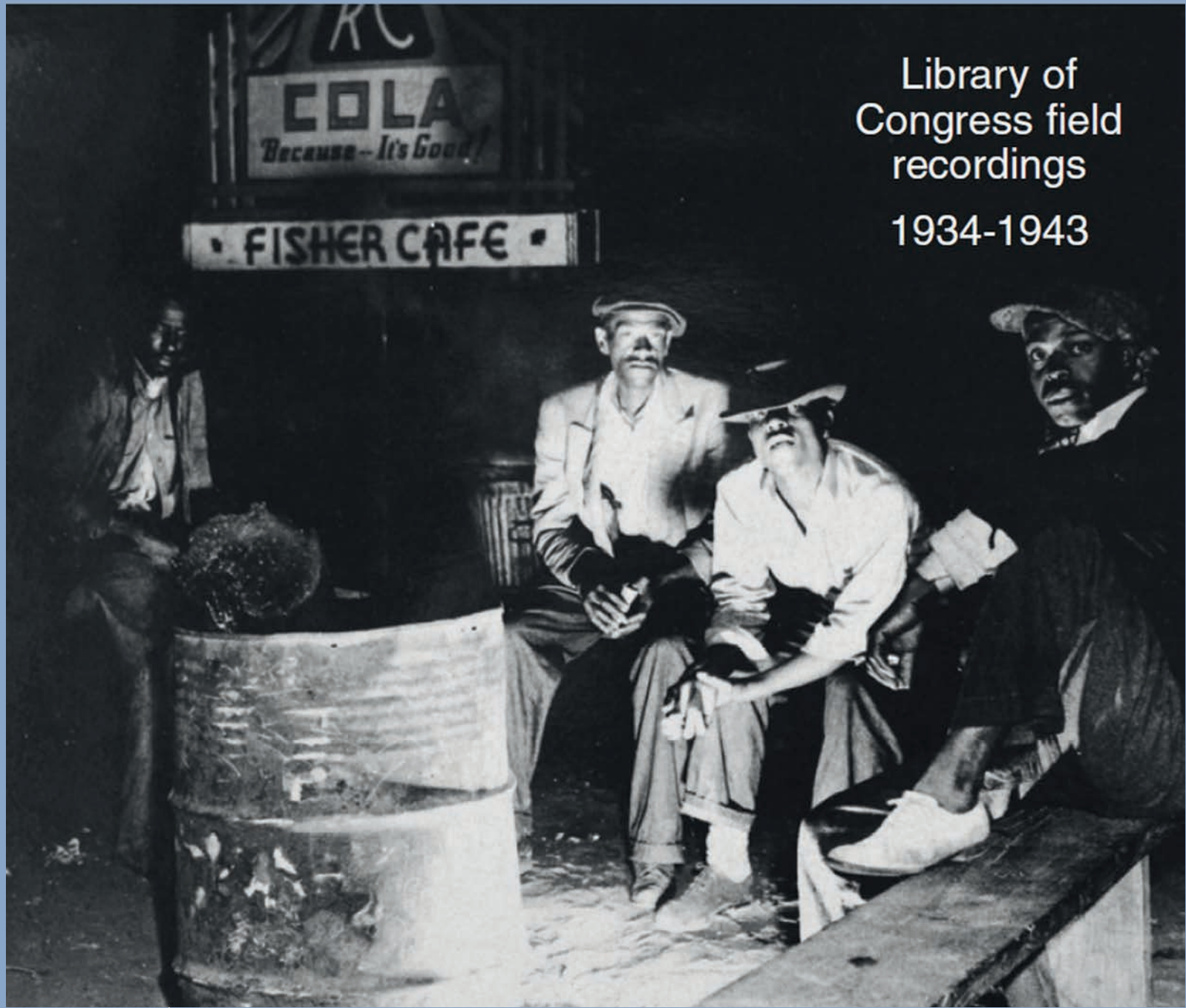


MSESET9
6 CD set

Jack O'Diamonds



Library of
Congress field
recordings

1934-1943

Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 9

Library of Congress Series

We thank:

Joseph C. Hickerson, Head, Archive of Folk Song, the Library of Congress,
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Matchbox Bluesmaster Series Vol 9

The six LPs of the Library of Congress Series were released as a joint venture between Flyright Records and Saydisc Records during the 1970s.

The original recordings made between 1934 and 1943 were made in the field on portable 78rpm lacquer disc cutting machines by various collectors. In the 30 years or so that they were lodged with the Library of Congress before being transcribed for this series in the 1970s, many of the fragile discs deteriorated. The music recorded on those discs is of the highest importance in the history of the development of the blues and it was vital to preserve this for posterity. Some of the performances are really outstanding and from completely unknown and previously unrecorded singers and musicians some of whom (Vols 5 & 6) were in state penitentiary farms.

Therefore some of the surfaces are noisy (mostly on discs 3 and 4) and many tracks on discs 5 and 6 start or cut off abruptly. We have indicated these problems by asterisks in the title lists as follows:

- * denotes a poor surface quality
- ** denotes an abrupt start or end

The original LP releases for Vols 3 to 6 had extensive extra notes and references included as inserts in the LP sleeves and these are available to view or download on: **matchboxbluesmaster.co.uk** under L of C Series. The notes in this booklet contain just a précis of these notes and we would urge listeners to access the full versions on our website.

Gef Lucena - Matchbox Series Producer

**Originally released in 1973 as Flyright-Matchbox SDM 230 -
Mississippi River Blues
1940 field recordings from Natchez, Mississippi
Library of Congress Series: Volume One**

1.	Lonesome Highway Blues	Lucious Curtis (vcl/gtr), Willie Ford (gtr), John Lomax (speech)	AFS 4002 A1	3:35
2.	Guitar Picking Song	Lucious Curtis (gtr)	AFS 4002 A2	1:15
3.	High Lonesome Hill	Lucious Curtis (vcl/gtr), Willie Ford, gtr)	AFS 4002 B	4:31
4.	Pay Day	Willie Ford (vcl/gtr)	AFS 4003 A1	2:35
5.	Train Blues	Lucious Curtis (vcl/gtr)	AFS 4003 A2	1:43
6.	Mississippi River Blues	Lucious Curtis (vcl/gtr), Willie Ford (gtr)	AFS 4003 B1	2:47
7.	Stagolee	Lucious Curtis (vcl/gtr), Willie Ford (gtr)	AFS 4003 B2	1:33
8.	Farmin' Man Blues	Lucious Curtis (vcl/gtr), Willie Ford (gtr)	AFS 4004 A1	2:59
9.	Nobody's Business	Willie Ford (vcl/gtr)	AFS 4004 A2	1:00
10.	Santa 'Field' Blues	Willie Ford (vcl/gtr/speech), John Lomax (speech)	AFS 4004 B1	3:46
11.	Sto' Gallery Blues	Willie Ford (vcl/gtr/speech), Lucious Curtis (gtr)	AFS 4007 A1	3:53
12.	Rubber Ball Blues	Lucious Curtis (vcl/gtr), Willie Ford (gtr)	AFS 4007 B1	2:40
13.	Country Girl Blues	George Boldwin (vcl/gtr)	AFS 4007 B2	1:33
14.	Time Is Gettin' Hard	Lucious Curtis (vcl/gtr), Willie Ford (gtr)	AFS 4013 A1	3:36
Total duration:				39:09

All titles recorded at Natchez, Mississippi on Saturday 19 October 1940.
Original recordings made on 12" aluminium base acetate discs at 78 rpm
by John Avery Lomax and Ruth Terril Lomax.

The town of Natchez has played an important role in the history of the state of Mississippi. Situated on a series of lofty alluvial bluffs, overlooking the Mississippi river, the town, one of the earliest settlements in the state, has been colonised at some time by the French, Spanish and English. Below the Natchez bluffs was once situated the turbulent old river port of Natchez-under-the-Hill. Here there was a multi-racial population of rougns and toughs who thrived on the river trade and other more infamous pursuits. This was the sort of place where one imagines Black entertainers, playing in the local barrelhouses and honky-tonks, evolved some of the traditions of jazz and blues. The soft rockless land, upon which the port was situated, had been gradually eroded by the river. Nearby, in 'a strip of bottom land just back of the bluffs', is Buckner's Alley, where the Black blues and gospel singer Cat Iron (*né* William Carradine) was living when he was found by Frederic Ramsey Jr. in c. 1957. Today such places are still the most likely haunts of those Black Natchez musicians who retain memories of older traditions.

