

Historical Vignettes

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Alexander, David "Black Ivory King"

Sadly, very little is known about David Alexander, who performed under the name "Black Ivory King." Only four recordings made by Alexander are known to exist. One of them, "The Flying Crow" is a blues classic that celebrates the rail line from Shreveport to Port Arthur, Texas, that Alexander frequently travelled. His birth date is listed as 1910, and it is presumed he was born in the Shreveport or greater Arklatex area, but there is no definite evidence. Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter cited Black Ivory King as a musician who had influenced him when he heard him in Shreveport, possibly as early as 1906. Alexander's four recordings were made at a session in Dallas, Texas in 1937. The late Omar Sharriff, who was born David Alexander Elam in Shreveport in 1938, reported that his mother, Susy Hill Elam, told him that he had been named after his father's good friend, David Alexander, who was a Shreveport piano player – clearly Dave "Black Ivory King" Alexander. From the late 1950s until changing his name in the early 1970s, Omar performed as Dave Alexander. Consequently, over the years some people thought that Dave Alexander/Omar Sharriff was the son of David "Black Ivory King" Alexander. Based on birth records and inter views with Omar Sharriff, all evidence indicates that the story Omar heard from his mother is true and

that his father, Tom Elam, was indeed friends with David “Black Ivory King” Alexander and named his first born son after him as a gesture of respect and admiration.

Alexander, Dave AKA Omar Sharriff

(See Elam, David Alexander)

Beck, Jim

Jim Beck was born in Marshall, Texas, August 11, 1916. Widely regarded as an electronics genius, Beck developed equipment and recording techniques that were ahead of their time when he opened his first studio on Main Street in Dallas in 1945 after returning from Army service in World War II. In 1950, Beck opened a new studio at 1101 Ross Avenue in Dallas and had established it as a national center for country music recording by the time of his tragic early death May 3, 1956. Among others, Beck is credited with discovering and being the first to record Lefty Frizzell. He was also the first to record Ray Price and was among the first to record Fats Domino, Roy Orbison, George Jones, Floyd Tilman, and Marty Robbins. Beck had worked with broadcasting equipment in the Army, but was largely self-taught. He is now regarded as an electronics genius whose innovations in recording equipment were the most advanced of their time. Tragically, Jim Beck died in 1956 after accidentally inhaling the fumes of carbon tetrachloride, a solvent he was using to clean recording heads on his studio equipment. At the time of his death, his expertise as a recording engineer and his canny ability to discover talent had attracted Columbia Records to center their country music division in Dallas. It is widely believed that except for Jim Beck’s untimely death, Dallas would have rivaled or even eclipsed Nashville as a center for the country music industry.

Bowden, Richard

Richard Bowden, a versatile musician, comedian, and inventor who bills himself as “America’s Most Famous Unknown Entertainer,” was born in Linden, Texas in 1945. While still in high school, he formed a band that eventually was called Shiloh that enjoyed considerable popularity in Texas. The drummer and lead vocalist of Shiloh was Richard’s close friend, Don Henley, who rose to fame as a songwriter and founding member and front man of The Eagles. After the band moved to Los Angeles and recorded an album, the band broke up in 1970 and Bowden, Henley, and bassist Mike Bowden (Richard’s cousin) joined with future Eagles’ guitarist and vocalist Glenn Frey to become the backing band for Linda Ronstadt. After Henley and Frey left to form the Eagles, Bowden toured with the Byrd’s Roger McGuinn and later, with Dan Fogelberg. In 1978, Bowden formed a band called “Blue Steel” and toured with The Eagles on their 1980 “Long Run” tour. In 1982, Bowden moved

to Nashville and teamed up with songwriter Sandy Pinkard. They formed the comedy act "Pinkard and Bowden," recorded four parody song albums for Warner Brothers, toured nationally for 15 years, and were frequent guests on top-rated radio programs. In 1999, Bowden moved back to Linden where he continued to record and tour with The Eagles and with Don Henley's band. In 2001, he formed the band "Moon and The Starz," which is still actively recording and performing. Bowden helped found the prestigious concert venue "Music City Texas Theater" in Linden that has attracted such major stars as Jackson Browne, Merle Haggard, Kenny Rogers, George Jones, Michael Martin Murphy, Don Henley, Robert Earl Keene, and Delbert McClinton. Bowden was also instrumental in establishing the annual T-Bone Walker Blues Festival that headquarters at Music City Texas Theater. A lifelong tinkerer, Bowden is also the inventor of the Bowden B Bender guitar string bender.

