the part of WLS and the *Prairie Farmer*. A single picture of Autry is all that appeared in the *WLS Family Album*. The amnesia was mutual, for in his autobiography, Autry gave only a cursory mention to the show and the station that helped launch him to fame.⁷⁵

Born in Tioga Springs, Texas, in 1907, Orvon Gene Autry was raised in Oklahoma in that state's second decade of statehood. His mother taught him to play guitar, and he learned to sing in the church where his grandfather served as pastor. As a teenager, he traveled with a medicine show; and as a twenty-one-year-old, he undertook a trip to New York City, where his first attempts to record were unsuccessful. Back in Oklahoma, he returned to his job as a railroad telegrapher but also got a radio gig on KVOO in Tulsa. He billed himself as the Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy, and by 1929 began his very prolific career as a recording artist.⁷⁶

Many of Autry's first records were vocal duets with Jimmy Long, a fellow railroad employee. But what really made established his early career was that he could successfully imitate the blue yodel of early country music giant, Jimmie Rodgers. Not only did Autry cover a number of Rodger's pieces, he contributed many blues pieces of his own. Yet, by the time Autry left Chicago to star in Hollywood westerns, he had remade himself into a western singer. Also, during his time in Chicago, because of the incredible success of "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine," he was encouraged to focus more on sentimental songs.⁷⁷ On many of his sessions during his Chicago days, the *Prairie Ramblers* accompanied Autry.

Another too-often overlooked gem of the National Barn Dance was the sister act, the Girls of the Golden West. The sisters were Mildred and Dorothy Goad, born in 1913 and 1915, respectively, on a farm in southern Illinois. By the time Millie was fourteen, the Goad family had moved first to Mt. Vernon, and then to East St. Louis on the other side of Illinois. The sisters learned to sing naturally at home, for their mother played guitar and sang and was known to perform in public at a church gathering. Dollie learned guitar from her mother. Harmony also came easily and unstudied, as Millie related in a 1978 interview, explaining that her mother “always had a natural ear for harmony just like I do. . . . When I hear a note, I hear the harmony note to it, so I got that from my mother.”⁷⁸

In 1930, after a short time at WIL in St. Louis, the Good Sisters (they changed the spelling), established themselves on the larger KMOX. They started on a morning show and soon joined the Saturday night program called County Fair. At some point, they were given the name the Girls of the Golden West and began to focus on traditional cowboy songs and other “western-type songs,” even dressing the part with elaborate, homemade western costumes. After a sojourn to Abilene to broadcast programs that, by means of a relay, were aired from XER in Mexico, the sisters were booked by Glenn Snyder to join the Barn Dance in 1933 (though in Millie’s memory, it “was about 1931”).⁷⁹ Whatever the year, at least one of the Girls was still just a teenager. They stayed at WLS through 1937, during which time they helped several other young women land roles in the Old Hayloft. As part of the Pinex Merrymakers with Red Foley, they also moved to Cincinnati in 1938 and latched on with the Boone County Jamboree, a show started by George Biggar on WLW, “The Nation’s Station.”

Between 1933 and ’38, the Girls of the Golden West recorded sixty-four harmony duets, always accompanied only by Dollie’s guitar. Many of their numbers featured tight harmony yodels. Meade classified seventeen of these songs as traditional, including such cowboy ballads as “Bucking Bronco” and “Lonely Cowgirl.” The major part of their recorded repertoire was of newer western songs, like “By the Silvery Rio Grande” and “Take Me Back to My Boots and Saddle.” They also waxed some memorable love songs, such as “Roll Along, Prairie Moon” and, perhaps their best known, “There’s a Silver Moon on the Golden Gate.”

Patsy Montana was a true pioneer. Her self-penned, 1935 hit recording, “I Want to Be a Cowboy Sweetheart,” was the first disc by a woman in the country music field to sell a million

copies. Of greater importance is that her work and success created space for women in a business that, like so many others, had been dominated by men. Mary Bufwack and Robert Oerman capture the essence of her contribution: “In her songs and stage presence she rewrote the myth of the American cowboy to include women, providing a new role option for women country singers, and popularizing an innovative independent female image.”⁸⁰

Patsy Montana was born Ruby Blevins in 1912 in Hope, Arkansas, the sole daughter in a family of eleven children. By the time she was a teenager, she had learned to play guitar, studied violin in high school, learned songs from Jimmie Rodgers records, and most importantly, had figured out on her own how to yodel by singing along with Caruso records left behind by the previous tenant in their rented house. In 1929, after graduating from high school, Ruby headed for California, where she planned to live with her brother, enroll at the University of the West (now UCLA), and study violin. These plans were diverted, in part, when she entered and won a talent contest—by singing two Jimmie Rodgers songs—and earned the right to appear on the Breakfast Club on station KMTR.⁸¹

On KMTR, Ruby was known as “The Yodeling Cowgirl from San Antone” and caught the attention of Stuart Hamblen on KMIC. He invited her to join his troupe as part of a trio called the Montana Cowgirls, for which Ruby Blevins adopted the stage name Patsy Montana. The Cowgirls were big favorites in southern California, and Patsy got plenty of experience riding in rodeos and singing on radio. But the trio split up in the early years of the Great Depression, and Patsy headed back to Arkansas. A week-long booking at KWKH in Shreveport led to an opportunity to travel east to serve as accompanist at a Victor session for Jimmie Davis, and to record four numbers on her own.⁸²

