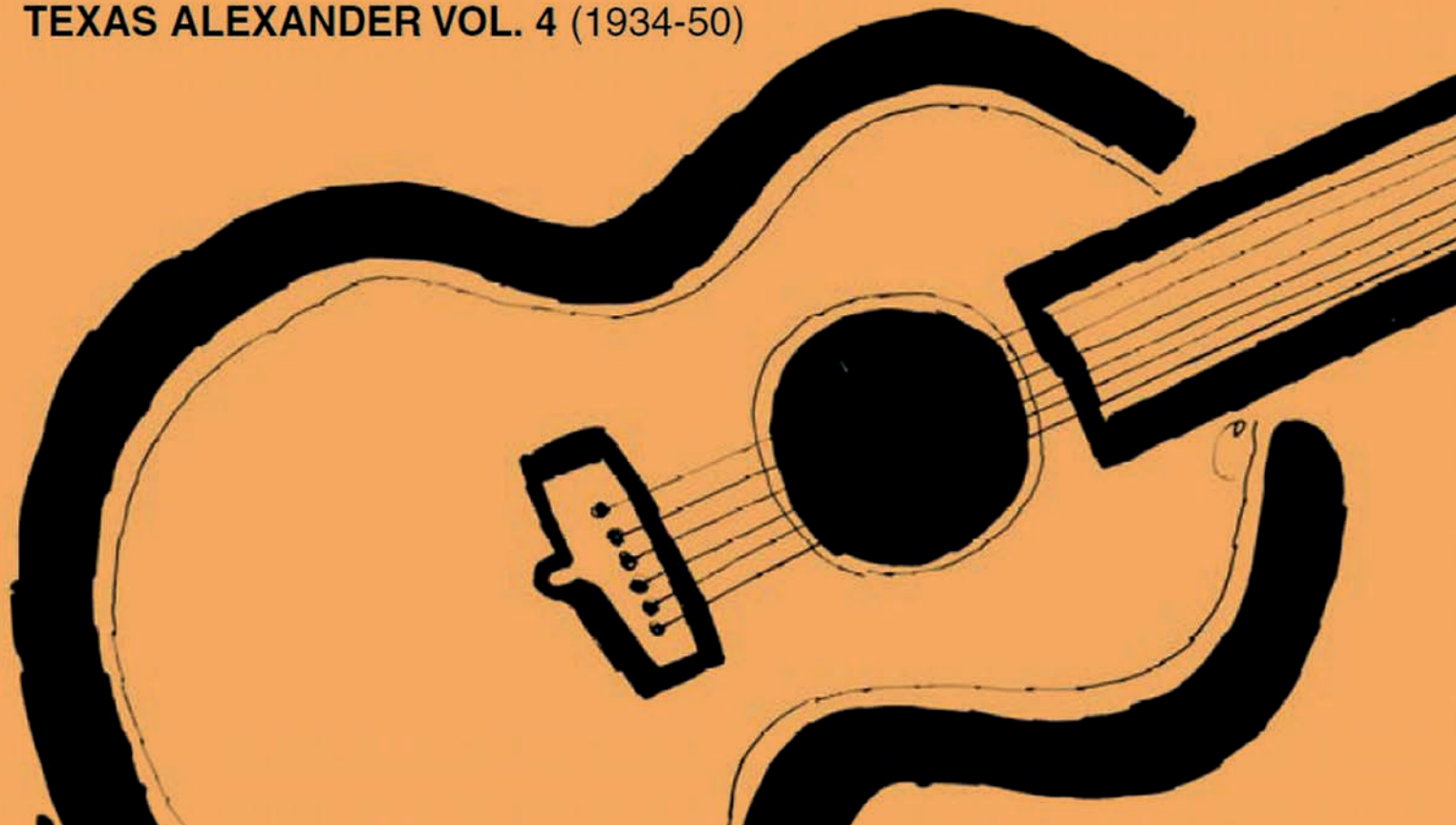


# Matchbox Bluesmaster Series - set 4



**JULIUS DANIELS - LIL McCLINTOCK (1927-30)**  
**TEXAS ALEXANDER VOL. 3 (1929-30)**  
**PEG LEG HOWELL (1926-27)**  
**SANCTIFIED JUG BANDS (1928-30)**  
**ST. LOUIS BESSIE (1927-30)**  
**TEXAS ALEXANDER VOL. 4 (1934-50)**



**Series Editor:** Johnny Parth  
**Notes:** Paul Oliver  
**Produced by:** Gef Lucena  
**Remastering from 78s:** Hans Klement, Austrophon Studios, Vienna  
**Digitising from vinyl:** Norman White

**Original recordings from the collections of**  
Werner Benecke, Joe Bussard, Johnny Parth, Guido van Rijn,  
Bernd Kuefferle,

**With thanks to Mark Jones of Bristol Folk Publications** for the loan of  
vinyl LP copies of the original re-issue series

**Sleeve Design:** Bob Doling/Genny Lucena

**Discographical details** from Blues and Gospel Records 1902-1942  
by John Godrich and Robert Dixon

**Considering the extreme rarity of the original 78s, condition is generally  
better than might be expected. Titles marked \* are from poor condition  
and very rare or only known surviving copies.**

**MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES  
IS A DIVISION OF SAYDISC RECORDS  
The Barton, Inglestone Common  
Badminton, S Glos, GL9 1BX, England  
[www.saydisc.com](http://www.saydisc.com)**

## Matchbox Bluesmaster Series

The 42 albums that make up the iconic Matchbox Bluesmaster Series were released by Saydisc Records between Nov 1982 and June 1988. Most of the albums were subtitled “Complete Recordings in Chronological Order” with a few under the subtitle “The Remaining Titles” or “New to LP”. The originating 78 rpm records (many of them extremely rare) were provided by several collectors under the editorship of well known Austrian collector, Johnny Parth and were re-mastered by Hans Klement of Austrophon Studios in Vienna. Johnny Parth had already created his extensive Roots Records label which Saydisc distributed in the UK and the Matchbox Bluesmaster Series was a carefully sculpted edition of black blues roots music giving a broad spectrum of the genre.

The series documented the early days of blues, hokum and gospel music from 1926 to 1934 (1950 for two tracks) and gives an insight into the way that black music was first released on record. From a commercial standpoint, record companies such as OKEH sent out talent scouts to find black singers, many of them “singing for nickels” on street corners. The market that these RACE record companies were after was the black community and they sometimes gave these newly found performers epithets such as “Peg Leg ...”, “Blind ...”, “Bo Weavil...”, “Buddy Boy...”, “Barbecue...” or “Texas...” to give them more appeal. The music of these singers formed the backbone of later urban blues, rhythm-and-blues and, of course, rock-‘n’-roll. The songs are sometimes raw and primitive in character, but some outstanding playing and singing shines through many of the performances.

Putting this music into perspective are the very valuable notes by **Paul Oliver** who was a world authority on early blues and travelled in the US extensively to try and trace any remaining details of these sometimes obscure people. Along with the work of other field collectors and researchers, we gain a rare insight into the world of black musicians of the day by reading his notes alongside listening to the music they performed.