Buddy Records

Buddy Records was founded in Marshall, Texas at 500 Locust Street by A. T. "Buddy" Young and was active from the early 1950s until 1968. Although the label never achieved national distribution, it released a number of pioneering rockabilly recordings, including cuts made by Tommy Blake, Lucky Boggs, and Jimmy Sims. Buddy records also released a number of singles recorded by the popular Marshall based group "The Four Blazers."

Cass County Boys

The Cass County Boys took their name from the home of accordion player Fred Martin who was born in Linden, Texas (Cass County) June 22, 1916. Along with guitarist and vocalist Jerry Scoggins, born September 20, 1911 in nearby Mount Pleasant, Texas, and bass player and vocalist Bert Dodson, the trio were staff musicians at radio station WFAA in Dallas around 1935. First called the Early Birds, then the Cass County Kids, they harmonized between programs. When fellow Texan Gene Autry heard them in 1940, he wanted them as replacements for his Rough Riders group on Autry's Melody Ranch radio program. Autry's plans were delayed by World War II. When he returned to radio in 1945 they joined his cast as the Cass County Boys. The trio were regulars on the Melody Ranch program through its final broadcast in 1956 and toured extensively to back up Autry's personal appearances. They also appeared on Autry's TV program and many of his post World War II western movies. Unique among western musical groups, the Cass County Boys never changed or added members but stayed together for the entirety of their career as a trio, occasionally backing other singers such as Bing Crosby. After the Cass County Boys stopped performing, baritone Jerry Scoggins came out of retirement to record the theme song for The Beverly Hillbillies TV show.

Coker, Henry

Born in Dallas, Texas December 24, 1919, Henry Coker studied music at Wiley College in Marshall, where as a member of the Wiley Collegians he developed an interest in jazz and switched from piano to trombone. From 1935 to 1939, Coker worked with trumpeter John White and the Nat Towles bands before relocating to Hawaii. In 1945, he joined Benny Carter's band and later the Eddie Heywood Sextet. In 1952 he joined the famed Count Basie orchestra as principal trombone soloist for an eleven year run. Throughout the 1960s until his death in 1979, Coker was in great demand for studio work in New York City and Los Angeles and played with the Ray Charles orchestra and, again, Count Basie. He is regarded as one of the all time great jazz trombonists.

Dalhart, Vernon

Born Vernon Try Slaughter in Jefferson, Texas April 16, 1883, Dalhart adopted his stage name from the towns of Vernon and Dalhart in the area of northeast Texas where he had worked as a cowboy. In his early teens, his family moved to Dallas where Dalhart attended the Dallas Conservatory of Music. After starting a family, he moved to New York City in 1910 where he worked occasionally as a singer in Light Opera. Dalhart's recording career began when he was auditioned by Thomas Edison. He made numerous recordings for Edison records and other labels, often using pseudonyms. His recording of the classic ballad about a notorious derailment of a Southern Pacific mail train, "The Wreck of the Old 97" became the biggest selling non-holiday record of the first 70 years of recorded music and is credited with establishing Southern country music vocals as a national market. Because of the many recordings he made using pseudonyms, the exact number of them is unknown, but it is generally believed that Dalhart's voice is on more recordings than any other person in history.