In 1933, she was back home, where her mother had cooked up quite a plan. She had been corresponding with the Girls of the Golden West, stars on her favorite radio show, and told them all about Patsy. Seizing the good fortune of a gigantic, hundred-pound watermelon produced by the family garden, Mrs. Blevins urged two of her sons to take Patsy along and go show it off in Chicago at the World’s Fair. Three Blevins headed north, and while two took the watermelon into the Fair, Patsy went downtown to the Eighth Street Theatre, where she found the Good sisters backstage. Dolly told her, “Honey . . . The Prairie Ramblers are looking for a girl singer. If you’re interested, go sign up.” She got the job and began the hectic life of a full-time country artist—she always described herself as a “western” singer, and always sewed her own western

costumes. Her daily schedule with the Ramblers included broadcasts on Wake Up and Smile each morning at 5:30 and 7:30, followed by a road trip to a personal appearance in the station's listening area, followed by yet another drive back home, with hopes for a few hours of sleep before the alarm rang to start it all again. And, of course, there was the Barn Dance on Saturday nights. Even her 1934 marriage to Paul Rose—business manager for Mac & Bob—and the arrival of baby Beverly the following year, did not slow Patsy's career. She remembers that when she and the Ramblers, in 1936, were first scheduled for the coveted NBC network segment of the Barn Dance, they really had made it, for then they would be heard "coast-to-coast."⁸³ As noted earlier, the Prairie Ramblers with Patsy Montana were voted one of the three most popular acts on WLS in 1937.

Patsy Montana recorded eighty-seven masters with the Prairie Ramblers between 1933 and 1940. Add in the four pieces recorded in 1932—before she landed her spot on the Barn Dance, and the thirteen recorded in Dallas in 1941, after she left Chicago—and her total output on pre-1942 discs is 104 masters, yielding eighty-two separate songs. Meade classified only three of these as traditional. A large portion of her repertoire was songs she had written. Her earliest signature piece was, "Back on Montana Plains," an adaptation of Stuart Hamblen's "Texas Plains." The phenomenal success—slow, steady, and persistent—of "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart," led her record label, the ARC group, to urge her to come up with more of the same. She eventually did, with the likes of "I Wanna Be a Cowboy's Dreamgirl." But Patsy proved to be a prodigious and effective songwriter, especially in her use of western themes: "The She Buckaroo," "Cowboy Rhythm," "Gold Coast Express" (co-authored with Stuart Hamblen), and "Old Nevada Moon" and "My Poncho Pony" (both co-written with Lee Penny).

Novelty Musicians

From the second week of the National Barn Dance on through 1929, one of the regularly-scheduled performers was "Kentucky Wonderbean, harp." By the end of that first summer, the Wonderbean was clearly identified as Walter Peterson. Not much is known about Peterson himself. His performances featured his "Doubled Barrelled Shot-gun": he cradled a guitar in his arms while simultaneously blowing on a ten-hole harmonica held in a wire rack around his neck. During the same period, Dynamite Jim, a native Hoosier whose real name was Harry Campbell, Jr., also performed on WLS with a similar get-up, dubbed a "cap and fuse."⁸⁴ Between 1924 and

1927, Peterson recorded twenty-two masters—many of them medleys of old familiar tunes, and all were instrumentals only. Half of them are listed as traditional in Meade. In 1928, the Kentucky Wonderbean made one final recording: a vocal version of a modern folk song, “My Blue Ridge Mountain Home.”

A third NBD musician who paired guitar and harmonica in a rack—his “two cylinder corn cob crusher”—was Pie Plant Pete. In real life, he was Claud Moye, born in 1906 and reared on a farm in Gallatin County, Illinois, near Shawneetown. Pete joined the Barn Dance in 1927 and stayed through 1930. In 1929, he headlined a touring unit known as the WLS Show Boat Junior and was seldom heard on the broadcasts. In 1929 and '30, he recorded twenty-six numbers for Gennett, many released under the name Asparagus Joe. In 1934, after he had left WLS for WTAM in Cleveland, Pete recorded another twenty-two songs. All of his Gennett sides, and all but seven of the 1934 sides, were classified by Meade as traditional.⁸⁵

Finally, the National Barn Dance tradition of comic-novelty groups must at least be mentioned, even though they cannot be given the attention deserved. The most famous was the Hoosier Hot Shots, who were formed in 1932 at WOWO in Fort Wayne, Indiana, by remnants from Ezra Buzzington’s Rustic Revelers. The next year they came to WLS to join a sponsored program with comedian Uncle Ezra [Pat Barrett]. When they arrived in Chicago, they were still a trio of multi-instrumentalists, all born and raised in Arcadia, Indiana. Charles Otto “Gabe” Ward held forth on clarinet and sometimes saxophone; Paul “Hezzie” Triestch was a wizard of the washboard and slide whistle—“Are you ready, Hezzie?” was their signature salute—and Ken “Rudy” Treitsch was the rhythm section on guitar and tenor banjo. They were soon joined by Illinois native Frank Kettering on bass and guitar. The Hot Shots were a Barn Dance favorite until 1944, when they left for California.⁸⁶

Another long-time audience favorite was the Maple City Four from LaPorte, Indiana. Primarily a vocal quartet, they were also known as cut-ups who devised a musical instrument out of a shower-hose and frequently tried the most outlandish antics to cause Arkie to break into laughter when he was in the middle of his featured number. Most of the other comedy and novelty music groups in the Old Hayloft were instrumental groups, such as the Four Hired Hands

from Gary, Indiana, the Novelodeons, and Otto & the Tune Twisters. The latter two were essentially comprised of the same personnel and were led by Ted “Otto” Morse. The Hoosier Sod Busters, who started on WLS in 1933, featured a wide and sometimes weird array of harmonicas played by Reggie Cross, with guitar accompaniment by Howard Black. In 1939, guitarist and singer Rusty Gill joined them. Apparently, the Sod Busters never made commercial recordings.