Paul Oliver not only wrote 10 books on the history of blues and gospel music, but was also a Professor of Architecture on which subject he wrote five seminal books. He was born in May 1927 and died in August 2017. Through his blues books and writings he opened many windows into a little researched area which is of such importance to the history of black music in America. The final 4 CDs in the series are entitled “Songsters and Saints” and were put together by Paul Oliver to illustrate his book of the same name.

The present Matchbox Bluesmaster Series has been transcribed from the 1980’s vinyl pressings by Norman White using high-end transcription techniques. The original master tapes for the vinyl releases vanished long ago. See page 31 for details of the rest of the series.

Saydisc has in its vaults many more pre-Bluesmaster blues albums which may be issued on CD in due course.

**GEF LUCENA, Series Producer**

## MATCHBOX BLUESMASTER SERIES

**SET 4: DISC 1:** Original vinyl release date: Feb 1986 as

**MSE219 Atlanta Blues 1927-30**

**The Complete Recordings in Chronological Order  
of Julius Daniels - Lil McClintock**

**49'00"**

### JULIUS DANIELS

- 1 My Mamma Was a Sailor (A) 37931- Atlanta, Ga., Feb 19 1927
- 2 Ninety-Nine Year Blues (A) 37932-1 -
- 3 I'm Gonna Tell God How You Doin' (A) 37933-3 -
- 4 Slippin' and Slidin' Up the Golden Street (A) 37934-3 -
- 5 Can't Put the Bridle on that Mule This Morning (B) 40347-2  
Atlanta, Ga., Oct 24 1927
- 6 Richmond Blues (B) 40348-2 -
- 7 Crow Jane Blues (B) 40350-2 -

*Alternate takes:*

- 8 Ninety-Nine Year Blues (A) 37932-2 Atlanta, Ga., Feb 19 1927
- 9 Slippin' and Slidin' Up the Golden Street (A) 37934-1/2 -
- 10 Can't Put the Bridle on that Mule This Morning (B) 40347-1  
Atlanta, Ga., Oct 24 1927
- 11 Richmond Blues (B) 40348-1 -

### LIL MCCLINTOCK

- 12 Furniture Man (C) 151016 - Atlanta, Ga., Dec 4 1930
- 13 Don't Think I'm Santa Claus (C) 151017-2 -
- 14 Sow Good Seeds (C) 151018 - -
- 15 Mother Called Her Child to Her Dying Bed (C) 151019 - -

**A = Julius Daniels, vcl/gtr; prob. acc. Bubba Lee Torrence, 2nd gtr  
(definitely on tracks 4, 9)**

**B = Julius Daniels, vcl/gtr; prob. acc. Wilbert Andrews, gtr**

**C = Lil McClintock, vcl/gtr**

**SET 4: DISC 2:** Original vinyl release date: Aug 1986 as  
**MSE 220 TEXAS ALEXANDER: TEXAS ALEXANDER VOL. 3 (1929 – 30)**  
**51'14"**

**Alger "Texas" Alexander, vcl acc. Little Hat Jones, gtr**

- |   |                               |                                  |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Gold Tooth Blues 402645-B     | San Antonio, Tex., June 15, 1929 |
| 2 | Johnny Behrens Blues 402646-B | —                                |

**Texas" Alexander, vcl acc. Carl Davis, gtr**

- |   |                                   |                                 |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 3 | Rolling Mill Blues 403356-B *     | San Antonio, Tex., Nov 27, 1929 |
| 4 | Broken Yo Yo 403357-A             | —                               |
| 5 | Texas Special 403358-B *          | —                               |
| 6 | When You Get To Thinking 403359-B | —                               |
| 7 | Thirty Day Blues 403360-B         | —                               |
| 8 | Peaceful Blues 403361-A *         | —                               |

**Alger "Texas" Alexander, vcl acc. The Mississippi Sheiks: probably Bo Carter (Chatman), vln; Sam Chatman, gtr; possibly with Walter Vincson, 2nd gtr on tracks 9, 12**

- |    |                                     |                                 |
|----|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 9  | Days Is Lonesome 404111-            | San Antonio, Tex., June 9, 1930 |
| 10 | Seen Better Days 404112-B           | —                               |
| 11 | Last Stage Blues 404113-A           | —                               |
| 12 | Stealing to Her Man 404114-B        | —                               |
| 13 | She's So Fair 404115-               | —                               |
| 14 | Rolling and Stumbling Blues 404116- | —                               |
| 15 | Frost Texas Tornado Blues 404117-B  | —                               |
| 16 | Texas Troublesome Blues 404118-A    | —                               |

**\* = poor sound quality from rare original 78**

**SET 4: DISC 3:** Original vinyl release date: Aug 1986 as  
**MSE 221 PEG LEG HOWELL: Peg Leg Howell Vol. 1 (1926 – 27)**

46'25"

**“Peg Leg” Howell, vcl/gtr**

- |   |                           |                           |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Coal Man Blues 143116-2   | Atlanta, Ga., Nov 8, 1926 |
| 2 | Tishamingo Blues 143117-1 | —                         |
| 3 | New Prison Blues 143118-2 | —                         |
| 4 | Fo' Day Blues 143119-1    | —                         |

**“Peg Leg” Howell & His Gang: “Peg Leg” Howell, vcl on tracks 5,7)/gtr; Henry Williams, gtr; Eddie Anthony, vln/vcl (on track 5); speech by two of the above on track 13**

- |   |                               |                           |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 5 | New Jelly Roll Blues 143941-1 | Atlanta, Ga., Apr 8, 1927 |
| 6 | Beaver Slide Blues 143942-1   | —                         |
| 7 | Papa Stobb Blues 143944-2     | —                         |

**“Peg Leg” Howell, vcl/gtr**

- |   |                          |   |
|---|--------------------------|---|
| 8 | Sadie Lee Blues 143945-2 | — |
|---|--------------------------|---|

**“Peg Leg” Howell & His Gang: “Peg Leg” Howell, vcl/gtr; Henry Williams, gtr; Eddie Anthony, vln/ poss vcl on track 10)**

- |   |                          |                           |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 9 | Too Tight Blues 145062-1 | Atlanta, Ga., Nov 1, 1927 |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|

**(“Peg Leg” Howell & His Gang)**

- |    |                                     |   |
|----|-------------------------------------|---|
| 10 | Moanin' and Groanin' Blues 145063-1 | — |
| 11 | Hobo Blues 145064-2                 | — |
| 12 | Peg Leg Stomp 145065-2              | — |

**“Peg Leg” Howell, vcl/gtr**

- |    |                          |                           |
|----|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 13 | Doin' Wrong 145184-2     | Atlanta, Ga., Nov 9, 1927 |
| 14 | Skin Game Blues 145185-2 | —                         |

**SET 4: DISC 4:** Original vinyl release date: Mar/Apr 1987 as  
**MSE 222 Sanctified Jug Bands (1928 – 30)**

57'20"