Dixon, Floyd

Born February 8, 1929, in Marshall, Texas, Floyd Dixon was a popular and influential jump blues and boogie woogie pianist and vocalist whose original recordings "Hey, Bartender" and "Wine, Wine, Wine" remained jukebox favorites for decades. After his family moved to Los Angeles in 1942, Dixon continued to live in Marshall off and on where he sometimes heard a boogie woogie piano player known only as "Road Master," who Dixon later described in interviews as the greatest piano player he had ever heard. In Los Angeles, Dixon got to know blues pianist Charles Brown. It has been observed that Brown and Dixon influenced each other's style of playing and singing and on at least once occasion in his early years, Dixon was mistaken for Brown. He began recording for Modern Records in 1949, specializing in highly suggestive songs such as "Red Cherries," "Too Much Jelly Roll," and "Baby Let's Go Down to the Woods." Dixon has been credited with encouraging Ray

Charles, who had begun his career playing and singing in a style similar to Nat King Cole, to incorporate the boogie and jump blues style and gospel-like vocals that ultimately brought Charles lasting fame. Recording for the Aladdin, Specialty, and Atlantic's Cat labels, Dixon performed widely until departing the music industry during the 1970s except for occasional tours. An appearance in Sweden ignited an international following for Dixon and in 1980 he joined with Charles Brown and Ruth Brown on the European Blues Caravan tour. He received the Rhythm & Blues Foundation's Pioneer Achievement Award in 1993. In 1996 he released "Wake Up And Live" on Alligator Records, an album that New York Post jazz critic Chip Deffaa called Dixon's most fully realized album...rollicking, unpretentious and satisfying." Dixon wrote affectionately about his hometown of Marshall in "Doin' the Town" and "Marshall, Texas is My Home." In the 1950s, he occasionally visited Marshall with his old friend Amos Milburn to play free concerts for students at Pemberton High. At one of these concerts a young future Blues Hall of Famer David Alexander Elam (later Dave Alexander/Omar Sharriff) decided to become a professional blues and boogie piano player.

Dove, Nat

Nathaniel "Nat" Dove was born in Mumford, Texas November 13, 1939 and began playing the piano at the age of four. His mother, a church pianist, gave Nat and his four siblings piano lessons. With piano time so tight, Nat also took up the trumpet, bass and drums. During high school days in Bryan, Texas, Nat played in a local dance band. He met and played with Juke Boy Bonner and Big Mama Thornton at an uncle's recording studio in Houston. The 1960s found Dove in the Bay area, where he got to know fellow Texas boogie and blues pianist Dave Alexander before moving to Hollywood where he formed his own Sll-Star band featuring Pee Wee Crayton, Mickey Champion, Curtis Tillman, Bop Daddy, Clifford "Honky Tonk" Scott and Big Jim Wynn. He was soon in much demand as a studio blues pianist and contributed to such classic blues recordings as Little Johnny Taylor's "Part Time Love," Little Joe Blue's "Dirty Work Goin' On," Lowell Fulson's "Live at the Pitt Inn," George 'Harmonica' Smith's "Mojo Workin'," and Robert Cray's "Who's Been Talkin'." Other blues classics featuring Nat Dove's piano work include Big Mama Thornton's "Stronger Than Dirt" and "The Gospel Soul of Sam Cooke," Volume II. By 1980, Dove had settled in Paris, France from where he toured and performed in major European and Asian cities as the "Texas Boogie King." In 2003, Dove returned to California to take a position at California State University at Bakersfield. Recently honored with the Blues Foundation's 2013 Keeping the Blues Alive Award, Mr. Dove is a respected historian and educator as well as an outstanding musician. An ethnomusicologist at Cal State Bakersfield, Mr. Dove was featured at the Smithsonian Institution's 45th Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C., and has co-authored blues and gospel music instructional books with the legendary Memphis Slim and Mickey "Guitar" Baker. In 2011, he founded the annual Bryan Texas Music Festival.

Elam, David Alexander – AKA Dave Alexander, Omar Sharriff

David Alexander Elam was born March 10, 1938, in Shreveport Louisiana to Tom and Susie Hill Elam. While David was still an infant, the Elam family moved back to Marshall where they previously had been living. He attended elementary schools in Marshall and Pemberton High School, where he was active in the choir and played drums in the band. After attending a free concert performed for the Pemberton student body by famed Boogie Woogie artists Floyd Dixon, a Marshall native, and Houston's Amos Milburn, David became determined to learn to play piano and become a professional musician. Remarkably, except for a single piano lesson, from Mrs. Ella Mae Willis in Marshall, he was self-taught. He slipped past the lock of a neighborhood church where he spent many hours when no one was around practicing on the church's old upright. While still in high school, he learned enough songs to form a small band with several of his classmates to play for small dances and rural juke joints.