Summing Up the Barn Dance

In spite of all the old 78rpm recordings I have listened to, the actual sounds of the early National Barn Dance remain elusive. Of the four network shows that I have heard, the only artists covered in the previous sections who appeared were the Arkansas Woodchopper, Lulu Belle & Scotty, and the Hoosier Hot Shots. And Arkie did no singing, only a smattering of square dance calls! To be honest, I am pretty disappointed with the music I hear on the air-check recordings. To be sure, it is great to experience the spirit and exuberance of the live broadcasts, to hear the comic sketches of Uncle Ezra and Pat Buttram, and to catch hold of the familiar friendliness of announcer Joe Kelly: “Hello, hello, hello everybody, everywhere! How’s Mother and Dad and the whole family?” But there is vast dissonance between the music on this small sample of NBC network broadcasts and the vibrant and rustic old-time styles found on the phonograph records by early artists who made “the rafters ring in the old hayloft.” Others have tried to deal with this disparity between the image of the National Barn Dance and the preserved broadcast evidence. For instance, Wayne Daniel noted, with a tone of polite objectivity, that “the Barn Dance was a variety show similar in format to other contemporary radio variety shows,” and followed with a hopeful suggestion: “Perhaps the non-network broadcast segments of the show featured a higher ratio of ‘hillbilly’ and ‘western’ material.”⁸⁷

I am convinced that Daniel’s latter suggestion is correct, and therein lies the key to understanding the National Barn Dance: it encompassed so much more than the sixty-minute segment heard weekly on the NBC Blue network. It is possible to talk about five overlapping aspects of the Barn Dance. First, all Saturday-night programming on WLS, from 7:30 to midnight, was generally understood by listeners as the National Barn Dance. Second, various segments of what went out over the WLS airwaves were plainly titled the National Barn Dance. In the typical program lineup from 1933 quoted earlier, these programs ran from 7:30 to 8:00,

and from 11:00 to midnight. Third, beginning in 1932, the National Barn Dance brand was also applied to each of the two-hour-long shows staged before large audiences at the Eighth Street Theater. The two on-air segments identified in the previous point filled only a portion of the running time of the theater shows. According to Slim Bryant, there were portions of the show at the Eighth Street Theater that were not broadcast. Fourth, shorter segments of the show aired with the name of a sponsor, like the “Aladdin Barn Dance Frolic” or the “Keystone Barn Dance Party.” The Alka-Seltzer sponsored network segment, the most famous of these, was broadcast live from the Eighth Street Theatre. At least some of the shorter segments, such as those between 9:30 and 10:00, must have originated from the WLS studios. Finally, the National Barn Dance identity also encompassed the active program of artist tours and personal appearances managed through WLS Artists, Inc. For example, the Des Plaines Theater, in the Chicago suburb of the same name, hosted the “WLS National Barn Dance Gang” in 1931 and a “WLS National Barn Dance” stage show in 1935. The latter featured Rube Tronson and His Texas Cowboys, Arkansas Woodchopper, Tom Corwine, Bob Gardner, and the Hayloft Trio.⁸⁸

Such size and scope of the National Barn Dance in the 1930s necessitated a prodigious outlay of management and support services. For instance, a radio column in an Atlanta newspaper noted that because each week’s program comprised around twenty musical numbers, and because an effort was made to avoid repetition, the WLS music librarian had the monumental task of supplying over a thousand pieces each year. These numbers, however, reflect only the network portion of the broadcast, so the total number of songs and tunes needed was at least four times greater. However, the repetition of songs favored by the audience was, in fact, not avoided, and was carefully monitored through fan mail sent to the station. Esther Mowery of Decatur, Indiana, recalled how as a teenaged fan of Patsy Montana, she kept a notebook by the radio, and each week was able to write down more of the lyrics of Montana’s big hit “I Want to Be a Cowboy’s Sweetheart.” After she had learned the complete song, Esther performed it with a band of her siblings, including fiddler Francis Geels, at a circa 1937 WLS Home Talent Show somewhere in northeastern Indiana.⁸⁹

Besides requiring a large repertoire of songs, the four-and-a-half hours of Barn Dance air time—along with the stage show and the constant demand for personal appearances—presented WLS with a continual need to replenish its talent. The Old Hayloft had its stars, of course, a number of whom stayed at the station for decades. But the show also needed a constant supply

of fresh faces and voices, with skills that meshed with the rest of the cast and the spirit of the endeavor. Edgar Bill, Glenn Snyder, George Biggar, and John Lair were some of the WLS executives responsible for locating and auditioning performers and, further, for fitting them into the ongoing operation of the programs. Biggar's memoir provides perhaps the best description of how the many parts fit together:

The National Barn Dance from the stage of the Eighth Street Theatre was primarily divided into half-hour programs—each unit period being built around a “star” with about three other acts—singles, team, trio or instrumental-vocal unit. Each program, usually sponsored, was carefully routined [sic] in advance to insure proper pacing. During a typical evening, about twenty entertainment units—singles or larger—appeared during the evening—for a total of between forty and fifty people. There were always two sets of square dancers of eight members each, with callers.