By the 1930s the Black population of Natchez (53.3% of the town's total population in 1937) were quite well off in comparison with other Black Mississippians. They had created a professional class and traded almost exclusively at stores owned by members of their own race. The focal point (in the 1930s) for their commercial and business establishments and the majority of their churches – the place where out of town Blacks gravitated – was St. Catherine Street. This road runs east, away from the Mississippi river and the centre of the town, and joins with U.S. Highways 61 and 84 at the north-east edge of the urban area. From the south, Highway 61 enters Natchez along Homochito Street. This is the road by which, it can be safely assumed, John A. Lomax and his wife would have entered the town when they drove up from Baton Rouge, Louisiana in October 1940.

It was not a happy time for the Blacks of Natchez, for the year 1940 was the year of the disastrous fire at the Rhythm Club dance hall (23 April 1940) which resulted in the death of Black bandleader Walter Barnes and over two hundred other victims. The Lomaxes' search for Black singers was hampered by the after-effects of this fire. In a letter to her family, dated 19 October 1940, Ruby T. Lomax wrote, 'Any songs beside spirituals are hard to get here; for the terrible dance hall fire of several months ago has sent the Negro population to the mourners' bench, and they will not sing "reels" or "worl'ly" songs'. Later she notes an experience she had trying to record a young Black boy singing a game song. 'I heard a little boy down Judge's street [Alice 'Judge' Richardson was also recorded by the Lomaxes at this time] singing gayly a little game

song. He told me another little boy taught it to him at school. It was just such a children's song as we had been looking for, but his Auntie with whom he lived would not let him sing it into our microphone. "You see" she explained "his mother died in the big fire [the dance-hall fire], and I wouldn't dare let him sing that song without his father's permission".¹ It is surprising therefore that on the very same day that Ruby T. Lomax wrote to her family, John A. Lomax was led to Lucious Curtis, Willie Ford and George Baldwin, and that these performers agreed to sing and then record blues and other worldly songs for him. One can but surmise that these singers had not been affected by the fire and its aftermath – possibly they were only transitory Natchez residents.

¹ "Like I foretold you, I ain't much of a player". When Lucious Curtis was there, Willie "followed after" him, but he did it skilfully, watching the leader carefully.¹ So reads the first paragraph of John A. Lomax's notes for the recording session featured on this record. Lomax's notes are informative about the methods he used to discover suitable performers for his field recordings and also tell us something about the performers themselves. The main part of these notes follow. 'Lucious Curtis is a honky-tonk, guitar picking Negro, living on a precarious income from pick-ups at dance halls. His "complementer" Willie Ford has a regular job at a big saw-mill but had a "sad-day" off.

When we first got to our showy Natchez hotel I started the entire bunch of bell-hops on a hunt for folk songs. Twenty-four hours later, all the "prospects" the bell-hops had brought in were proving a waste of time, I found a real helper. The hotel parking lot was run by a lively voluble Negro man. The second day of our stay he came to me and said "Boss them other n***** you been foolin' with don' know nothin'. I understand's what you want. Lemme drive your car and I'll take you to some real guitar pickers." He did, Lucious Curtis and Willie Ford were two of them.

To get Lucious started I had to buy a new 75c set of strings for his guitar. He seemed proud of them until I mentioned the expense when dividing the tip between him and Willie. But his guitar picking was good. "I could do better 'ceptin for my back. I hurt it lifting in a logging camp" he told me.

Lucious and Willie first played their repertoire of blues for me to make selections for recording (1) *Farming Man Blues*, (2) *Mississippi Water [sic] Blues*, (3) *Rubber Ball Blues*, (4) *Sto' Gallery Blues*, (5) *Lonesome Highway Blues*, (6) *Santa "fiel" (Santa Fe R.R.) Blues*, (7) *Crawling King Snake Blues*, (8) *Stackerlee Blues*, (9) *Country Girl Blues*. Lucious claims to have composed all these pieces. The best tune, *Crawling King Snake Blues*, Lucious refused repeatedly to play again. After I had begged him, I offered him a dollar for this one song. Although I promised him that the Library would protect him in his rights he would not be moved. "I think I can sell it to NBC" he said.

Lucious said he had once made records with Bo Chapman alias "Bo Carter". Elsewhere in the notes Lomax states 'Lucious Curtis has made some commercial records and would not give us his "*Crawling Blacksnake [sic] Blues*" having been "gypped" by a "feller" once who stole one of his tunes. He has played with the Chapman Brothers, one of whom has also made records under the name Bo Carter.

The notes are sometimes confusing, for it was Willie Ford who sang and composed *Santa 'Field' Blues* (he states so on the record - 4004 B 1) and it is probable that he was also the composer of his other non traditional song *Sto' Gallery Blues*. Additionally the disc jacket notes for 4007 B 2 *Country Girl Blues*, states 'made up and sung by George Boldwin'. (Unfortunately no further information is available on Boldwin). Lomax also confuses Curtis' surname with that of the Carter (Chatmon) family, when he announces the performers on 4002 A I.

There is an interview between Lomax and Curtis on 4002 B. Curtis is asked about a trip he took to New York where he supposedly made some commercial recordings. (This has not been included on this record – unfortunately Curtis' replies are too indistinct to make inclusion worthwhile). If, as Lomax states, Curtis did record commercially with Bo Carter, the only occasion when he can have done so would have been at Carter's sole New York recording session (for Okeh) in June (4 & 5) 1931. There is an unidentified interlocutor on Carter's *Twist It Babe* (Ok. unissued – Yazoo L 1034) recorded at this time. It is possible that this speaker is Curtis who may have travelled with Carter to New York. It should be noted that there appears to have been no accompanying musician on this session. Alternatively, disregarding New York as a recording location and taking into account Curtis' stated association with the Chatmon family, Curtis could be the Leroy Carter who recorded with (poss.) Harry Chatmon at Jackson, Miss, in October (10 & 18) 1935. Only one record (Vo. 03120) was issued from these sessions and it has not been possible to compare the performances with those of Curtis. No commercial records released under the name of Lucious Curtis are known to exist. It may be that Curtis was a member of the Chatmon family himself; his music testifies to a familiarity with their recorded style (in particular Bo Carter). Lomax's statement shows that Curtis certainly knew the Chatmon brothers, even if he was not directly related to them.

The high standard of the music speaks for itself. There is a refreshing air about all these performances. Many of the songs have highly original lyrics together with pleasing guitar duet accompaniments. Bob Groom has discussed these songs in detail (B. W. 38) and points out the melodic similarities of Curtis' excellent *High Lonesome Hill* to that of

Tommy Johnson's *Canned Heat Blues* (Vi. V38535). He also observes similarities to Bo Carter's style in Curtis' performance of *Farmin' Man Blues*. Another of Curtis' songs, the traditional *Time Is Gittin' Hard*, was recorded by Bo Carter (and others) as *Good Old Turnip Greens*, (Carter's version was issued on Br. 7048). One wonders how good was Curtis' *Crawling King Snake Blues*. Judging by his other performances his rendition of this song must have been outstanding.

Of his four featured titles Willie Ford produces two very individual selections, the highlight of these being his haunting and beautiful *Santa 'Field' Blues*. *Sto' Gallery Blues* is good too but is marred by one of his guitar strings breaking during the performance. Willie however soldiers on to complete the song.

George Baldwin sounds hesitant on his *Country Girl Blues* – perhaps he was only just learning how to play his guitar, nevertheless his performance is not without interest.

At the time these recordings were made John A. Lomax wrote to his son (Alan) 'We got some good blues at Natchez'. One can but agree with his assessment.

John H. Cowley© 1973

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Blues and Gospel Records 1902-1942 by John Godrich and Robert M. W. Dixon, Storyville, 1969.

Natchez, Mississippi Blues by Bob Groom, pp. 3-7, *Blues World*, 38, Spring, 1971.

Blacks, Whites and Blues by Tony Russell, Studio Vista, 1970.

Various notes and letters written by John A. Lomax and Ruby T.

Lomax at the time of the field recordings (kindly supplied by the Archive of Folk Song, the Library of Congress).