**ELDER RICHARD BRYANT: Sermons and singing with one male and three female voices; acc. unknown kazoo, hca, bj, gtr**

1 The Master Came and Called Me 41860-2 Memphis, Tenn., Feb 7, 1928

2 Saul, A Wicked Man 41861-2 —

**ELDER RICHARD BRYANT'S SANCTIFIED SINGERS: Singing with one male and three female voices; acc. unknown hca, md (on track 4), gtr, wbd, jug**

3 Come Over Here 400369-B Memphis, Tenn., Feb 28, 1928

4 How Much I Owe for Love Divine 400370-B —

5 Lord, Lord, He Sure Is Good To Me 400371-B —

6 Watch, Ye, Therefore, You Know Not the Day 400372-A —

**ELDER RICHARD BRYANT: Sermons and singing with one male and three female voices; acc. unknown cnt, gtr, jug**

7 A Lie Was Told, But God Know'd It 47045-2 Memphis, Tenn., Sept 17, 1928

8 A Wild Man In Town 47046- 1 test —

9 He Shut the Lion's Mouth 4704-test —

10 A Lie Was Told 47045-1 (excerpt) —

11 A Wild Man In Town 47046-2 —

12 He Shut the Lion's Mouth 47048-1 \*

13 Everybody Was There 47048-1 \* —

**BROTHER WILLIAMS MEMPHIS SANCTIFIED SINGERS**

Vocal group; acc. unknown tp, pno, gtr, jug

14 He's Got the Whole World In His Hands MEM-788

Memphis, Tenn., c. Feb, 1930

15 I Will Meet You at the Station MEM-789 —

**HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED SINGERS**

Vocal group; acc. poss. Will Shade, hca; unknown gtr, jug

16 Thou Carest Lord, For Me MEM-796 Memphis, Tenn., c. Feb 21, 1930



- 17 Jesus Threwed Up a Highway for Me MEM-797 —
- 18 Sinner, I'd Make a Change MEM-798 —
- 19 When I Get Inside the Gate MEM-799 —

\* = *poor sound quality from rare original 78*

**SET 4: DISC 5:** Original vinyl release date: Mar/Apr 1987 as **57'11"**

**MSE 223 ST LOUIS BESSIE: (Bessie Mae Smith) (1927 – 30)**

**Blue Belle (Bessie Mae Smith), vcl; acc. prob. De Loise Searcy, pno;**

**Lonnie Johnson, gtr/vln (on tracks 5 & 6)**

- 1 Cryin' For Daddy Blues 80821-A St.Louis, Mo., May 2, 1927
- 2 High Water Blues 80822-A —
- 3 Creepin' Eel Blues 82044-B Chicago, Dec. 12, 1927
- 4 Ghost Creepin' Blues 82045-B —
- 5 Boa Constrictor Blues 82048-A —
- 6 Dead Sea Blues 82049-B —
- 7 Sneakin' Lizard Blues 82050-B —
- 8 My Daddy's Coffin Blues 82051-B —
- 9 Mean Bloodhound Blues 82052-A —

**Blue Belle (Bessie Mae Smith), vcl; acc unknown pno**

- 10 Death Valley Moan 402165-B Chicago, Dec. 5, 1928
- 11 Sweet Black Woman 402166-B —
- 12 Good Feelin' Blues 402167-A —

**Bessie Mae Smith, vcl; acc. Wesley Wallace, pno/speech (on track 13)**

- 13 St. Louis Daddy L-78-1 Grafton, Wis., c. Oct, 1929
- 14 Farewell Baby Blues L-90-2 \* —

**St. Louis Bessie (Bessie Mae Smith). vcl: acc. prob. Eddie Miller or poss.**

**Henry Brown, pno; Charley Jordan, gtr**

- 15 Sugar Mama Blues – Part 1 C-6167 Chicago, Sept. 19, 1930
- 16 Sugar Mama Blues – Part 2 C-6168 —

**St. Louis Bessie (Bessie Mae Smith). vcl: acc. prob. Henry Brown, pno;**

- 17 He Treats Me Like A Dog C-6490 Chicago, c. Nov. 6, 1930
- 18 Meat Cutter Blues C-6491 —

**SET 4: DISC 6:** Original vinyl release date: Mar/Apr 1987 as  
**MSE 224 TEXAS ALEXANDER: Texas Alexander Vol. 4**

**49'41"**

**Alger 'Texas' Alexander vcl; acc. His Sax Black Tams: unknown, cl/as;  
unknown, pno; unknown, gtr**

- |                                    |                                 |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 Blues In My Mind SA-2158-A       | San Antonio, Tex., April 9 1934 |
| 2 Mistreatin' Woman SA-2159-A      | —                               |
| 3 Polo Blues SA-2160-A             | —                               |
| 4 Normangee Blues SA-2161-A        | —                               |
| 5 Worried Blues SA-2162-A          | —                               |
| 6 Prairie Dog Hole Blues SA-2163-A | —                               |

**Texas Alexander, vcl; acc. poss. Willie Reed, Carl Davis, gtrs; unknown,  
sbs (on track 8)**

- |                                      |                                 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 7 Justice Blues FW-1130-1            | Fort Worth, Tex., Sept 19, 1934 |
| 8 Katy Crossing Blues FW-1131-2      | —                               |
| 9 Lonesome Blues FW-1132-1           | —                               |
| 10 Lonesome Valley Blues FW-1133-2 * | —                               |
| 11 One Morning Blues FW-1134-1       | —                               |
| 12 Deceitful Blues FW-1136-2         | Fort Worth, Tex., Sept 30, 1934 |
| 13 Easy Rider Blues FW-1138-2        | —                               |
| 14 Good Feelin' Blues FW-1139-1 *    | —                               |

**'Texas' Alexander with Benton's Busy Bees: Alger Alexander, vcl; acc.  
Edwin 'Buster' Pickens, pno; Leon Benton, gtr.**

- |                        |               |
|------------------------|---------------|
| 15 Bottom's Blues 1604 | Houston, 1950 |
| 16 Crossroads 1605     | —             |

**\* = poor sound quality from rare original 78**

## **Atlanta Blues 1927-30 The Complete Recordings in Chronological Order of Julius Daniels-Lil McClintock**

Slowly the differentiation between the blues singers and the songsters is being recognised and instead of being regarded as failed blues singers, "folk" singers, or curious throwbacks to a distant era of embarrassing minstrelsy, the songsters are becoming acknowledged in their own right. They were practising musicians and singers who were of a slightly older generation than the blues singers who followed them, but they shared the same audiences and worked in much the same environments. Much of their repertoires drew from songs of an earlier era and they were eclectic in the choice of material, singing and performing traditional ballads, songs that were also in the white tradition, religious items and spirituals and of course, the popular blues when these "came in".

Songsters were to be heard all over the South: unfortunately, indifference to their merit has meant that they have been under-researched and the

extent to which their songs were distributed and the forms of local styles have not had the attention they deserve. But there is plenty of evidence to show that they were to be heard as far north as Virginia, as far south as Florida, as far west as Texas and in all states between. In *Songsters and Saints* I endeavoured to remedy what I believe to be a grave oversight in the study of black folk and popular music, but there is a great deal that remains to be done. Two singers from whose work I was able to quote a few examples were Julius Daniels and Lil McClintock, and it is a pleasure now to be able to introduce their entire recordings, including the revealing alternate takes of some of those by Julius Daniels.