Future Country Music Hall of Fame member Bill Monroe, for example, got his professional start in show business as an NBD square dancer shortly after he moved north from Rosine, Kentucky, to join his brothers working at an oil refinery in northwest Indiana. Other promising young performers, as Biggar noted, hit the big time of being hired by WLS after a final audition before the audiences at the Eighth Street Theatre. Such was the experience of the Flannery Sisters, who were heard by the Girls of the Golden West (Dolly and Milly Good), when they played a barn dance road show in the Flannery's home town of Gladstone, Michigan, in 1935. At Dolly and Milly's recommendation, the Flannery Sisters were invited to Chicago for an audition, and a week later they were touring the Midwest and appearing on the Saturday night Barn Dance.⁹⁰

While perusing the photographs published in the annual *WLS Family Albums*, it is easy to be struck by the youth of so many of the Barn Dance musicians. Yet even many of the youngest were already experienced radio performers when they came to WLS. The Three Little Maids, Smiley Burnette, and Pepper Hawthorne all came from an important downstate Illinois rural-oriented station, WDZ, in Tuscola. Pepper, a native of Ramsey, Illinois, and a veteran of a WLS Home Talent Show in nearby Decatur, was just eighteen in 1941 when she joined WLS—her third station!⁹¹ Many of these young artists matured artistically during their tenure in the Old Hayloft, and when they left found continued success in the entertainment industry. It is worth noting that a phenomenal number of marriages took place among cast members or between performers and members of the support staff. The number of such marriages reflects the fact that

the National Barn Dance was singular in the field of country music for its concentration of featured female artists.⁹²

A careful examination of the music of the National Barn Dance, within the larger context of the developing professionalization of country music during the 1930s, reveals other distinctive aspects of the sounds that rang throughout the Old Hayloft. In one area, the Barn Dance stands practically alone: the pervasive popularity of yodeling. A large number of NBD stars wove solo and harmony yodels into many of their performances. The Arkansas Woodchopper was probably the first Barn Dance artist regularly to incorporate a yodel. Gene Autry also was an early yodeler in the Old Hayloft, but Autry's yodels reflected the bluesier style of Jimmie Rodgers, America's famous "Blue Yodeler." Most subsequent yodeling on the Barn Dance was of a western flavor, and some even contained small traces of Alpine sounds. Solo yodelers included the station's "little Swiss miss" Christine [Endeback], Pie Plant Pete, Red Foley, and the most famous, Patsy Montana. But NBD audiences also often heard team yodels, in a call-and-response pattern, from Lulu Belle & Scotty, and close harmony yodels from the Girls of the Golden West and the DeZurik Sisters.⁹³

The Barn Dance can also be regarded as an influential leader in the development of a few aspects of style that became important throughout the field of country music. First of all, as mentioned earlier, the Old Hayloft always featured vocal duos and trios. Although the sound of many of these groups has not been preserved, it is clear from several groups from the 1930s that Barn Dance audiences appreciated close parallel harmonizing a style that was distinct from barbershop quartet style. Mac & Bob and Karl & Harty have already been discussed as pioneers in the so-called "brother duet" style. But another important example of close harmony singing was on the many harmony duets Gene Autry recorded with his partner Jimmy Long between 1929 and 1937. Autry's vocal duets and trios with Smiley Burnette, who joined him in Chicago in 1933 from downstate Tuscola, should also be considered. However, it is not certain that either Long or Burnette sang with Autry on any of his WLS broadcasts. This is a topic that deserves closer attention and more careful analysis than can be given here. Let it suffice that the key contributions of these duos are related to the fact that they were male—remember that the dominant vocal harmony in country music to that time was provided by the women of the Carter Family—and that they presented carefully crafted, relatively sophisticated diatonic harmonies that relied on parallel, rather than droned, polyphony. Many other important acts in the Old Hayloft

built their presentations around similarly-crafted harmonies. Besides the yodeling duos mentioned above, this list would include the Three Little Maids (the Overstake Sisters), Jo & Alma, Blaine & Cal Smith, and the Prairie Ramblers.