In 1955, David joined the Navy and left Marshall for Oakland, California. His time in the Navy was brief and problematic and he was discharged after less than a year. He settled in Oakland where his mother and brother, Jimmy, were also living, and began performing professionally as a drummer, pianist, and vocalist, billing himself as Dave Alexander. By the 1960s, he had become a fixture at Minnie's Can Do Club in San Francisco, where his unique style and growing artistic power attracted the attention of legendary music promoter Bill Graham, who began using him to open for major rock acts such as Bob Dylan and The Rolling Stones at Graham's Fillmore West and other large concert venues. He frequently shared the stage with such legendary artists as Muddy Waters, Big Momma Thornton, Albert King, Nina Simone, Bukka White, Buddy Guy, and numerous others.

Even as Dave Alexander was becoming established as one of the great blues and boogie piano masters of his generation, his personal difficulties increasingly took their toll. He suffered two near-fatal gunshot wounds to the abdomen during a domestic conflict in Oakland in the late 1960s, triggering a lifelong struggle with pain medication and alcohol. Another close brush with death in an automobile accident while touring the West Coast followed. In the early 1970s, he stopped performing and recording as Dave Alexander and tried a variety of Muslim-related names. By 1972, he had settled on "Omar Sharriff," a name he would use the rest of his life. Confusion over his various name changes, combined with chronic health problems for much of the last 20 years of his life, were impediments to his achieving the commercial success his artistic accomplishments merited.

Omar got his birth name from his father's good friend, the obscure but notable Shreveport boogie and blues musician David Alexander, who performed as "Black Ivory King." Omar's father, Tom, was a gifted musician himself, who played boogie and blues piano and guitar.

Omar later recalled that he mostly heard his father playing guitar in the back yard because his mother, Susie, would not permit what she called “Devil music” in the house. In any event, there was no piano in the Elam household. Tom Elam earned his living as a mule skinner in the logging camps in the Piney Woods around the Marshall and Caddo Lake area where, presumably, he learned boogie woogie music from remnants of the generation that created the music. In his later years, Omar remembered his father taking him to the logging camps when he was a child on several occasions and hearing his father and other laborers playing boogie woogie music after work.

On October 25, 1991, Bill Graham died in a helicopter crash and, without Graham’s personal interest in him, Omar’s fortunes continued to decline. A stern perfectionist in his music, he was also articulate and well-read and often expressed controversial opinions on racial and political issues. He had relocated from the Bay Area to Fresno, California where, briefly, he produced his own TV show for public access cable. Although he had many die-hard fans and loyal supporters, his health worsened and his personal difficulties continued to mount. He moved to Sacramento in the mid-1990s, where at the time there was a lively club scene, and continued to record. But economic decline in California’s capitol city and the emergence of DJ driven recorded music in clubs eroded the live music scene. By 2006, when he had open heart surgery, he was unable to support himself without the aid and assistance of friends. In 2008 he played his last major event, the Chicago Blues Festival. Over the next several years, his situation grew so dire that many people thought he had died. Such was his condition in March, 2010, when music historian Dr. John Tennison discovered that Omar Sharriff and Dave Alexander were the same person and that Omar was still living in Sacramento. Tennison’s research on the origins of Boogie Woogie Music had led Marshall, Texas to declare itself to be the “birthplace” of Boogie Woogie, and the city was considering staging a major concert to celebrate the discovery of its musical heritage. With Tennison’s assistance, Sharriff was brought to Marshall to headline a Boogie Woogie Homecoming concert in June, 2010. His performance electrified his old hometown and he was brought back in December to share the stage with international stars Seeley & Baldori. Following that concert, the city of Marshall invited Omar Sharriff to relocate to Marshall as Artist-in-Residence and Boogie Woogie Ambassador. In March, 2011, Omar moved into an apartment provided by the city of Marshall and quickly established himself as the Boogie Woogie Man, playing regular gigs at downtown establishments, headlining concerts, and playing for school groups, civic organizations, reunions, and others. He headlined the 6th Annual T Bone Walker Blues Festival in Linden, Texas, in June, 2011. Sadly, in spite of excellent medical care, Omar’s medical problems worsened. When he died in Marshall, Texas January 8, 2012, he had begun to obtain considerable recognition under the name Omar Sharriff and had European tours and recording sessions pending. In August 2012 he was posthumously inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame as a Master Blues Artist.