What little we know of Daniels is noted in Bruce Bastin's book *Crying for the Carolines* where we learn that he was born in South Carolina lived in North Carolina and recorded in Atlanta. During the 1920s it seems that he was living in Charlotte. N.C. His songs do not give us much in the way of further clues as to his whereabouts, except that **Richmond Blues** presumably refers to

Richmond, Virginia at the northern limits of the Piedmont school of musicians. However, there is some internal evidence of the sources of some of his lyrics and songs, and though he recorded much less than one would have liked, what he did put on wax is of high quality and great interest. Of Bubba Lee Torrence and Wilbert Andrews who played second guitar on the February and October 1927 sessions respectively, nothing is known at all.

Though a number of the titles are blues they refer back to the early phases of the music in a number of ways. **Ninety-Nine Year Blues** for instance, goes back far into the previous century for some of its "lines". When Julius asks: *Judge, what'll be my fine? Says "A pick and shovel in Joe Brown's coal mine"* he is quoting lines from an old song which is known to both blacks and whites under many titles, including **Reuben, The Longest Train and 900 Miles**. In the early 1870s Governor Joseph Emerson Brown gained notoriety and a permanent place in American folk song when he operated "*Joe Brown's coal mine*" in Dade County, Georgia. (You can read

more about this in Norm Cohen's book *Long Steel Rail*). It's interesting to note that there is very little difference in the two takes of this song, indicating that Daniels had worked out a consistent sequence that satisfied him. This wasn't the case with the two versions of **Richmond Blues** which duplicated the core verses but differed in the concluding ones. The initial verse in which he declares he was down in Richmond "*leanin' on my walkin' cane, policeman come by asked me – what's my name?*" to which he replied, "*my name is written in the bosom of my shirt, I'm a solid lover, never had to work*" – these words derived from a song by George "Honey Boy" Evans written in 1895 entitled **Standin' On the Corner Didn't Mean No Harm**. The words had quite an impact and are to be heard in similar form on Jimmie Rodgers' **Blue Yodel No. 9**.

At least as old as these references and stanzas were the verses of **Can't Put the Bridle On That Mule This Morning** which is a song that is related to **The Crawdad Hole, This Mornin', This Evenin', So Soon** and other songs known especially to

whites with a similar structure and words. The "*nigger and the white man*" verse had been collected as early as the 1870s but though it is widely known amongst blacks and sometimes sung in a bowdlerised version few ever recorded the offensive words: Tommy McClennan's **Bottle Up and Go** may be the only other on a commercial 78. If some of these stanzas can be traced, what are we to make of the opening verse of **My Mamma Was a Sailor**? Does it echo obscurely the old sea songs about women in men's attire which were recalled in the Appalachians, or is it intended to be taken literally? This blues is very "early" in character being a melange of more or less unrelated stanzas, one or two of which being related to the earliest collected blues lines. As a songster Daniels also sang spirituals: two beautiful examples here are sung to slide guitar accompaniment. Both are variants on collected songs. **I'm Gonna Tell God How You Doin'** sometimes having a "*some of these days*" refrain rather than "*when I get home*", and **Slippin' and Slidin'** being usually known as **Taken My Lord Away**. But the verse "*Mother and father 'member well, your*

*daughter Elizabeth a-ringin' in hell*" seems very much his own.

Even more obscure than Daniels is Lil (perhaps "Lillie") McClintock whose four titles were made in Atlanta at his sole session. He sounds an older man, perhaps of the 1870s generation of Henry Thomas. To a fast-paced dance rhythm strummed on his guitar he sang two fascinating old songs in a strong, coarse grained voice. **Furniture Man** was known to both white and black singers, and it appears in Luke Jordan's **Cocaine Blues**. It tells of the recovery man who takes back the furniture when payments are overdue. I'm informed by Bruce Bastin that Cooper's furniture store still exists in Union, South Carolina, which is about 25 miles north of Clinton, where Lil McClintock was living in the early 1920s. **Don't Think I'm Santa Claus** is a medley of songs dating from around 1904, including one by Irving Jones, as I have explained in *Songsters and Saints*. His other two titles are religious, **Sow Good Seeds** being one of many on the theme from Galatians VI.v. "*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*". Like

**Mother Called Her Child** which is more generally known as **I'm Going to Leave You in the Hands of God** this is sung to a rhythmically complex accompaniment which includes the use of the slide – a technique possibly pioneered by those songsters who performed religious songs. Together, Julius Daniels and Lil McClintock afford us further insights into the richness of the old black songster traditions.

### **TEXAS ALEXANDER: Texas Alexander Vol. 3 (1929 – 30)**

A line drawn on the map from Houston to Dallas passes through Leon County, which lies just about half way. The County is bordered to the east by the Trinity River which runs from Dallas to Galveston Bay, and to the west by the Navasota, a tributary of the great Brazos. Much of East Texas is scrubby, uncared for country with low horizons and a featureless, dead-pan landscape. But Leon County is not like that, it's undulating, gently rolling land which at times gets positively hilly, lightly covered with a variety of oaks, gums and pines. Lumber is a local industry on a modest scale, and there is

some oil production, though not to the extent that is to be found in other counties. There is even a State Park at Normangee where there are deer and a variety of small game birds among the dogwoods. This is the country where Alger Alexander grew up and, when not on trips to Dallas or out as far as West Texas or Oklahoma, where he continued to live in the 1930s.

In Alexander's day it looked a little different, there were small farms growing watermelons and corn, and bigger plantations of cotton in the alluvial soils closer to the river bollomlands. Over the past thirty years this has changed quite a bit – there has been a general trend towards the raising of beef cattle and many of the old crop lands have been converted to pasture. But when Texas Alexander was a notable figure in the black community the tenant farmers and sharecroppers who worked the land for others, and the poor farmers who nevertheless had small holdings of their own, were dotted through the landscape and in small settlements off the dusty, and then unmetalled, roads. The clusters of houses and stores were little more

than hamlets: even today the capital of Leon County, Centerville, has less than a thousand inhabitants and his home village of Jewell fewer than five hundred.