A second area where the Barn Dance led the way for the rest of the country music field was in the adoption of the plucked, as opposed to bowed, string bass. Bases were rare in the rural string bands that recorded through the early thirties, and those that were brought into the studio were bowed according to a long-established and widespread traditional style. The plucked bass was an innovation rooted in the newer popular music forms of jazz and blues. So when three rural string bands joined the Barn Dance cast in the early 1930s, all featuring a plucked bass, something new was being added to white, old-time, rural music. These bands ranged from the tenaciously traditional (in sound, more than repertoire) Cumberland Ridge Runners to the progressively modern Westerners (aka the Massey Family). In between were the Prairie Ramblers, as equally adept with straightforward hoedowns (to be fair, so were the Westerners) and old-time songs as they were with the newer sounds of swing. Another influential string bassist was Ernie Newton, a Californian who came to WLS in 1933 to play with Mac & Bob. He became a versatile member of the staff as part of the Hill Toppers. He left WLS to tour with Les Paul's trio, and after the war ended up in Nashville, where he became a much sought-after session musician.⁹⁴

Finally, and perhaps conversely, there were several sounds broadly spread throughout country music by 1934 that were noticeably absent, or at least rare, on the National Barn Dance after that date. One is the sound of the Hawaiian guitar, a regular guitar laid horizontally and noted by means of a sliding steel bar. The sound of the Hawaiian guitar was ubiquitous on early radio broadcasts, as the instrument and its music became a fashionable trend in the first decades of the twentieth century. In fact, the alleged "inventor" of the Hawaiian guitar, Joseph Kekeku, was promoting the instrument and teaching at a studio in Chicago as recently as 1928. Kenneth Clark may have been the first to introduce WLS audiences to the instrument in his appearance on the Barn Dance in 1925. The first *WLS Family Album*, prepared in 1929, included pictures of two Hawaiian guitar teams: Cecil and Esther Ward, "barn dance Hawaiian guitar team for a long time," and the Strolling Guitarists. The latter, though not named as such by WLS, was the duo of Jim & Bob—Jim Holstein on harp guitar and Bob Paoli on Hawaiian—who recorded a dozen sides for the Bluebird label in Chicago in 1933.⁹⁵ But while the Hawaiian or steel guitar— including its

resophonic offspring, like the Dobro and other models that feature metal amplifying cones, and later electric models—became more prominent in country music in the 1930s, the instrument all but disappeared from the country side of the Hayloft Gang. Don Wilson, of the pop-oriented Hill Toppers, at times played an electrified Hawaiian guitar.

The other notable absence on the National Barn Dance, at least after Gene Autry left in 1934, was the blues. Many white southern string bands and songsters had recorded straight blues, or material that was heavily influenced by African-American lyrical and musical styles. The foremost white country blues artist was Jimmie Rodgers, whose immense popularity spawned a host of imitators. One of the most famous of these was Gene Autry, who covered a number of Rodgers songs and contributed many blues pieces of his own. After Autry, apparently no white country blues artists were featured in the Old Hayloft. A possible exception is Kenneth Houchins, who recorded a number of Rodgers and Autry-styled blues, such as “Mean Old Ball and Chain Blues” in 1933 and ’34. By 1937, Houchins had joined the Prairie Ramblers as a replacement for Salty Holmes, but no evidence that Houchins performed as soloist has surfaced. Yet, though the blues was missing from the Barn Dance (even while it was growing toward its future national prominence in Bronzeville and other African-American neighborhoods on Chicago’s south side), the influence of Black music styles was still clearly heard. The Prairie Ramblers and the Hoosier Hot Shots were just two of the NBD ensembles that knew how to swing. They had obviously learned a lot from listening to jazz.⁹⁶

Rural Rhythm traveled a long and winding road in the first eighteen years of the National Barn Dance. The show started with a nod to rustic simplicity that was both symbolic and pragmatic. The first featured rural performers were the unnamed, almost generic, “barn dance fiddlers.” They were succeeded, but never wholly replaced, by a succession of star singers who accompanied themselves with spare strums on a banjo or guitar. Then came the vocal duets with solid and uncomplicated parallel harmony, and a few string bands for whom the basic melody reigned supreme. As the 1940s drew near, musical arrangements became more sophisticated, even complicated. Instrumental accompanists eschewed earlier values of simplicity, and began to weave their sounds around the singer’s melody with elaborate counter-point and many embellishments. Nevertheless, at the end of the period covered by this essay, one of the Barn Dance’s most beloved rural artists went back into the studio to record some old-time fiddle tunes that one could . . . well, you could dance to them. Is not that where it all started?

NOTES

* Where would I be without my friends who collect ideas, old scraps of information, and 78rpm phonograph records? I've been able to hear National Barn Dance artists I'd never heard before because the following people generously made tape copies for me: Kerry Blech, Bob Bovee, Joe Bussard, Wayne Daniel, Paul Gifford, Frank Mare, Matt Neiburger, Jim Nelson, Paul Wells and the Old Town School of Folk Music's Resource Center. Jim Nelson also loaned me his complete run of *Stand Bys* and *WLS Family Albums*.

1. *Dallas Morning News* December 1, 1922, p. 1, sec. 2; Bill Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 33-34.
2. "A Brief History of WBAP Radio," www.wbap.com/article.asp?id=146501; "You Hear These Every Saturday Night," *WLS Family Album, 1931* (Chicago: Prairie Farmer Publishing), 43.
3. George C. Biggar, "The WLS National Barn Dance Story: The Early Years," *JEMF Quarterly* 6 (1970): 106; "Jazz Rules City Dance; Old Favorites Hold Country," *Chicago Evening Post Radio Magazine* (May 8, 1924): 16.
4. Boris Emmet & John E. Jeuck, *Catalogues and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 623.
5. James F. Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS: The Burrige D. Butler Years* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 216, 224.
6. *Ibid.*, 62ff; List'ning In . . . , *The Prairie Farmer* (April 15, 1933): 8.
7. "WLS Foremost in Radio Surveys," in *WLS Family Album* (Chicago: Prairie Farmer Publishing, 1930), 35; Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS*, 202.
8. Biggar, "WLS National Barn Dance Story," 110; List'ning In . . . , *The Prairie Farmer* (August 5, 1933): 8.
9. *Prairie Farmer* (October 14, 1933).
10. Biggar, "WLS National Barn Dance Story," 109.
11. *Ibid.*, 110; List'ning In . . . , *The Prairie Farmer* (Sep. 30, 1933): 8; Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS*, 1-2. Patsy Montana with Jane Frost, *The Cowboy's Sweetheart* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2002), 124.
12. "National Barn Dance Tonight," *Chicago Herald and Examiner* (April 19, 1924).