**Originally released in 1973 as Flyright-Matchbox SDM 250 -
Flyright-Matchbox Library of Congress Series: Vol 2
Fort Valley Blues – Library of Congress field recordings from Georgia**

1	Mama You Goin' To Quit Me As Good As I Been to You	Allison Mathis (vcl/gtr)	AFS 5158 A	01:39
2	Bottle Up And Go	Allison Mathis (vcl/gtr), Jessie Stroller (harm)	AFS 5158 A 1	01:45
3	Boll Weevil	Buster 'Buzz' Ezell (vcl/gtr)	AFS 5162 B 1	02:56
4	Fort Valley Blues	The Smith Band (gtr/bass/banjo-mand/kazoo)	AFS 5165 A 2	01:25
5	War Song	Buster Brown (vcl/harm)	AFS 6987 B	02:55
6	Milk Cow Blues	Gus Gibson (vcl/gtr)	AFS 6989 B	03:34
7	My Big Fat Hipped Mama	Charles Ellis (vcl/pno)	AFS 5167 A	04:25
8	Roosevelt And Hitler (Part 1)	Buster 'Buzz' Ezell (vcl/gtr)	AFS 6987A	03:39
9	Roosevelt And Hitler (Part 2)	Buster 'Buzz' Ezell (vcl/gtr)	AFS 6988 A1	01:54
10	Po' Boy Long Way From Home	Sonny Chestain (vcl/gtr)	AFS 5149 A	03:29
11	I'm Gonna Make You Happy	Buster Brown (vcl/harm)	AFS 6986 A	03:39
12	Railroad Song	Gus Gibson (vcl/gtr)	AFS 5162 A	04:25
13	Salt Water Blues	Buster 'Buzz' Ezell (vcl/gtr/harm)	AFS 5154 B	02:06
14	Southern Rag	James Sneed (vcl/wbd), J. F. Duffy (gtr), Alvin Sanders (gtr)	AFS 6989 A	03:34
15	John Henry	Allison Mathis (vcl/gtr), Jessie Stroller (harm)	AFS 5158 B 1	02:40
16	Blues – When Saints Come To Town	Jessie Stroller (harm)	AFS 5158 B 2	00:42
	Total duration:			45:05

Fort Valley Blues is a collection of blues, songs and instrumental tunes from Southern Georgia, recorded in the field, under the auspices of the Library of Congress, in the early 1940s. Although few, if any, of the recordings were made on stage, they commemorate a remarkable series of folk festivals – little-known but vital precursors of Newport or Ann Arbor. As you would expect in such circumstances, they give a sharp, wide-angle view of black folk music, more faithful than anything offered by the period's commercial recordings. The music from the Fort Valley State College Folk Festival (and those words could serve as this record's subtitle) reveal facets of black tradition that have hitherto been hardly visible.

Fort Valley, the seat of Peach County, Georgia, lies about 20 miles southwest of Macon. Every spring the State College used to hold a music festival, and in 1940 the college's president, Horace Mann Bond, inspired by the singing in a rural church he had visited, decided to augment the festival with the folk music session. For this debut he invited W. C. Handy down as a judge and in the words of the 1944 festival issue of the college's magazine the *Peachite* 'so many variations of the *St Louis Blues* were played by admiring, sometimes barefooted, guitarist and harmonica players, that Mr Handy wept with joyous laughter and at the end he took out his golden trumpet and played the *St Louis Blues* and the Folk loved it'.

The following year the folk festival became an event in itself. Already there was a day in the local calendar when people flocked to the College: the annual Ham and Egg Show, founded in 1915 and during the 1940s organised by County Agent Otis S. O'Neal. It seemed apt to couple the agricultural and musical produce of the neighbourhood and from then on the folk festival was a regular event in the first week of March every year.

'From the first', records the College magazine, 'the festival fell naturally into the evening devoted to secular performance, principally guitarists and banjoists' (Note: we have never had a fiddler) and a Sunday afternoon (reaching to unpredictable hours, also of the evening) for religious groups. Each year increasing numbers have taken part. On the secular evenings, we've had guitarists, banjoists, pianists, harmonic[a] players, jug bands and artists with washboards, "quills", saws, bones, and improvised one string instruments. On the religious "rally days" we've had rural church congregations and choirs, quartettes and soloists with new songs they have composed and which the congregation instantaneously learns to follow.'

The festival was aided by College staff, such as summer-school music teacher Frederick Hall (who 'had studied the Eisteddfod in its native Wales') and Willis Lawrence

James. Willis James, himself a singer and authority on Black folk music, played an important part in alerting the performers to the value of their songs and securing the interest of the Library of Congress in recording them.

The first Library of Congress recordings that can be associated with Fort Valley were those made by John Work, from Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. Sometime in 1941 Work recorded between 30 and 40 performances on AFS discs 5147 to 5149 and 5154 to 5167. Most of the performers were known to festival audiences: Buster Ezell, the Smith Band, Gus Gibson and others. They may well have recorded about the time of the second festival, in March 1941.

No 1942 recordings are known (though archives other than the Library of Congress may hold some) but in 1943, during the festival on 5-7 March, Willis James recorded AFS discs 6986 to 6993. Later that year, possibly about August, James made further recordings, a number of them by Buster Ezell, but much of this set (AFS discs 7039 - 7053) suffers from technical faults.

At the library, Harold Spivacke, Alan Lomax and Ben Botkin were stimulating the activity of James and President Bond. Their correspondence includes requests for remakes of technically poor records, urges continued documentation of the war songs composed by Buster Ezell, the area's most respected songster. In June 1943 James wrote that he planned fieldwork in Fort Valley, Columbus, Americus and Macon, but is not known if he accomplished it.

Many of the 1941-43 records contain religious music by such performers as Deacon Sam Jackson and the Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church, or Mrs Beatie Gay's First Baptist Church Mixed Quartet of Byron, Ga.. The scope of this record, however, is the secular folk music from the collection.

Buster Brown is the only Fort Valley performer known to have gone on to a commercial recording career. He had some success on New York labels in the late 1950s and early 1960s, chiefly with his hit *Fannie Mae*. At the 1943 festival he turned up in a white duck suit and intrigued the audience with his 'incredible feat of playing and singing at the same time'. On both his selections here he skilfully crosscuts the harp melody with whoops or cries. *War Song* is a slow blues, somewhat in the manner of Sonny Boy Williamson's several recordings about World War II, while *I'm Gonna Make You Happy* is a faster, merrier song. Brown was from Cordele, Ga., about 50 miles south of Fort Valley.

Sonny Chastain is possibly the Will Chastian credited by AFS files (incorrectly, it would seem) with his guitar accompaniment to Gus Gibson's *Milk Cow Blues*. His rough

but attractive *Po' Boy Long Way From Home* is his only known recording.

Of the pianist Charles Ellis no report survives, but south-eastern blues pianists are scarce enough for us to be able to welcome a new name, and *My Fat Hipped Mama* is in any case a very satisfactory performance.

With Buster Ezell, however, we are on firmer biographical ground, for he was evidently popular at the festivals. 'Bus is a rare musical talent', comments the College magazine, 'and the most consistent prize-winner of all. Says Mr Buster Ezell, "I done some o' everything: sawmill, road gangs, played in circuses, hoochie coochie shows.... I used to be world's champeen, 'cause I'm 'bout dat now when de boys pushes me. I has to be to win". He is always making new songs.'

Ezell, who lived 'out in the country near us' according to President Bond, was the most recorded of the musicians associated with the festival. On some of his 1941 sides he played both guitar and rack harmonica and throughout that session he employed traditional themes, like the *Boll Weevil*, on this album, or *Dixie Line* (which is the old-timer *Are You From Dixie?*). Thereafter he dropped the harp from his recordings and concentrated on his own songs. These, apart from an ebullient *Joe Louis*, blues with scat choruses were all about the war, and chiefly concerned with encouraging black co-operation in the war effort. Foremost among them was *Roosevelt and Hitler*, a stirring re-creation of a traditional theme, recorded in two parts. Ezell's subsequent recording like *Obeys Your Ration Laws* and *Do Right By My Country*, though technically unsuitable for inclusion on this album, are interesting texts and study of them is in preparation.

Gus Gibson is mentioned in the College magazine as one of 'our folk performers... frequently astonishing in their virtuosity'. From this source too we can deduce that Gibson died at some time after his 1943 recording but before March 1944. His *Milk Cow Blues* is not a familiar one and his *Railroad Song* is an impressive slide guitar performance.

Neither Allison Mathis nor his harp-playing accompanist Jesse Stroller is mentioned in the *Peachite*, but, though they are unknowns, blues enthusiasts may well elevate them to Great Unknowns and much regret the brevity of their performances. Mathis plays slide guitar with the expressiveness of a Fred McCullen or Curley Weaver, sings eloquently and infuses his tunes with a fetching melodiousness – in all this fluently supported by Stroller, who is also given a few moments on his own to demonstrate *When The Saints Go Marching In*.