It is important to understand the essentially rural context in which a singer like Texas Alexander lived, and the remote, backwoods nature of the small towns and settlements which he visited and where he could be heard singing in the streets. His Okeh records had done extremely well and for a while he was living high on the royalties from them. When automobiles were scarcely to be seen on the backroads, and certainly not outside black homes, Alexander is remembered coming through in a Cadillac – one of the first blues singers from the country perhaps, to flaunt this status symbol. There is something incongruous about a street singer owning a Cadillac, when it might be expected that he would be too poor to possess one, or, if he could afford it had no need to sing on the sidewalks. But for Alexander it was different. He was a field hand, a man who never played guitar, and was not in the customary sense an entertainer. He

could not hold down a job as a saloon entertainer, playing for tips or during intermissions, or providing a steady rolling piano background to the clinking of glasses and the shouts of the pikers in a local juke. His voice was full and resonant with chest tones, but he was not a shouter and his habit of moaning and humming stanzas was not suited to the bar-room. It might not seem to be suited to the street either, but in those days, when the streets were quieter and the mere presence of the singer drew a crowd, he could be heard well enough. He had a peculiar sense of territory: Buster Pickens, who knew him late in his life, recalled that he would take a tie-pin-or "stick-pin" as he termed it – and thrust the point into the wall of a building where he intended to sing. The little ritual somehow seemed to claim space and established his role as street singer. Beside him he would have a guitarist working the crowd and providing the instrumental support – J. T. "Funny Papa" Smith (also known as "Funny Paper"), Carl Davis, Dennis "Lillie Hat" Jones or later, Lightnin' Hopkins or Lowell Fulson.

Lillie Hat Jones was his accompanist on **Gold Tooth Blues**, on which he seems to have adjusted at last to Alexander's tempo, and on **Johnny Behren's Blues**. Behren (or Behrens) was a local singer who had one extended blues on which he told of his skill as sailor, jockey or in other occupations, and how he "learned" the women he knew. It was his blues that Alexander sang here. Later that year, 1929, he had a notable session with guitarist Carl Davis, an occasional companion of Willie Reed and leader of the Dallas Jamboree Jug Band in later years. Davis had an arpeggio style which linked him with Lonnie Johnson and Gene Campbell, which he was flexible enough to fit around Alexander's notably erratic song structures. These items are virtually one extended blues, with verses overlapping titles as Texas introduces them in more than one blues. In a number of cases he used an aabb verse pattern as on **Broken Yo Yo, When You Get To Thinking** and **Peaceful Blues**. It might also be noted that on **Johnny Behren's Blues** and Texas Special he used the "*matchbox*" theme and the "*blues come to Texas*" image that are generally associated with Blind

Lemon Jefferson, though he introduced his own variants of the established phrases.

Four years passed before Alexander was back in the recording studio in San Antonio and when he did so it was in very different company. Bo Carter and the Mississippi Sheiks had been in town and had recorded nearly thirty titles between them for Bluebird in a two-day session late in March 1934. They were brought in to back Texas Alexander a week later providing him with a rare string band setting. They were uncompromising and, unlike his usual deferential accompanists, made no attempt to fit in with his wayward tempos and stanzas. The effect was to discipline his singing and to provide it with an unfamiliar swing. The session also produced one of Alexander's most lyrically significant blues, which told in condensed form of the great tornado of May 6th, 1930 which hit Frost in Navarro County, and other locations, leaving 41 people dead and causing over \$2,000,000 damage:



*I was sittin' here lookin',  
way across the world,  
(twice)*

*Says the wind had things twistin',  
almost in a twirl.*

*Says I been a good feller, just as  
good as I can be  
(twice)*

*Says it's "Lord Have Mercy.  
Lord have Mercy on me"*

*Some lost their babies, was blown  
for two, three miles around  
(twice)*

*When they come to they right mind,  
they come on back to town.*

*Says the rooster was crowin', cows  
was lowin',  
never heard such a noise before*

*Mmmmm Lawd, Lawdy Lawd*

*Says it seemed like hell was broken,  
in this place below*

## **Peg Leg Howell Vol. 1 (1926 – 27)**

*NB: Vol. 2 was issued first in the  
original vinyl edition and is included  
in the first set in this CD edition)*

One day, late in 1926, a representative of the Columbia Record Company heard a large, unkempt one-legged street musician playing on the sidewalk in Decatur Street, Atlanta, Georgia, and he obviously liked what he heard. The tall, black musician played guitar, and was accompanied by a mandolin player with the name of Eugene Pedin, but it seems that he wanted to record the guitarist solo: Pedin never recorded and nothing more is known of him. Though his name was recalled as "Mr Brown" it is likely that the talent scout was Dan Hornsby, a local white musician who set up sessions for the field units of the Okeh and Columbia record companies when they visited the South. On Monday the 8th November that year, Joshua Barnes Howell, known simply as "Peg Leg" Howell to the musicians on Decatur, made four titles, the first rural blues to be cut by the company. They sold well enough to ensure another session in April the following year when the unit

returned, and others in the recurrent spring and fall visits until April 1928. The twenty-eight issued titles by Peg Leg Howell, either solo or with members of his Gang, are among the most important documentations of the early blues and its links with the other black rural traditions of music and song.

The son of a country farmer who worked a holding near Eatonton in Putnam County, Joshua Howell was born on March 5th, 1888. His early years were spent on the farm: he was a well-built lad and made a valuable plow-hand. It is likely that he was modestly literate for he went to school in Putnam County and continued to ninth grade. During this time he was undoubtedly exposed to the songs of the field hands and the country dance music of the rural string bands, but though this would have been part of the everyday experience of a black youth of his time he seems not to have been moved to learn an instrument until he was past twenty. *"I learned to play the guitar about 1909"* he told George Mitchell in 1963 *"I learnt myself – didn't take long to learn. I just stayed up one night and learnt*

*myself."* It was fortunate that he did, for as things turned out it was to become his source of a living. Though the circumstances remain unrecorded, Joshua appears to have riled his brother-in-law to such an extent that the man shot him, as a result of which he lost his right leg. It seems that he was probably fitted with an artificial limb, for an outdoor photograph shows him wearing both shoes, and standing erect without a crutch. Unable to do farm work he was still fit enough for employment and took a job at a fertilizer plant at Madison in the adjacent county to the north, Morgan. He worked there for a year before returning to Eatonton where, in his own words he *"just messed around town."* He tired of the small town life and in about 1923 when he was thirty-five, he moved to Atlanta. Just how he passed his time and gained employment he didn't say, but in the Prohibition era he made a little from bootlegging. *"As for selling the whiskey. I would sell it to anybody who came to the house. I bought the moonshine from people that ran it and I sold it."* But he was careless or "snitched" upon: in 1925 he was sent to jail for a spell for selling the bootleg liquor. *"I don't*

*know how they caught me: they just ran down on me one day”, he commented. It was there that he heard a blues which, some five years later, he recorded as **New Prison Blues**, with its chilling opening line “I’ll cut your throat mama, drink your blood like wine”. He had no idea who composed it, but it seems that he had a good ear for the songs of the period and drew from the variety of musicians and singers that he encountered in the city, as well as from the country districts around. **New Jelly Roll Blues**, for example, which he cut at the second session, he learned from a man named Elijah Lawrence. “He didn’t make records; I heard him singing it in the country. I learned many of my songs around the country. I picked them up from anybody – no special person. Mostly they just sang, didn’t play anything.”*

Peg Leg claimed to have composed **Coal Man Blues**, his first recorded title. It is an unexpected item which commences with a ballad fragment describing an accident when a coal man was run over by a train, and then shifts to the vending song of the coal man himself. The first titles were sombre in mood, but the April 1927

session revealed another side to Peg Leg’s music, made as they were with his “Gang” comprising a second guitarist, Henry Williams, and his close friend Eddie Anthony who played a strident, raw fiddle. The gritty vocal to **New Jelly Roll Blues** is placed against a syncopated string group accompaniment which prepares the way for **Beaver Slide Rag**, a splendid country dance piece. Other dance items like **Too Tight Blues**, adapted from a Blind Blake recording, and **Peg Leg Stomp** have the same infectious swing and untamed wildness which make them among the most authentic examples of Southern string reels on record.