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13. Robert Shelton, *The Country Music Story: A Picture History of Country and Western Music*, (Secaucus, N.J.: Capitol Books, 1966), 42.
14. Two other local newspapers noted in their program listings, "This will be a regular Saturday night feature." Radio Programs, *Chicago Evening-Post and Literary Review* (April 19, 194); Our 23-Hour Program, *Chicago Evening American* (April 19, 1924): pt. 2, p. 5; *Kankakee Daily Republican* (November 18, 1924).
15. Wayne Daniel, "National Barn Dance," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 372-73; see *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Evening Post*, and *Radio Digest*.
16. Wayne D. Daniel, "The National Barn Dance on Network Radio: The 1930s," *Journal of Country Music* 9 (1983), 47.
17. Ivan M. Tribe, "National Barn Dance, The," in *Century of Country*, www.countryworks.com; Douglas Gomery, "WLS Barn Dance," in *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*, ed. James R. Grossman, Ann Durkin Keating, and Janice L. Reiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 883.
18. Tony Russell, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-42* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2004.
19. *Ibid.*, 3; "Anyone who was really keen could try counting the recorded masters on each of 31 randomly selected pages and multiplying the total by 30 (since the discography proper occupies 933 pp)." Tony Russell, personal communication, 2005.
20. D. K. Wilgus, "Country-Western Music and the Urban Hillbilly," *Journal of American Folklore* 83 (April-June, 1970): 159; Kristine M. McCusker, "'Bury Me Beneath the Willow': Linda Parker and Definitions of Tradition on the National Barn Dance, 1932-1935," *Southern Folklore* 56 (1999): 227ff.
21. These descriptions, as well as those in the previous paragraph, are taken from various 1930s editions of the *WLS Family Album*.
22. Quoted in Jeffrey J. Lange, *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle for Respectability, 1939-1954* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 27.
23. Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.: A Fifty Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), viii; Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, rev. ed., 1.
24. D. K. Wilgus, "An Introduction to the Study of Hillbilly Music," *Journal of American Folklore* 78 (1965): 196.
25. Lange, *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly*, 27; Charles K. Wolfe, "The Triumph of the Hills: Country Radio, 1920-50," in *Country: The Music and the Musicians, From the Beginnings to the '90s*, ed. by Paul Kingsbury for the Country Music Foundation, 2nd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 50.

26. Bernard L. Asbel, "The National Barn Dance," *Chicago* 1 no. 8 (October 1954): 23; Biggar's discussion, from a unpublished 1967 paper, is paraphrased in Evans, *Prairie Farmer and WLS*, 229.

27. This development was ubiquitous, for though the field of country music emerged in large part from old-time fiddling—a tradition of instrumental music with no lyric content of real importance—country music as heard on the radio and found on hit singles over at least the last fifty years has been almost exclusively vocal and lyrical.

28. "Kenosha Fiddlers Win Honors in WLS Contest," *Chicago Evening Post and Literary Review* (September 27, 1924); "Barn Dance Callers in Contest on WLS," *Ibid.* (April 15, 1926); "72 Callers Ready for WLS Barn Dance Contest Saturday," *Ibid.* (March 17, 1927).

29. In a similar study of live country music on midwestern radio stations in the 1940s, radio artists and executives from that era used the terms "legitimate" and "hillbilly" to distinguish two varieties of musicians. I was told that union rules required a station to hire a "legitimate musician" for every country or "hillbilly" musician on their staff. Paul Tyler, "Country Music in the Cornbelt: WOWO - Fort Wayne in the 1920s and '30s," unpublished paper delivered to American Folklore Society, Nashville, 1982.

30. Ann & Norm Cohen, "Folk and Hillbilly Music: Some Further Thoughts on Their Relation," *JEMF Quarterly* 13 (1977): 52.

31. A similar symbolic reconfiguration was enacted elsewhere in rural America, as I described in a study of a mid-twentieth century transition of square dancing from kitchen hops to actual barn dances. Paul Tyler, "Square Dancing in the Rural Midwest: Dance Events and the Location of Community," in *Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition in America's Southeast and Beyond*, ed. By Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside, *Contributions to the Study of Music & Dance*, no. 35 (Westwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 38ff.

32. See, for example, the picture of WLS's Merry-Go-Round show, where seven of the thirty cast members pictured are holding a guitar, *WLS Family Album, 1941: 10th Anniversary*, p. 15; and the three guitars held by the seven musicians pictured with "Here Are Some Folks You Hear Weekly," *WLS Family Album, 1930 Edition: The Happy Radio Home*, p. 43; Hoyt "Slim" Bryant, telephone interview with author, August 13, 2005.