The full title of the Smith Band should be Blind Billy Smith's String & Washboard Band; they were based in Macon. Their 1941 line-up was kazoo, banjo–mandolin, guitar

and bowed string-bass, and they recorded *Fort Valley Blues* (issued here) and sprightly *Smithy Rag*. W. C. Handy had come down again to judge that year, bringing with him the celebrated pianist/composers Joe Jordan and J. Russell Robinson. The College magazine relates how Handy took out his trumpet to lead the Smith Band, while Jordan and Robinson alternated at the piano, the students meanwhile square-dancing gaily.

James Sneed, who sings what lyrics there are in *Southern Rag* and wields the washboard, has been vaguely recalled by other Georgia musicians, but more can be written of his accompanists, guitar pickers J. F. Duffy and Alvin Sanders. They were peach orchard workers and apparently favourites at the festivals. As the College magazine puts it: 'The audience loves them because of their talent and their intensely interesting personalities; they achieve a personal, natural, human balance which is above the mere comedy and which might well be the ambition of more famous artists. Sanders and Duffy never fail to "set off" an unrestrained current response from the audience when they sing – "Yuh cause me to worry, Yuh cause me to moan, Yuh cause me to leave My happy home..."'

'When we think', wrote John Work in the 1944 *Peachite* festival issue, 'of the marvellous negro folklore which has disappeared forever through the inattentiveness and the lack of appreciation of it by those who might have preserved it, the Fort Valley Folk Festival looms high. By bringing such inimitable music as "Gus" Gibson, "Bus" Ezell, and Samuel Jackson make to the attention of America, and in the same action proving to these musicians that their appreciative audience extends far beyond their church or corner storefront where they previously sang and played, this festival stimulates and preserves something extremely valuable in our American life.' Thirty years later, in a climate of folk music appreciation that the Fort Valley people can scarcely have foreseen, we can further their achievement by giving an account of it, in album form, to an audience equally appreciative and far more widespread. In doing so we're commemorating not only the musicians of Fort Valley, but the men like John Work and Willis James who saw the value of what was in front of them and went to great lengths, in a largely unsympathetic age, to document it. **Tony Russell © 1973**

5149 A; 5154 B 1; 5158 A 1, 2, B 1, 2 ; 5162 A , B 1;
5165 A 2, B 1; 5167 A: recorded in Georgia, 1941 by John Wesley Work
6986 A; 6987A, B; 6988 A 1; 6989 A, B; recorded at Fort Valley State College, Fort
Valley, Georgia, 5–7 March, 1943 by Willis Laurence James and Lewis Wade Jones.
Original recordings made on glass based acetate discs (5149, 5154, 5158, 5162, 5165,

5167: dubbed from originals not in the possession of the Archive of Folk Song, the Library of Congress).

6987A and 6988 A 1 – *Roosevelt and Hitler parts 1 and 2* – have flaws in the original discs which could not be completely eliminated. However this patriotic black war song has been included for its social and lyrical significance.

**Originally released in 1974 as Flyright-Matchbox SDM 257 -
Flyright-Matchbox Library of Congress Series: Vol 3
Out in The Cold Again – field recordings from Florida**

1*	John Henry	Gabriel Brown (vcl/gtr)	AFS 355 A	02:18
2	John Henry	Gabriel Brown (gtr)	AFS 355 B	02:26
3*	Casey Jones	Rochelle French (vcl/gtr), Gabriel Brown (vcl/gtr)	AFS 356 A	02:47
4*	Sail On, Little Girl, Sail On	Rochelle French (vcl/gtr), Gabriel Brown (gtr)	AFS 356 B	03:54
5	Out In The Cold Again	Rochelle French (vcl/gtr), Gabriel Brown (gtr)	AFS 357 A	02:56
6	Blues	Gabriel Brown (gtr), Rochelle French (gtr)	AFS 357 B	04:20
7	Tone The Bell Easy	Gabriel Brown (vcl/gtr)	AFS 358 A 1	01:40
8	Motherless Child	Gabriel Brown (vcl/gtr)	AFS 358 A 2	01:32
9*	Franky And Albert (Cooney And Delia)	John French (vcl), Gabriel Brown (gtr)	AFS 358 B 1	01:44
10*	Po' Boy, Long Way From Home	Rochelle French (vcl/gtr), Gabriel Brown (gtr)	AFS 454 B	04:07
11*	A Dream Of Mine	Gabriel Brown (gtr)	AFS 359 A	02:37
12	Blues (I Ain't Got No Mama Now) (Take 1)	Rochelle French (vcl/gtr), Gabriel Brown (speech)	AFS 359 B 1	01:31
13	Blues (I Ain't Got No Mama Now) (Take 2)	Rochelle French (vcl/gtr)	AFS 359 B 2	01:08
14	What Did the Doodle-Bug Say To The Mole?	Rochelle French (vcl), Gabriel Brown (gtr)	AFS 359 B 3	01:11

15	Education Blues	Gabriel Brown (vcl/gtr), Rochelle French (gtr)	AFS 360 A	03:03
16	Talking In Sebastopol	Gabriel Brown (vcl/gtr), Rochelle French (gtr)	AFS 360 B	03:28
17*	Careless Love	Gabriel Brown (vcl/gtr)	AFS 361 A	02:53
18	Uncle Bud	Rochelle French (vcl/speech/gtr), Gabriel Brown (vcl/gtr)	AFS 366 A	02:01
		Total duration:		45:54

Alan Lomax, Zora Neale Hurston and Elizabeth Barnicle met in Brunswick, Georgia on 15 June 1935 and immediately began collecting folk material from the black community on St. Simon's Island. Exulted at having recorded what they felt to be genuine Afro-American folklore of the 19th century they moved to Eatonville, Florida, Hurston's home town, where she introduced Lomax to the finest guitarist he had heard. This was Gabriel Brown.

Gabriel Brown recorded two versions of *John Henry*, the first in E and the second in C. This song had been heavily recorded commercially in the 1920s and was frequently recorded by the Library of Congress. It had been an archetypal blues among early east coast musicians, being one of the numbers first associated with the playing of slide guitar. This is confirmed by personal interviews in Georgia and the Carolinas with blues men who played before the phonograph record spread the blues in the 1920s. Although Brown's versions are almost entirely instrumental, at this time most folklorists were attracted by the lyrics and the legend of *John Henry* culminating in the studies by Guy Johnson and Louis Chappell.¹ Alan Lomax was himself to analyse the role of *John Henry* in black folklore at a later date.² Perhaps the best overall correlation of information on the legend of *John Henry* is that by Richard M. Dorson in *Western Folklore*.³

On *Casey Jones*, Gabriel Brown is joined by Rochelle French, who often lays down a rhythm over which Brown is able to improvise more readily. Both men sing and play and the session offers a variety of combinations. The field-notes refer to *Out In The Cold Again* as 'jazz', stating that the tune was 'recorded to please these musicians'. Brown recorded both secular and religious songs playing fine slide guitar on *Motherless Child*. *Franky And Albert* is described in the field-notes as a 'fragment of a ballad' and is sub-titled *Coony And Delia*. It is not however the black ballad *Delia*, unlike the version recorded later in the field trip by Booker T. Sapps (see Vol. 4 in this series, SDM 258).

Like *John Henry*, *Po' Boy* was another song that was in almost every east coast musician's repertoire; again frequently played using a slide or bottleneck technique. Rather surprisingly the field-notes refer to it as a 'two step'. Although *Po' Boy* was assigned AFS disc number 454 B, the field-notes state that it was recorded at the same time as the other Gabriel Brown material. The other side of the disc was used by the Lomax-Barnicle expedition to the Bahamas in July.

Brown seems to have been largely unrestricted in his choice of material for the field-notes state that he 'composed' *A Dream Of Mine*. The same notes list the next track simply as *Blues*, although previous discographies and the Library of Congress' own AFS checklist show it as *I Ain't Got No Mama Now*. The field-notes are slightly ambiguous on the quaintly-named *What Did The Doodlebug Say To The Mole?*, another 'two step', for they state it is 'played on the guitar and sung by Gabriel Brown and Rochelle French'. In fact it seems it is Brown who plays guitar and French who sings – one possible interpretation of the statement.

The session reaches one of its peaks with Brown's beautiful *Education Blues*. The song is almost certainly based on Leroy Carr's *Cruel Woman Blues*, recorded the previous August; the latter itself is possibly based on Robert Peebles' 1930 Paramount recording of *Mama's Boy*. The fine guitar work on *Education Blues* continues on *Talking In Sebastopol* [sic] and the field notes explain that, while the former was in C and the latter in E, on both Brown plays with a knife, Rochelle French playing 'straight'.