For those who are interested in noting Peg Leg Howell’s lyrics there are many surprises and many grounds for speculation on their sources. Where did the lines come from which state “*I whistled to the paper boy: the paper boy stopped. ‘What kind of papers boy have you got?’ I got the Atlanta Journal, talk about the Mobile Flag ..*”. Others clearly come from songs heard and events witnessed, of which one of the most interesting is **Skin Game Blues**, with its verses drawn from

**The Coon-Can Game** and the white song, **The Roving Gambler**, while **Hobo Blues** is clearly derived from hearing Cow Cow Davenport's **Cow Cow Blues** on record. Nothing is lost by the transcription to guitar and fiddle: on the contrary, the transition back to the folk idiom gives it a compelling quality which captures the thrust of the engine on its way to New Orleans.

Though his blues are simple and affecting, they often have unfamiliar lines or specific images that give them character and authenticity. Similarly, Howell's deceptively rural accents and rough voice may lead one to think of him as primitive, but this is belied by the quality of his instrumental work on solo pieces like **Doin' Wrong**. From an amalgam of country songs, remembered fragments of ballads and white folk pieces, blues lyrics and field hollers, Peg Leg Howell made a remarkably consistent repertoire of items that became uniquely his own.

## **Sanctified Jug Bands (1928 – 30)**

This is a collection of recordings of '*Sanctified Jug Bands*'. But what is a sanctified jug band? The question isn't as naive as it may sound: it isn't even clear what a jug band is. As I used to explain to slightly puzzled audiences, a jug band isn't completely made up of people playing jugs; usually there is just one musician who does so. And the rest play an uncertain list of instruments. The Memphis Jug Band could get along with jug, guitar, kazoo and harmonica. Clarence Williams had cornet, trombone, clarinet, guitar and piano with the jug in his Jug Band, while the Dixieland Jug Blowers included violin, alto sax, three banjos and two jugs. So there is little in common except the jug, and even that isn't that easily defined – Gus Cannon's jug was a kerosene can and Hammie Nixon's was a whisky bottle! '*Jug Band*' was a term that exploited the novelty value of the instrument, like the '*Washboard Band*' or the '*Goofus Five*'.

Most blues enthusiasts probably associate the concept of the jug band with southern, rural groups, though

the recording locations call even this into question. If though, we accept that the groups led by Gus Cannon, Will Shade, Jack Kelly and Will Batts define the genre as far as blues playing jug bands are concerned, is the Sanctified Jug Band fundamentally different? For instance – are all the members of the band also members of the Sanctified Church?

The Sanctified Church is almost as elusive, when you attempt to define it, as the jug band – more so, perhaps. Early Pentecostal, Holiness and Sanctified sects are often thought of as being identical, but although they share certain characteristics their adherents make distinctions between them. Black cult churches in the United States were doctrinal splinter groups from the older denominations, but in Arthur Huff Fausett's formulation of over forty years ago, *"the following experiences (are required) before an individual can be said to be a true member or to have been 'saved':*

1. *Conversion.*
2. *Sanctification (leading a pure life).*
3. *Spirit Possession (filled with the Holy Spirit).*

*Conversion, turning "from the sins of the world". was expected to lead to an experience such as miracle healing or "speaking in tongues."*

In *Songsters and Saints* I outlined the history of the Sanctified churches and the growth of the best-known of them, the Church of God in Christ, Sanctified. These churches were unlike the Baptist and Methodist churches in a number of ways, but the one that concerns us here is their willingness to have musical accompaniments to the congregational singing in their services. Taking literally Psalm 150: *"Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp; praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments: praise him with the loud cymbals"*, they accepted all the instruments they could match to this injunction – trumpet, mouth-harp, tambourine and stringed instruments. No mention of jugs, but doubtless they would have been acceptable to the many congregations experimenting with music in their services. Nevertheless, many of the Sanctified churches were very restrictive in their practices. For

instance, dancing was forbidden unless it was performed "*without crossing the feet*". This led to the curious flexed-knee, legs apart, jumping which was adopted by many church members. In the churches that took the words of the Bible absolutely literally even the use of jugs might have been forbidden as they were not expressly listed: moreover, the demijohn was associated with home-brew corn liquor and hence it must have been beyond the pale for many preachers. But, it seems a jug band was all right with Elder Richard Bryant. Elder Bryant is reported as having been a Mississippi preacher who recorded a couple of titles early in February 1928. **The Master Came and Called Me** was a loosely narrated story of the Resurrection which started clearly enough but which was soon broken up with numerous interpolations of "*Thank God. Amen*". His sermon on **Saul, A Wicked Man**, was similarly fragmented; Bryant seems to have quoted from the Bible in a straightforward manner but as soon as he began to interpret the text he became more hoarse in delivery and was inclined to use exhortation as he progressed.

Perhaps the Okeh company warned him against this; **A Wild Man in Town** has none. His sermons were fundamentalist, like that of "**Neb-u-shad-neezer**" and Daniel in **He Shut the Lion's Mouth**. On these titles he led the congregation into a simple song, the latter being a version of **The Farmer Takes a Wife**, a children's game song. Others included the familiar gospel song **Ananias on Come Over Here**, and **I Want to Go Where Jesus is on Watch, Ye, Therefore**. Second takes are to be heard of a couple of these and it is interesting to consider to what extent the responses were planned in advance.

Many years ago (1970) Tony Russell speculated on the membership of the jug groups that accompanied Bryant and settled, not surprisingly, for the Memphis Jug Band. The jug player he observed could have been Charlie Polk but suggested that the mandolin player was more "*fluid*" than Vol Stevens. I think that a Memphis Jug Band group is very likely though it is given little room to stretch and the trolling pace of **Come Over Here** is not typical of the group's sense of rhythm. It does not solve the identity

of the cornet player, who seems a circus man to me, and who plays fairly straight even on **Everybody Was There** which, as **Keep a-Knockin'** would have been a gift to a New Orleans horn man.

There seems little doubt though, of the presence of Will Shade on the Brother William(s) titles. or on those by the Holy Ghost Sanctified Singers where the guitar is very reminiscent and the harp could well be his. There is a temptation to identify Bessie Johnson and Melinda Taylor among the Sanctified Singers, though Bessie Johnson's rasp is usually more marked. These are themes for speculation that can keep an enthusiast for Sanctified music happy for hours. But there are more serious ones to stack alongside the questions raised earlier in this note. For example, was there ever such a thing as a Sanctified jug band? Were jug bands ever an accompaniment to church music? Did they ever play in churches and were they ever chosen by preachers to perform for them? In other words, is the whole idea of the Sanctified Jug Band our own, and is it based wholly on the evidence of records that were

devised by the company promoters for the sole purpose of selling more records? I suspect that it was something of a gimmick, but I'd like to be proved wrong. Has anyone any evidence that jug bands did play in churches, or in any other ostensibly religious context apart from fine recordings like these?