33. See William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Diane Pecknold, "The Selling Sound: Country Music, Commercialism, and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1920-1974" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2002), for insightful discussions on the practices of cultural production.

34. *Chicago Tribune*; *WLS Family Albums*.

35. Bryant, interview with author.

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36. Walter Peterson [The Kentucky Wonder Bean], *Sensational Collection of Mountain Ballads and Old Time Songs* (Chicago: M. M. Cole Publishing Co., 1931).
37. Bradley Kincaid [The Mountain Boy], *Favorite Old-Time Songs and Mountain Ballads*, Book 2 (Chicago: WLS, 1929); Lester McFarland and Robert Gardner, *Deluxe Edition Mac and Bob: Mountain Songs, Western Songs, Cowboy Songs* (Chicago: M. M. Cole Publishing Co., 1941); *The Arkansas Woodchoppers World's Greatest Collection of Cowboys Songs with Yodel Arrangement* (Chicago: M. M. Cole Publishing Co., 1931), 44, 64.
38. McFarland & Gardner, *Deluxe Edition Mac and Bob*; Doc Hopkins & Karl & Harty of the Cumberland Ridgeruners, *Mountain Ballads and Home Songs* (Chicago: M. M. Cole Publishing Co., 1936).
39. John Lair, comp., *100 WLS Barn Dance Favorites: Pioneer Songs, Southern Songs, Cowboys Songs, Fiddle Tunes, Sacred Songs, Mountain Songs, Home Songs* (Chicago: M. M. Cole Publishing Co., 1935), 88. I'd like to thank Paul Gifford for pointing out to me the historical significance of this Dandurand recording. For further discussion on "singing" versus "patter" calls, see Paul L. Tyler, "'Sets on the Floor': Social Dance as an Emblem of Community in Rural Indiana" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2002), 177-84.
40. Malone, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 1985, 31-32; Dick Spottswood, "Gennett Records," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 197-98.
41. This chronology, and others, derive from my analysis of the data in Russell, *Country Music Records*.
42. Charles K. Wolfe, "Autry, Gene," in *Century of Country*.
43. See "Part 3" of Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Tyler, "Country Music in the Cornbelt."
44. Biggar, "WLS National Barn Dance Story," 110; Montana, *Cowboy's Sweetheart*, 73.
45. I do not collect 78rpm phonograph discs, but I have obtained taped copies from other collectors; and have scoured LP and CD reissues. However, without the recent reissue projects emanating from the British Archives of Country Music, less than four hundred recordings would have been available to me.
46. Guthrie T. Meade, Jr. with Dick Spottswood & Douglas S. Meade, *Country Music Sources: A Biblio-Discography of Commercially Recorded Traditional Music* (Chapel Hill: Southern Folklife Collection, 2002), xii.

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47. See George Biggar, "When the Cowbells Ring Out on Saturday Night: It's National Barn Dance Time," in *One Hundred WLS Barn Dance Favorites*, n.p.; John Lair, "Foreword," in *Ibid.*; "Radio Programs," *Chicago Evening-Post and Literary Review*, April 26, 1924, January 3, 1925; "Fiddlers at Poultry Show This Evening," *Kankakee Daily Republican*, January 3, 1925.
48. "Fiddlers of Past Tighten Strings for WLS Contest," *Chicago Evening Post and Literary Review*, May 17, 1924; "Real Old-Time Fiddlers Play at Barn Dance," *ibid.*, May 29, 1924.
49. *Who's Who in Radio* (Chicago: Charles P. Hughes Publishing Co. 1925).
50. "Tommy Dandurand of this city was broadcasting at WLS, Chicago, last Saturday night. He played his old-time fiddle and many Kankakee fans were tuned in for him." Radio, *Kankakee Daily Republican* October 24, 1924. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Thomas Dandurand, aged 64, lived at 3142 N. Kedzie, Chicago, and was a musician in an orchestra.
51. "Allemande Right!" in *WLS Family Album*, 1933, 38. Brusoe was the winner of the big Midwest Fiddle Championship sponsored by the *Chicago Herald & Examiner* in 1926. He was also recorded for the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress in 1940 by Helen Stratman Thomas, a member of the music faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
52. Charles K. Wolfe, "McMichen, Clayton," *Century of Country*.
53. Russell, *Country Music Records*, 676; John Lair, "Foreword," *One Hundred WLS Barn Dance Favorites*.
54. Cited in Rick Kennedy, *Jelly Roll, Bix, and Hoagy: Gennett Studios and the Birth of Recorded Jazz* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 162; Charles K. Wolfe, *Kentucky Country* (University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 47.
55. Harry Steele, "From the Archives: The Inside Story of the Hillbilly Business," *JEMF Quarterly* (1974), 54; Kennedy, *Jelly Roll, Bix, and Hoagy*, 162.
56. D. K. Wilgus, "Bradley Kincaid," in *Stars of Country Music: Uncle Dave Macon to Johnny Rodriguez*, ed. By Bill C. Malone & Judith McCulloh (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 87-88.
57. Loyal Jones, *Radio's "Kentucky Mountain Boy": Bradley Kincaid* (Berea College Appalachian Center, 1980), 19-20. For the effect of listeners' mail, see Kristine M. McCusker, "'Dear Radio Friend': Listener Mail and the National Barn dance, 1931-1941," *American Studies* 39 (Summer), 173-96.
58. List'ning In . . . , *Prairie Farmer* (September 7, 1929), 29; Here's "Arkie," *WLS Family Album*, 1930, 48.