The pleasant *Careless Love* features Brown using slide but apart from a short version of *Uncle Bud*, allocated five discs later, this marks the end of some very fine music. As with all other bawdy material recorded for the Library of Congress, *Uncle Bud* is not noted in the AFS checklist. The field-notes list it as a 'vulgar semi-ballad', although this version is quite mild. The song is wide-spread and usually appears as a suggestive if not outright bawdy song. In his notes to the Raglan album of unexpurgated folksongs, Mack McCormick gives considerable detail about the assimilation of the song into associated references to Texas prison transfer official, Bud Russell.⁴ Interesting associations of *Uncle Bud* with *Froggie Went A-Courtin'* are discussed in the notes to the Rounder, Gid Tanner album.⁵ Rochelle French seems rather embarrassed about singing, perhaps because Hurston was there, and he obviously apologises at the end of the recording.

By the mid 1940s Gabriel Brown was in New York where he recorded commercially. It is possible that Lomax and Hurston encouraged him to make these records. Hurston was almost certainly in New York during this period for she wrote an article on Harlem

Slang, published in 1942, in the American Mercury.⁶ Lomax was Assistant in Charge of the Archive of (American) Folk Song at the Library of Congress from 1937 to 1942 but he also worked, from 1939 to 1944, as an assistant with the Columbia Broadcasting Service in New York.

At the start of *Talking In Sebastopol*, Gabriel Brown identifies the date of the recording, which would appear to be 20 June 1935. This would have been consistent with the date of the arrival of the recording team in Georgia, allowing them time to record there and to travel to Florida. From Eatonville the expedition left for Belle Glade, to the south-east of Lake Okeechobee in the Everglades. Here they recorded Booker T. Sapps, Roger Matthews and Willy Flowers, who can be heard on Volume Four in this series, SDM258.

Bruce Bastin © 1974

¹ Guy B. Johnson, *Tracking Down A Negro Legend*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1929. Louis W. Chappell, *John Henry: A Folk-lore Study*, Jena, Walter Biedermann, 1933

² Alan Lomax, *The Folk Songs Of North America*, New York, Doubleday, 1960

³ Richard M. Dorson, 'John Henry', *Western Folklore*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Los Angeles, 1965, pp. 155-163, reprinted (as 'The Career of "John Henry"') in Alan Dundes, ed., *Mother Wit From The Laughing Barrel*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1973, pp. 568-577.

⁴ Mack McCormick, 'The Bawdy Song', notes to *The Unexpurgated Folk Songs Of Men*, Raglan (Lp.) 51, Berkeley, 1960, pp. 6-7

⁵ Mark Wilson, 'Gid Tanner and Skillet Lickers', notes to *Gid Tanner And His Skillet Lickers*, Rounder (Lp.) 1005, Somerville, 1973, p. 3

⁶ Zora Neale Hurston, 'Story In Harlem Slang', *The American Mercury*, 45, July, 1942, pp. 84-96, reprinted in Dundes, ed., op. cit., pp. 222-229

All titles recorded Eatonville, Florida, June 1935 by Alan Lomax, Zora Neale Hurston and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle

Original recordings made on aluminium discs. On 356 B the original recording starts partway through the first verse and 359 B 1 and 360 B end abruptly
356 A and B have flaws in the original disc which could not be completely eliminated.

A leaflet containing further information was included with the original LP and a facsimile of this has been included on the Library of Congress Series section on matchboxbluesmaster.co.uk

**Originally released in 1974 as Flyright-Matchbox SDM 258 -
Library of Congress Series Volume 4 – Boot That Thing
Field recordings from Florida**

1*	The Train	Booker T. Sapps (speech/harm)	AFS 367 A	04:28
2*	The Fox And Hounds	Roger Matthews (harm/vcl effects/speech)	AFS 367 B	02:35
3*	Alabama Blues (Part 1)	Booker T. Sapps (vcl/speech/harm), Roger Matthews (vcl effects/speech/harm), Willy Flowers (gtr)	AFS 368 A	04:20
4*	Alabama Blues (Part 2)	Booker T. Sapps (vcl/speech/harm), Roger Matthews (harm/vcl effects/speech), Willy Flowers (vcl/speech/gtr)	AFS 368 B	02:40
5	The Weeping Worry Blues,	Booker T. Sapps (vcl/speech/harm), Willy Flowers (speech)	AFS 369 A	04:10
6*	Levee Camp Holler	Willy Flowers (vcl/speech/gtr), Booker T. Sapps (vcl/speech)	AFS 369 B	04:29
7	Uncle Bud (Take 1 and Take 2),	Booker T. Sapps (vcl/speech/harm), Roger Matthews (harm/vcl effects/speech), Willy Flowers (vcl/speech/gtr)	AFS 370 A	02:50
8*	Frankie And Albert (Cooney And Delia),	Booker T. Sapps (vcl/speech/harm), Roger Matthews (harm/vcl effects/speech), Willy Flowers (speech/gtr)	AFS 370 B	02:32
9*	Boot That Thing	Booker T. Sapps (vcl/harm), Roger Matthews (harm/vcl effects), Willy Flowers (vcl/gtr)	AFS 371 A	02:50
10*	John Henry	Booker T. Sapps (vcl/harm), Roger Matthews (harm/vcl effects), Willy Flowers (vcl/gtr)	AFS 371 B	02:47
11*	Po' Laz'us (Every Mail Day; Muley On The Mountain)	Booker T. Sapps (vcl/speech/harm), Roger Matthews (harm/vcl effects/speech), Willy Flowers (gtr/speech)	AFS 372 A 2	03:35
12*	I'm A Pilgrim	Booker T. Sapps (vcl/speech/harm), Roger Matthews (harm/vcl effects/speech), Willy Flowers (vcl/speech/gtr)	AFS 385 B	03:00
Total duration:				40:38

Alan Lomax, Zora Neale Hurston and Elizabeth Barnicle met in Brunswick, Georgia, on 15 June 1935 and immediately began collecting folk material from the black community on St. Simon's Island. Exulted at having recorded what they felt to be genuine Afro-American folklore of the 19th century they moved on to Eatonville, Florida, Hurston's home-town, where, among a number of local singers, they recorded Gabriel Brown, Rochelle French and John French, whose recordings can be heard on Volume Three in this series, SDM 257. From Eatonville, the expedition left for Belle Glade, to the southeast of Lake Okeechobee in the Everglades. Here they recorded one of the finest small jook bands ever, comprising harmonica players Booker T. Sapps and Roger Matthews and guitarist Willy Flowers.¹

We are introduced to Booker T. Sapps through his fine version of the almost obligatory harmonica solo in partial imitation of a train and he dominates most of the session, as both other musicians seem content to permit him to assume the role of group leader. Roger Matthews introduces himself on his version of *Foxchase* and his whoops are to be heard on a number of other songs. *Alabama Blues* allows us to hear Willy Flowers' superb slide guitar and both Matthews and Flowers play together with uncanny unison behind Sapps' wild vocal. Part 2 starts with the 'Rollin' and tumblin' motif common enough further west in Alabama and Mississippi, and Flowers drives them at almost breakneck speed.

The field notes tell us that Sapps plays guitar on *Weeping Worry Blues* but it is his fine harmonica that we hear. Once again, the 'Rollin' and tumblin' motif is in evidence. *Levee Camp Holler* brings a beautiful change of pace and is a fine blues by Flowers accompanied by his anguished guitar, which must compel comparison with Gabriel Brown as the finest guitarist found on the 1935 expedition. It seems to be Sapps who joins in at times, although the field-notes make no mention of a second singer.

It is possible that *Uncle Bud* was requested, for it was also collected at Eatonville (see SDM 257). As with all other bawdy material recorded for the Library of Congress, it is not shown in the AFS checklist. The field-notes list it as a 'vulgar semi-ballad'. The first take breaks up as Sapps stops them and they then remake the version. The song is wide-spread and usually appears as a suggestive if not outright bawdy song. In the notes to the Raglan album of unexpurgated folk songs, considerable detail is given about the assimilation of the song into associated references to Texas prison official Bud Russell.² Interesting associations of *Uncle Bud* with *Froggie Went A-Courtin'* are discussed in the notes to the Rounder, Gid Tanner album.³

Frankie And Albert, unlike the John French version on SDM 257, really is the black

ballad *Delia*, as the sub-title given by the field-notes suggest. Once again, they list it as a 'fragment of ballad'. Blind Willie McTell recorded this same song for both the Library of Congress in 1940 and Atlantic in 1949 but it had been collected in the field as early as 1904-6, when Howard W. Odum was collecting in Newton County, Georgia. He published the lyrics of *One Mo' Rounder Gone* in 1911 – almost identical to those later sung by McTell:

Rubber-tired buggy, double-seated hack,
Well, it carried po' Delia to graveyard, failed to bring her back,
Lawdy, one mo' rounder gone.' ⁴

The song had been collected also in North Carolina between 1900 and 1904 with a verse which suggested an Atlanta source for this variant at least:

Men in Atlanta trying' to pass fo' white,
Delie's in de bone yard
Six foot out o' sight. ⁵

By 1923 it had been collected from Clinton, South Carolina singers, Lil and Babe McClintock, ⁶ the former surely the same person who recorded for Columbia in Atlanta in 1930.