*References:*

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*Russell, Tony: **Key to the Bushes**, Blues Unlimited, June 1970. No. 73. p. 18.*

### **ST LOUIS BESSIE: (Bessie Mae Smith) (1927 – 30)**

Slowly the outlines of the blues picture in St. Louis are being filled in, at least as far as the availability of recordings of some of the city's principal artists is concerned. Recent reissues of recordings by such blues singers as Charley Jordan, Henry

Townsend, Henry Spaulding, Luella Miller, Robert Lee McCoy and a number of others have given a fuller indication of the richness of talent in that city than we have ever had in the past. St. Louis has played a significant part in the history of the blues, but it has not received the attention that it merits.

St. Louis is situated on the west bank of the Mississippi a few miles south of the confluence of the upper Mississippi and the Missouri Rivers. Historically it has been important as a river port, but it has also prided itself on being the "*Gateway to the West*", which the St. Louis Arch now commemorates – while ruining the splendid river-front levee in the process. Opposite is a small sister town of East St. Louis, an ugly, depressed area which looks as if it were destroyed in an air raid and only partially reconstructed. It was of course the scene of the East St. Louis race riot of July 2 1919 from which it seems never to have recovered. It was however the home city of many thousands of blacks and the workplace of many more who came over from St. Louis. Together the two cities were the focus of black

movement from the South to the Northern Cities and from all points to the urban complex itself. Nearly thirty trunk line railroads passed through bringing black transients from Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky and elsewhere and acting as a host to those moving on to Chicago, Detroit and other cities. Blues singers were a part of this movement and many came to stay.

*"Just because I'm from the country my man treats me like a dog: he wants to put me in the stable and feed me like a hog"* sang St. Louis Bessie at her last session. She was one of the many singers who resided in the city and who has been poorly served by blues research or reissues. Whether she did indeed come from the country we do not know, but there persists, in her unsophisticated approach to her blues, much that suggests that she was of rural origin. Perhaps, like Wesley Wallace, the pianist whose first appearance on record was with her, she came from the little township of Alton, Illinois.

Unfortunately, none of the St. Louis blues singers and accompanists to whom I addressed questions about



St. Louis Bessie had much to say about her. Lonnie Johnson remarked that Mary Johnson (then his wife) was jealous of her: Henry Brown did not include her in his circle of good-time associates – as he did Alice Moore. Only Big Joe Williams claimed a close relationship: "*she was my old lady*" he said. This had led to the statement that she was married to Joe, but I suspect that it was a "*common-law*" partnership and not one that lasted. My impression, from his few words about her, was that she did not like his "*rambling ways*"

Perhaps it was Bessie's introspective and rather morbid frame of mind that discouraged friendships and did not fit in with the wilder spirits of some of the St. Louis crowd. Certainly, on her recordings at any rate, death figures prominently: **Ghost Creepin' Blues**, **Dead Sea Blues**, **My Daddy's Coffin Blues** and **Death Valley Moan** are all on morbid themes. **Dead Sea** also refers to dreams, another recurrent theme in her blues. The majority make reference one way or another to leaving, or to being forsaken, a subject which had particular relevance to the transient

nature of much of the black population of the city. **Cryin' for Daddy Blues**, **Farewell Baby Blues** and **St. Louis Daddy** are all of this type: the latter is unusual in the string of interruptions and jocular comments from, presumably, Wesley Wallace, over which Bessie makes her protestations and final determination to go to Detroit. Undoubtedly the success of other singers, notably Victoria Spivey, is reflected in some of Bessie's blues. So successful were Spivey's **Black Snake Blues** and **Garter Snake Blues** that Bessie apparently hoped to benefit by it with her own **Creepin' Eel Blues**, **Boa Constrictor Blues** and **Sneakin' Lizard Blues**, while rattlesnakes occur in a couple of other items. But perhaps the obsession was her own: after all, her **Mean Bloodhound Blues** was made a couple of years before Victoria made her famous **Blood Hound Blues**. Like Victoria, Bessie Mae Smith did use erotic symbolism in some of her songs. On **Creepin' Eel** she sings that it "*ain't got no fingers. ain't got no toes: I looked in his face and didn't see no nose.*" a couplet which would have been treated with ribald humour by many

another singer. Her last title, **Meat Cutter Blues**, is also sexual, though the relentless use of the violent imagery is anything but joyful. But the use of the *"meat cutter"* image was particularly potent in St. Louis at the time, when tensions in the stockyards to the north of East St. Louis and the struggles of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of America to unionise its black members were fresh in the memory.

Like many women blues singers, St. Louis Bessie took a challenging stance though her words were often revealing of her personality. *"My floor is dirty and my house ain't never clean: ain't got no husband but I got a dozen married men"* she sang on **Sweet Black Woman**, adding *"my hair is kinky, but my baby do not care, any man's a fool who wants a woman for her hair."*

On this blues she declared that she was a *"whisky-head woman"* and on **Good Feelin' Blues** while she had *"had no whisky today"*, she had *"six quarts of beer and sixteen bottles of wine"* to keep up the good feeling.

Of Bessie Mae Smith's background life and presumably death we have

no concrete information. Even her identity is somewhat in question as far as her recordings are concerned. It is assumed that Bessie Mae Smith on Paramount is St. Louis Bessie though her voice on these titles is deeper. Her first sessions were as by *"Blue Belle"* for Okeh, but the Columbia file cards listed her as Bessie Martin. It seems very likely that the recordings made by Mae Belle Miller with Roosevelt Sykes were by her and several years later those by *"Streamline Mae"*, which are credited to Mary Belle Smith, would also seem to have been hers. Was the Martin entry a mistake, or was it her maiden name? Did Miller indicate a link with Luella Miller, or Al Miller? It's probably too late to learn.

What we do have are the recordings of a woman whose insecurity, morbidity and introspection gave an insight, through her blues, of what it was like to be a working class black woman in St. Louis in its troubled years: *"bad luck in St. Louis and it all fell on poor me"*

**TEXAS ALEXANDER:**  
***Texas Alexander Vol. 4***

Four years passed between Alger Alexander's 1930 recording session with the Mississippi Sheiks and his next appearance in the studio. These were the worst years of the Depression, which affected Texas as it did all other states. If it was a lean time it was still one when a singer could attract attention and even earn a dollar or two by hollering in the streets.

It was a time when most people would have needed a boost, when picnics and play-parties would have been popular if only to take their mind off the trials of the period. Texas Alexander was hardly the kind of good-time entertainer to lift his hearers out of the depression by singing optimistic songs. On the contrary, he dwelt more upon the difficulties that he personally experienced, with a certain honesty and lack of affectation which made it possible for others to relate to his blues. It was this role of his in enunciating the feelings of others, this sharing of emotions and predicament, that endeared him to

his audiences at the time – and which perhaps makes him rather less accessible now.