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59. Charles K. Wolfe, "Mac and Bob", in *Century of Country*; Ivan M. Tribe, "Monroe, Charlie," in *Century of Country*
60. Some of the Old Southern Sacred Singers discs were released with the name Smoky Mountain Sacred Singers. A group with unidentified personal recorded by that name in Chicago in 1928, Russell, *Country Music Records*, 852.
61. *WLS Family Album*, 1931, 41; 1932, 13; 1933, 20; 1934, 11.
62. Charles K. Wolfe, *Classic Country: Legends of Country Music* (New York: Routledge), 118-20; Ivan M. Tribe, "Lulu Belle and Scotty," *Century of Country*; Kristine M. McCusker, "Bury Me Beneath the Willow": Linda Parker and Definitions of Tradition on the National Barn Dance, 1932-1935, *Southern Folklore* 56 (1999), 223-24, 235-38.
63. Wolfe, *Classic Country*, 121.
64. Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: The Saga of Women in Country Music* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), 76-79; Tribe, "Lulu Belle and Scotty."
65. Tribe, "Lulu Belle and Scotty."
66. William E. Lightfoot, "Lulu Belle & Scotty," in *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 308.
67. Charles K. Wolfe, "Prairie Ramblers," *Century of Country*; Wayne W. Daniel, "The Prairie Ramblers and Their Fiddlers," *Devil's Box* 30 (Fall 1996), 14-16.
68. Quoted in Wolfe, "Prairie Ramblers."
69. Daniel, "Prairie Ramblers and Their Fiddlers," 19-20.
70. Robert K. Oermann, "Louise Massey & the Westerners," in *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 329; Wayne D. Daniel, "The Ranch Romance of Louise Massey & the Westerners," *Journal of Country Music*, 20 (1999), 38-39.
71. Wayne D. Daniel, "Same Face, Different Names: The DeZurik Sisters and the Cackle Sisters," www.hillbilly-music.com/groups/story/index.php?groupid=12066.
72. *Ibid.*
73. Ivan M. Tribe, "Dean, Eddie," *Century of Country*.
74. *WLS Family Album*, 1941, 31.

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75. *WLS Family Album*, 1933, 33; Gene Autry with Mickey Herskowitz, *Back in the Saddle Again* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1978), 16.
76. Jonathon Guyot Smith, "Gene Autry," in *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 22; Autry, *Ibid.*, 14-15.
77. Douglas B. Green, "Gene Autry," in *Stars of Country Music*, 144; Smith, "Gene Autry," 22-23.
78. Charles Wolfe, "Interview with Millie Good," included with *Two Cowgirls on the Lone Prairie: The True Story of the Girls of the Golden West*, *Old Time Music* no. 43 (1986/87), 7.
79. *Ibid.*, 7-8.
80. Robert K. Oermann & Mary A. Bufwack, "Patsy Montana and the Development of the Cowgirl Image," *Journal of Country Music* 8 (1981), 18.
81. Montana, *Cowboy's Sweetheart*, 11-36.
82. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 86-87.
83. For highlights of Patsy's career in Chicago and the best back-stage look at the Barn Dance in 1930s, see Montana, *Cowboy's Sweetheart*, 49-85.
84. "Hear Are Some of the Folks You Hear Weekly," in *WLS Family Album*, 1930, 48.
85. "Pie Plant Pete Pleases," in *WLS Family Album*, 1930, 46; Tribe, "Pie Plant Pete," in *Century of Country*.
86. Gabe Ward, interview with author, June 30, 1984; "Hoosier Hot Shots," in *Century of Country*.
87. Daniel, "National Barn Dance on Network Radio," 48, 50.
88. Bryant, interview with author; *Daily Herald* (May 8, 1931 and March 22, 1935).
89. Daniel, "National Barn Dance on Network Radio," 50; Esther Mowery, interview with author, June 21, 1979.
90. Biggar, "WLS National Barn Dance Story," 110-11; Charles K. Wolfe, "Monroe Brothers," in *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 352; "Girls on Cover," *Prairie Farmer's New WLS Weekly [Stand By]* (March 23, 1935), 12.
91. "Pepper," *WLS Family Album* (Chicago: Prairie Farmer Publishing, 1942), 22.

92. See Lange, *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly*, 31-33; and Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 74-98.

93. See Wayne D. Daniel, "Same Faces, Different Names: The DeZurik Sisters and The Cackle Sisters" (www.hillbilly-music.com/groups/story/index.php?groupid=12066).

94. Walt Trott, "Ernie Newton," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*,

95. Ken Kapua [Reece], "Joseph Kekuku: Originator of the Hawaiian Guitar," in *The Hawaiian Steel Guitar and Its Great Hawaiian Musicians*, comp. Lorene Ruymar (Anaheim Hills, Calif.: Centerstream Publishing, 1996), 2; Advance Programs, *Radio Digest* (July 27, 1925); *WLS Family Album*, 1930, 16, 43. Ruymar, in *Hawaiian Steel Guitar*, gives Bob's last name as Paoli, while Russell, in *Country Music Records*, gives it as Kaii.

96. Charles K. Wolfe, "Atchison, Tex," in *Century of Country*.