Boot That Thing is called a 'two-step' in the notes and more than exemplifies the fine jook music that these men perform. *John Henry* had been recorded commercially in the 1920s and was frequently collected by the Library of Congress. It had been an archetypal blues among east musicians, being one of the numbers first associated with the playing of slide guitar. This is confirmed by personal interviews in Georgia and the Carolinas with bluesmen who were playing before the phonograph record spread the blues in the 1920s. At this time it had been the lyrics and the legend which had attracted the attention of folklorists, culminating in the studies by Guy Johnson and Louis Chappell. ⁷ Alan Lomax was himself to analyse the role of *John Henry* in black folklore at a later date. ⁸ Perhaps the best overall correlation of information on the legend of *John Henry* is that by Richard M. Dorson in *Western Folklore*. ⁹

Po' Laz'us was also known locally at *Muley On the Mountain* and was a wide-spread work song, collected in penitentiaries from Virginia to Mississippi¹⁰. It became popularized by Woody Guthrie as *Cornbread, Meat And Molasses*. A reference to the

mules, Mike and Jerry, again turns up in *Been Plowing Blues*¹¹ by The Blues Boys, on the obscure New York, Tru-Blue label of the 1940s. The Blues Boys were Alec Seward and Louis Hayes, from Virginia and North Carolina respectively. *I'm A Pilgrim* ends with a delighted 'That was OK!' It certainly was.

The field-notes refer to the musicians as being from Pahokee, Florida, just north of Belle Glade, on the edge of Lake Okeechobee. 'From Christmas to April, Pahokee is a 24-hour town; long trains of refrigerated cars roll out for northern markets day and night; the streets are noisy and crowded; bars, restaurants and gambling houses are seldom closed.'¹² Little surprise that during the seasonal fruit-picking times, folk songs were 'as thick as marsh mosquitoes',¹³ as Lomax described the situation, when writing back to the Library of Congress.

While at Belle Glade, Lomax and Hurston collected songs from Bahaman blacks working at nearby Chosen and from there, together with Elizabeth Barnicle, went on to rest up in Miami. Hurston remained into July while Lomax and Barnicle went to the Bahamas. Writing back to the Library of Congress on 3 August, Lomax refers to the expedition as the 'most exciting field trip' he had made. The music on this album shows just why he thought that was true.

Bruce Bastin © 1974

¹ There is some doubt to Willy Flowers' christian name for on recorded announcements during the session he calls himself Jesse Flowers

² Mack McCormick, 'The Bawdy Song', notes to *The Unexpurgated Folk Songs Of Men*, Raglan (Lp) 51, Berkeley, 1960, pp. 6-7

³ Mark Wilson, 'Gid Tanner and Skillet Lickers', notes to *Gid Tanner And His Skillet Lickers*, Rounder (Lp) 1005, Somerville, 1973, p.3

⁴ Howard W. Odum, 'Folk-song and Folk-poetry as Found in the Secular Songs of the Southern Negro', *Journal of American Folklore*, 24, October-December, 1911, p. 354

⁵ Newman I. White, *American Negro Folk Songs*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1928, p. 215

⁶ Chapman J. Milling, 'Delia Holmes: A Neglected Negro Ballad', *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 1, December, 1937, p. 8

⁷ Guy B. Johnson, *Tracking Down A Negro Legend*, Chapel Hill, University

of North Carolina Press, 1929. Louis W. Chappell, John Henry:

A Folk-lore Study, Jena, Walter Biedermann, 1933

⁸ Alan Lomax, *The Folk Songs Of North America*, New York, Doubleday, 1960

⁹ Richard M. Dorson, 'John Henry', *Western Folklore*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Los Angeles, 1966, pp. 155-163, reprinted (as 'The Career of "John Henry" ') in, Alan Dundes, ed., *Mother Wit From The Laughing Barrel*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1973, pp. 568-577

¹⁰ An example is *Cap'n Got A Pistol* collected by Lawrence Gellert in the 1930s and recently issued on Lp.: *Negro Songs Of Protest*, Rounder (Lp.) 4004

¹¹ The song was retitled *Mike And Jerry* when reissued on Lp.: *Guitar Slim And Jelly Belly : Carolina Blues*, Arhoolie (Lp.) R2005

¹² Federal Works Agency, Works Project Administration (Federal Writer's Project) *Florida: A Guide To The Southernmost State* (American Guide Series), New York, Oxford University Press, 1965 (1939), p. 475

¹³ Alan Lomax, letter to Oliver Strunk, Music Department, Library of Congress, 3 August 1935

A leaflet containing further information was included with the original LP and a facsimile of this has been included on the Library of Congress Series section on matchboxbluesmaster.co.uk

All titles recorded at Belle Glade, Florida, June 1935 by Alan Lomax, Zora Neale Hurston and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle on aluminium discs.

On 369 B and 371 A the original recordings start part way through the first verses and on 368 A the original recording ends abruptly.

369 B and 372 A 2 have flaws in the original discs which could not be completely eliminated.

368 A and B – *Alabama Blues parts 1 and 2* – have serious flaws in the original disc which could not be corrected. However this song has been included for its musical importance.

**Originally released in 1976 as Flyright-Matchbox SDM 264 -
Library of Congress Series: Vol 5**

Two White Horses Standin' In Line - 1939 field recordings from Texas

1	Rabbit In De Garden	Ace Johnson (vcl/harm)	AFS 2596 A 1	02:52
2**	Mama Don't 'Low No Swingin' Out in Here -	Ace Johnson (vcl/harm), L.W. Gooden (gtr)	AFS 2596 A 2	01:04
3**	Worry Blues	Jesse Lockett (vcl/prob. own gtr)	AFS 2596 B 3	01:22
4	I Wouldn't Mind Dying If Dying Was All	Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 2597 A 1	01:21
5	When I Git Home	Roger Gill (vcl), Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 2597 A 2	01:57
6**	Gray Horse Blues	Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 2597 B 2	01:22
7**	Shorty George	Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 2598 A 1	03:15
8**	West Texas Blues	Roger Gill (vcl), Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 2598 A 2	01:31
9**	Santa Fe Blues	Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 2598 B 1	04:20
10	Hesitating Blues	Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 2604 A 1	04:27
11	My Pore Mother Keeps On Praying For Me	probably Wallace Chains (vcl), Sylvester Jones (gtr)	AFS 2605 A 2	02:21
12	Smoky Mountain Blues	poss. Wallace Chains (vcl), Sylvester Jones (gtr)	AFS 2606 A 1	02:32
13**	Ella Speed	probably Wallace Chains (vcl), Sylvester Jones (gtr)	AFS 2606 A 2	01:20
14**	Long Freight Train Blues -	Richard L. Lewis (vcl), Wilbert Gilliam (gtr)	AFS 2646 A	02:40
15	Desert Blues	Hattie Ellis (vcl), 'Cowboy' Jack Ramsey (gtr)	AFS 2650 A	02:20
16**	Jack O' Diamonds	Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 3551 A 1	01:44
17**	Mournful Blues	Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 3551 B 1	02:14
18**	Two White Horses Standin' In Line -	Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 3552 A 1	02:33
19**	East Texas Rag	Smith Casey (vcl/gtr)	AFS 3552 A 2	02:08
Total duration:				44:44

When John A. Lomax and his son Alan set out in Summer 1933 to gather songs for their book *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934) they were determined to document the important contribution of black Americans to the North American folk heritage. Starting in their Texas homeland they traversed the southern United States collecting examples of early song traditions. Arrangements had been made for field recordings resulting from this expedition to be deposited at the Library of Congress Archive of (American) Folk Song and the Lomaxes' long association with the Archive began at this time.

The music of black convicts particularly interested John A. Lomax and during his period at the Archive he arranged to visit isolated penal institutions in the majority of southern states, where he collected and recorded many of the folk songs 'preserved' by inmates.