There's no doubt that he was in demand, or that he was to be heard in many towns and settlements in Leon County and Grimes County north of Houston, and often much further afield. In the early 'thirties Sam Hopkins – "Lightnin'", was a name that was still to be acquired – accompanied him on guitar after hearing him singing for the first time, at a ball game in Normangee. He recalled, as others have, that Texas carried a guitar around with him so that any aspiring accompanist could back him if he wished; Texas didn't play guitar himself. In particular he was impressed by Alexander's long, new Cadillac car, in which he travelled to more distant points. Perhaps that was later in 1934, for on **Deceitful Blues** he mentions that he was planning to exchange his Ford for an eight-cylinder cadillac: "*I'm gonna trade this Lincoln, get me a Cadillac Eight*", helped maybe, with the payment from his recent sessions.

Vocalion had doubtless decided to develop a new image for their recently acquired singer, and the first title, **Blues In My Mind** was unexpectedly, something of a pop song. The images were pretty conventional: *"I'm crying', with tears in my eyes"* etc. It's tempting to assume that this was foisted upon him, but internal evidence suggest it was Alger's own attempt at song-writing, especially the phrase *"left me all in a strain"* which was one which is peculiar to him (he used it again on **Katy Crossing Blues**).

Fortunately, after this brief essay in an unfamiliar and unsuitable idiom he settled into the kind of blues of which he was master. The accompaniment of his **Sax Black Tams** was unusual for him, though the clarinetist, who revealed a strong New Orleans vein in his playing, was sensitive in his accompaniments and more than able in his solos.

On **Polo Blues Texas** got into his stride, using the kind of verses that make his blues so singular: *"You can hand me my pistol, shotgun and some shells; I'm gonna kill my woman, send the poor gal to hell,"* and *"You get your milk from a polo,*

*cream from a jersey cow; your pigmeat from your pig, and your bacon from a no-good sow."* Apart from the sexual ambivalence in the final line, the localised imagery sets his blues firmly in rural Texas: a "polo" was a "polled" animal whose horns had been removed so that it's "strength" would go into beef and milk. A note of protest enters **Normangee Blues** and though the identity of Mister Batson remains unclear, the comparison of their respective clothes must have been the kind of point that appealed to the black audiences. As a driver, Texas Alexander must have been aware of the "Safety First" campaign of the mid-1930s and amusingly applied it when he sang on **Worried Blues** *"I'm gonna get myself a black woman and play 'safety first' "*. He may never have been a "topical" singer, but he was far from insulated from his times.

Alger was now in his prime, his 34th birthday still a few months away. He seems to have taken some pride in his irreligious life. secularising a prayer with *"Lord My Father, Lord Thy Kingdom come; send me back my baby and my will be done"* and

declaring *"says I went to church and the people called on me to pray; I set down on my knees and forgot just what to say"* on **Prairie Dog Hole**. It was a theme that he was to continue on **Justice Blues** at his next session: *"Take me out of this water, before the high water rise; you know I ain't no preacher and I never been to heaven, people, but I been told, Oh Lord it's women up there got their mouths chock full of gold"* and he dreamed of building a heaven of his own, with his throne surrounded by women. His accompanists on the sessions of 29/30 September 1934 were guitarists Willie Reed and Carl Davis, who worked well with him and produced strong and varied support.

**One Morning Blues** opened with *"one morning, when God begin to break his day"* and continued with a mention of Johnny Ryan, the plantation owner who, like Cunningham, worked the convict lease system to which Leadbelly referred. If the gang labour songs of his first sessions in 1927 had now been dispensed with, hints of them still remained. Probably Vocalion felt that Texas Alexander was too old-

fashioned at a time when the records of Joe Pullum were pointing the way to an entirely fresh approach to Texas blues, and they did not record him again. But he was still popular, and several guitarists were glad to work for him, among them J. T. "Funny Paper" Smith in 1935, who had recently served several years for murder; and Lowell Fulson in 1939, when Smith left. Around this time Texas seems to have been imprisoned himself: for a double murder according to Frankie Lee Sims; for singing a dubious verse according to others. Buster Pickens was quite certain that he had served a spell in the Ramsey State Farm around 1942, but a few years later he heard Alger often at a well-known juke in Spring, Texas, where he sang regularly.

By the late 'forties Texas was, in Pickens' words *"a kinda pitiful looking feller"*. Ravaged by syphilis, and worn down by labour in the pen, he looked and behaved much older than his years. He was singing in the streets again, with his cousin Lightnin' Hopkins accompanying him when they were heard by Lola Ann Cullum, who managed Amos

Milburn. It seems that she did not take to Texas Alexander and when Lightnin' and Amos went to the West Coast to record he was left behind. A single coupling for the Houston label Freedom is all that exists to give us an indication of his last years. Buster Pickens played piano and was extremely unhappy about the session; a rather mediocre Hopkins copyist, Leon Benton, played guitar, and Texas sang some of the verses that had made earlier records memorable. It was disorganised, though, in its extempore character, it had a certain authenticity. Not enough to secure another date for any of them, however. Four years later Alger Alexander died on 18 April 1954, of progressive locomotor ataxia, and was buried in an unmarked grave at Longstreet in Grimes County; his memorial is the body of 66 recordings which document one of the major singers of Texas, and indeed of the blues as a whole; one whose work, more than that of any other blues singer, was rooted in the vocal traditions of the plantation and the penitentiary.

**PAUL OLIVER**

## **UPDATES TO ORIGINAL NOTES:**

*page 13:* Lil McClintock is believed to have been born c. 1886. In 1930 he was living, and working as a rock mason, in Union, SC, where the talent-scout J. Byrum Lawson, who worked at the Cooper Furniture Company, arranged for him to record for Columbia in Atlanta (as he did for other local artists, both black and white).

*page 17:* the Columbia representative who discovered Peg Leg Howell in 1926 and whose name was recalled as Brown was almost certainly Wilford "Bill" Brown, who worked at Columbia's Atlanta office and was an assistant to Frank Walker at numerous recording sessions in that city. Dan Hornsby had a similar role, but did not take it on until 1929 or 1930.

**TONY RUSSELL, 2021**

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MSE 1005 MISSISSIPPI SHEIKS VOL. 1 (1930)  
MSE 1006 LONNIE JOHNSON VOL. 1 (1926-28)

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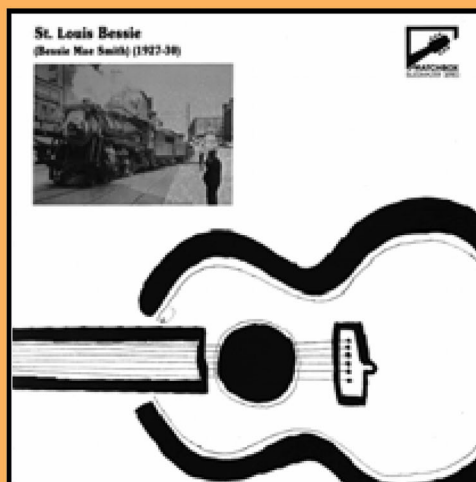


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