With his 1933 tour commencing in Texas the establishments of the state's prison system were naturally the first places where he obtained such songs. Lomax is known to have visited these Texas institutions during three of the years he undertook Archive field recording expeditions, first in 1933, again in 1934 (see Volume 6 in this series, SDM 265) and finally in 1939. The 1939 expedition was the least successful in documenting older folk styles but, as this album demonstrates, a considerable proportion of the recordings were in the then more recent blues tradition.

Archive field notes show that John A. accompanied by his wife, Ruby T. Lomax, set out from Port Aransas, Texas on 31 March in their 1939 Plymouth automobile, equipped with a 'Presto recording machine and playback for a. c., two sets of batteries and (a) converter.'

Travelling via Austin and Houston their next destination was the Hogg family's Varner Plantation, close to West Columbia in Brazoria County. Here they stayed for a few days. Nearby is the Clemens State Farm, which they took the opportunity of visiting and where they recorded. Their field notes describe the visit.

'On Saturday, April 15 we drove over to Clemens State Farm a few miles away to arrange for a meeting with the "boys" – Negro convicts stationed on the Farm. On Saturday the "boys" who were working near headquarters were hauling dirt, grading, cleaning ditches and otherwise improving the grounds around a new brick and steel dormitory. A group of ditch-diggers was working in time to the musical calls of the leader. We arranged to return to make records on the next day, Sunday, and returned to West Columbia to rent batteries for power, the dormitory being wired for d. c..

When we arrived at the Farm the next day the "boys" were ready for us. Mechanics

from the white convicts, who had quarters on the second floor, helped adjust the machinery. The barber and the dentist furnished counter attractions but our "show" gave the "boys" greater diversion. Gradually after suggestions from Mr Lomax as to what kind of music he wished to record, musicians and singers volunteered or were pushed forward by their contemporaries. Some of the "boys", Ace Johnson and Smith Cason (sic) for example, already had experience before the microphone since they were sometimes used on the programme called "Behind The Walls" broadcast from the Huntsville, Texas Penitentiary on Wednesday nights. After two hours we stopped for lunch, we being served with the white guards, and after lunch we worked an hour or so until the time came for base-ball practice and preaching.'

Having completed their recordings at Clemens, John A. and his wife returned to Houston whence they travelled to Sugarland continuing their search for singers and songs at the nearby Central State Farm. 'The Captain had a good dinner served us and assisted Mr Lomax in trying to locate singers. In previous years Central Farm had "entertained" such singers as Clear Rock and Iron Head, who had made recordings. But this trip was fruitless. The old crowd had scattered, the new "boys" sang fewer of the old songs and in performance imitated radio artists. We did not set up the machine. We found about the same situation at the Darrington Farm some thirty miles away - few singers and these not interested in old songs or the old manner of singing.

Our next stop was at Camp Four of the Ramsey State Farm (near Otey) where most of the habitués and incorrigibles stay. With the help of the Captain and some of his guards we located some singers, who were admitted one by one or by small groups into a small office where the recording machine was set up ... Just outside this office we could look down on the dormitory room, where Negro convicts were playing cards, reading, talking, singing blues, listening to an exhorter, sleeping. One "boy" was standing on a barrel as a punishment for some violation of rules. We saw the "boys" go into supper, in a line, both hands on the shoulders of the man in front of him . . . Supper with the white guards closed our day at Ramsey.'

Almost a month later they reached Huntsville where 'J. A. L. visited (the) State Penitentiary (the 'Walls') to arrange for recordings' and had a 'conference with (the) director of (the) broadcast programme "Thirty Minutes Behind The Walls".' Despite several visits to the penitentiary very little recording was accomplished. A few selections however were recorded at the Goree State Farm for women – situated a short distance from Huntsville. This concluded their 1939 Texas prison recordings. The expedition however continued through East Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama,

Florida and finally South Carolina.

The most surprising fact established by these field notes is that during the late 1930s a radio series featuring prison talent – *Thirty Minutes Behind The Walls* – was broadcast from Huntsville. Three of the performers on this record are noted as having broadcast on the programme, Hattie Ellis from the Goree Farm, plus the aforementioned Ace Johnson and Smith Cason (Casey) from Clemens. Nothing more is known of the programmes although black blues talents were obviously a feature and it is likely that white prisoners (probably old-time performers) also participated.

Unfortunately, many of the recordings made during this field expedition start and finish part way through performances – possibly because the Lomaxes were economising on blank recording discs – the field notes however have complete although sometimes inaccurate transcriptions of the majority of the songs.

It was well that the Lomaxes began collecting black Texas folk songs in 1933 for record companies made no location 'country blues' recordings in that year and (pianists excepted) very few of the state's blues performers were commercially recorded between 1934 and 1942. This and the Lomax family's ability to record interesting, sometimes exceptional, folk performances makes their 1930s black Texas folk music recordings unique.

John H. Cowley © 1976

Original Recordings: John Avery Lomax and Ruth Terril Lomax

Leaflets with detailed notes for Vols 5 and 6 were enclosed with the original Flyright-Matchbox LP production and a facsimile of these is available to download or view on matchboxbluesmaster.co.uk website under L of C Series. The notes for these two volumes have been severely truncated in this booklet due to the limitations of space and Matchbox would encourage the viewing of the complete texts and references on our website.

**Originally released in 1976 as Flyright-Matchbox SDM 265 -
Flyright-Matchbox Library of Congress Series: Vol 6
JACK O' DIAMONDS 1934 field recordings from Texas**

1	Jack O' Diamonds	Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 89 B 1	02:02
2*	Square Dance Calls	Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 78 A 1	02:17
3	He Rambled	Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 78 A2	01:48
4**	Stavin' Chain	Tricky Sam (vcl/gtr)	AFS 210 A 1	02:24

5**	The Buffalo Skinners - Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 78 A 3	01:35
6	Alabama Bound Pete Harris (vcl/gtr), John Lomax (speech)	AFS 78 B 3	01:31
7**	Thirty Days In Jail Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 89 A 2	01:02
8**	Stavin' Chain- new take - Tricky Sam (vcl/gtr)	AFS 215 A1	03:14
9**	Ella Speed Tricky Sam (vcl/gtr)	AFS 215 B 2	04:20
10**	Jack And Betsy Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 89 B 3	01:18
11	Jack O' Diamonds (different Take) Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 89 B 2	02:09
12**	Blind Lemon's Song - Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 78 B 1	02:49
13	The Red Cross Store - Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 78 B 2	01:21
14	Police Special Augustus 'Track Horse' Haggerty (vcl), prob. Jack Johnson (gtr)	AFS 211 B 1	02:50
15	Hattie Green Augustus 'Track Horse' Haggerty (vcl), prob. Jack Johnson (gtr)	AFS 211 B 2	02:02
16**	Is You Mad At Me? Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 89 A 1	02:39
17	It Was Early One Morning - Jack Johnson (vcl/gtr)	AFS 221 A 1	03:26
18* **	Up And Down Buildin' (the) K. C. Line [sic] Little Brother (vcl/gtr)	AFS 200 B 2	02:52
19	Carrie Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 89 A 3	01:19
20**	Standing On The Border - Pete Harris (vcl/gtr)	AFS 89 A 4	00:36
21**	[announcement] I Met You Mama 1929 - Augustus 'Track Horse' Haggerty (vcl), Jack Johnson (gtr), John Lomax (speech)	AFS 197 B 2	03:26
22* **	I Feel That Old Woman Is A Jinx To Me A. Haggerty (vcl/gtr)	AFS 197 B 3	01:02
	Total duration:		49:36

Few black folk musicians born before 1910 were exclusively blues performers. Most can be described as songsters and the breadth of their repertoires should not be judged solely by those who made commercial recordings prior to World War II. Unlike record companies, the Archive of Folk Song was as much concerned with collecting ballads, spirituals and work songs as with blues, and their recordings therefore provide a wider cross-section of the pre-war black artist's repertoire than commercial ones from the same period.

Pete Harris is the odd man out on this album in the sense that he was not recorded in prison. He is an excellent songster whose repertoire consists of a

fascinating mixture of blues, ballads, spirituals, dance tunes, cowboy songs and reels. Unfortunately all we know of his biography is contained in a brief announcement (by John A. Lomax) following the performance of *Alabama Bound*. 'This record, and several others, was made by Pete Harris of Richmond, Texas who has worked all his life on the ranch of John M. Moore of the same town. Pete is thirty three years old, the grandson of a pure African and is not able to read or to write.' Harris was therefore born either in 1900 or 1901 making him only three or four years younger than Blind Lemon Jefferson and of the same generation as Skip James, Son House and Blind Willie McTell.

Pete 's recording *Square Dance Calls* consists mainly of dance instructions of the kind to be heard at any old-time country hoedown 'Ooh promenade and circle right. Eight hands up and circle right. Swing low. Fast cornering' and is infectious in its gaiety. *Liza Jane* is used as a framework to hang the calls on and it is worth noting that this old-time song is performed as a dance tune by Scott Dunbar (*Ahura-Mazda* (Lp) AMS SDS - I).

Harris seems to have had quite an extensive repertoire of folk ballads. For instance *The Buffalo Skinners* (Laws B 10) is a vintage cowboy ballad which originally derived from a 19th century logging song. He does not however appear to have been completely familiar with the lyrics, and sounds less assured here than on most of his other recordings.

Blind Lemon's Song, like Smith Casey's *Two White Horses Standin' In Line* (see Volume 5 in this series, SDM 264), is a slide-guitar accompanied variant of the piece Blind Lemon Jefferson made famous as *See That My Grave Is Kept Clean*. Apart from its textual interest *Blind Lemon's Song* is notable for Harris's superb slide-guitar playing.

Alabama Bound is central to a complex of songs of considerable age and was collected in Texas probably before World War 1 and in Tennessee in 1915-16. *Don't Leave Me Here* is of similar vintage.

The lyrics of *Carrie* are fairly conventional – 'Carrie, Carrie baby, hear your man callin' you. Low down fireman, dirty engineer. Took my baby away, left me standin' here' – but these are only part of a total sound which makes this Pete Harris performance one of the finest blues recordings ever made for the Archive of Folk Song. Pete's slide-guitar playing, similar to that of Smith Casey (see SDM 264) on several of his records, is breath-taking in its richness.

In their notes to the Pete Harris session the Lomaxes give the full lyrics to a ballad entitled *Mollie* and Pete's recording of this, albeit with the first and last verses missing and the lines in somewhat different order, is on AFS 89 B 3. At some stage it was

retitled *Jack And Betsy* by the Archive (although Harris sings about *Jack and Mollie*) perhaps because this is the usual title of this song.

Jack O' Diamonds is a gambling song of great antiquity and is usually said to describe the card game Monte. There is a text in W.H. Thomas's pamphlet which runs 'Jack o' Diamonds is a hard card to roll'. Traditionally *Jack O' Diamonds* has been sung to slide-guitar accompaniment and on his 1926 recording (*Jack O' Diamond Blues*, Paramount 12373) Blind Lemon Jefferson plays his guitar, with a knife or bottleneck, in Open D tuning. The vocal lines are drawn out in a way reminiscent of a field holler, suggesting that the song was originally performed acapella. A few weeks before Jefferson's recording was made, Texas-born Sippie Wallace had recorded her *Jack O' Diamonds Blues* (Okeh 8328) but this has very different lyrics and melody. Two separate recordings were made of Pete Harris's *Jack O' Diamonds*, the second including a verse not in the first version. Both have a 'payday' line but are otherwise closer to Blind Lemon's version than the Archive's recording by Smith Casey (see SDM 264).

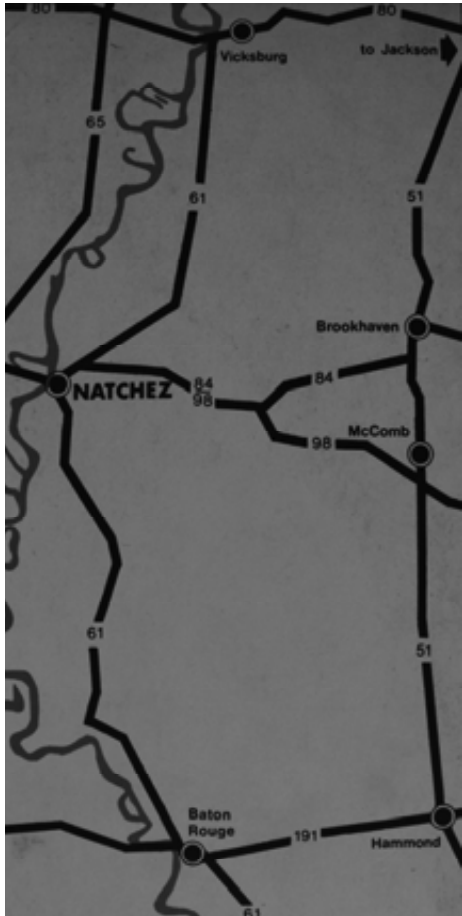
The single recording made by a convict who went by the name of 'Little Brother' is the only one here that has been issued previously and it should be noted that the Archive's Checklist shows the title of this song as *Up And Down Building (The) K. C. Line*. Aurally however it is the 'Mobile and K. C. line' which Little Brother sings about in his first verse. This is of considerable interest for during the latter part of the 19th century a railroad called the Mobile and K. C. line was started but never completed. How Homer Roberson, convict 70409 at Huntsville, acquired the nickname 'Tricky Sam' we do not know and the only biographical information we have is that he was born in the city of San Antonio, Texas on 25 January 1890 and at the time of his discharge, on 1 October 1947, his wife Janie Roberson was resident at 440 Hedges Street in San Antonio. What is evident however is that Tricky Sam was one of the finest songsters at Huntsville in 1934. He recorded two distinct versions of *Stavin' Chain* and a long *Ella Speed*. Additionally the field notes show he performed *Frankie And Albert* and a country blues *Fare Thee, Oh Babe* for the Lomaxes.

Ella Speed (Laws,16) is one of the best known black Texas folk ballads but relatively few versions have been recorded and few of these are commercial ones. Leadbelly recorded it three times for the Archive of Folk Song (AFS 54 A, B; AFS 120 B 2; AFS 25 B) and once for Capitol in 1944 (Capitol (Lp) H 369). Wallace Chains and Sylvester Jones recorded a version for the Archive in 1939 (see SDM 264) and Finious 'Flatfoot' Rockmore recorded one in 1940 (AFS 3990 A 1, at Lufkin, Texas). John A

Lomax believed the version he obtained from Rockmore was older than that obtained from Leadbelly. An early printed reference to the song is in *The American Songbag* by Carl Sandburg (New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1927, pp. 28-29). Here it is titled *Alice B* but the song is definitely the familiar ballad about Bill Martin and Ella Speed. An interesting aside which highlights the complex process of oral transmission is the story of how the song reached Sandburg. Apparently he acquired it from the son of a lawyer in Rochester, New York, who had learned it from a friend from New Orleans, Louisiana, while the two were riding on top of a box car heading for Constantinople (of all places!) with the American Relief Expedition. The friend had been taught the song by a hobo in New Orleans who had himself learned it a few days earlier in Memphis from a black, newly arrived there from Galveston, Texas! No wonder names and places get changed around. This little story is also instructive in that it places the origin of the song in Texas and indeed Leadbelly was firmly convinced that Bill Martin had shot down Ella Speed in the streets of Dallas not long before his arrival in that city. The fourth verse of Tricky Sam's recording, beginning 'Bring out your rubber-tyred hearse and your rubber-tyred hack' is a floating one which crops up in a number of ballads notably *Frankie and Albert* and *Delia*. Tricky Sam also uses this line in the text of *Frankie And Albert* which the Lomaxes took down from him. There is further overlap in that he similarly uses the verse about people getting news in St. Louis in both songs and that usually Frankie and Bill Martin both use a Colt 41. Oddly the field note text of Tricky Sam's *Ella Speed* omits both the 'rubber-tyred hearse, rubber-tyred hack' and 'St. Louis' verses. It is in fact so different from the recorded version that one wonders if Tricky Sam sang *Ella Speed* for the Lomaxes on more than one occasion and the text they noted down is a composite.

The accent in this collection is on blues and ballads. Except that the selection would have been more representative if it had included work songs and the like, this set (and its companion album SDM 264) offers the most rewarding sample of pre-war black Texas music yet to be made available on long playing record. There is much here that is new to hear, enjoy and research and artists like Pete Harris, Track Horse Haggerty and Tricky Sam must in future be accorded a place amongst the elite of recorded pre-war black folk music performers.

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Roger Matthews & Booker T. Sapps, Belle Glade, Florida, Jun 35

Gabriel Brown & Rochelle French, Eatonville, Florida, Jun 35

Roger Matthews, Willy Flowers & Booker T. Sapps with admirers
Belle Glade, Florida,
Jun 35
(all pics courtesy
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Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 9



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Vol 6 – 1934 field recordings from Texas