Elam, Tom & Susie Hill

Tom and Susie Hill Elam were the parents of David Alexander Elam (born March 10, 1939 in Shreveport, Louisiana.) They had a younger son, Jimmy, who was born in Marshall. Tom Elam worked as a mule skinner in the logging camps around the Marshall and Caddo Lake area and learned to play boogie woogie piano and guitar from barrel house musicians in those camps. They named their first born son after David "Black Ivory King" Alexander, a Shreveport boogie and blues piano player who Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter cited as a major influence on his musical style. Their son David later achieved considerable artistic success, first performing and recording as Dave Alexander and later as Omar Sharriff. Because he first heard boogie woogie music from his father and later became recognized as one of the greatest boogie and blues piano masters of his generation, Dave Alexander/Omar Sharriff was considered by many to be the last living link to the generation that created boogie woogie music in the Piney Woods area of northeast Texas around Marshall. In August, 2012, Dave Alexander/Omar Sharriff was posthumously inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame as a Master Blues Artist.

Henley, Don

Although he was born in nearby Gilmer, Texas, July 22, 1947, Don Henley grew up in Linden, where with his friends Richard Bowden, Jerry Surratt, and Freddie Neese he formed his first band, the Four Speeds, in 1963. After some personnel changes the band became Felicity, and later Shiloh. Although its members were still in high school, Shiloh achieved considerable popularity playing throughout Texas and when they came to the attention of Kenny Rogers, he encouraged them to move to Los Angeles, where he produced and released a record album. Henley and Bowden teamed with guitarist/vocalist Glenn Frey to form the Linda Ronstadt Band and toured with the popular singer until September 1971, when Henley and Frey formed The Eagles. The Eagles became one of the world's most popular and enduring rock bands. Henley has also enjoyed a prominent solo career and recognition as a preeminent songwriter and vocalist. As a member of the Eagles, Don was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1998 and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2000. He is also widely recognized for his activism on behalf of musicians creative rights and for environmental issues. He established the Walden Pond Preservation Fund and the Caddo Lake Institute, a non-profit educational organization that has gained world wide recognition for its efforts to protect Caddo Lake and its wetlands, now recognized as a Wetland of International Significance by the Ramsar Treaty. Henley also remains devoted to his hometown of Linden where he has supported the protection and restoration of the Cass County Courthouse and numerous historic buildings .

Houston, Lawyer

Lawyer Daniel Houston was born in Marshall, Texas in 1917. He was inducted into the army in 1941 and served until 1946. He re-enlisted two months later and served until 1961. His songs "In The Army Since 1941" and "Lawton, Oklahoma Blues" are loosely autobiographical accounts of his time in the Philippines and Fort Sill near Lawton. As writer Neal Slavin notes: "Apart from their unusually informative lyrics, Houston's songs are notable for the springy rhythms with which he accompanies himself. In essence, his style is close to that of Lil' Son Jackson." Two further songs, 'Out In California Blues' and 'Going To The West Coast', were prophetic; in the former, Houston announces his intention of going to Los Angeles' Central Avenue to stay at the Hotel Dunbar, after which 'I'm going out to Hollywood and become a movie star'. The move took place but the Army intervened. They needed him in Korea, where war broke out on June 25, 1950. At his second and last recording session, "Far East Blues" and "Leavin' Korea" indicate a familiarity with Korea and Japan which in this artist's case is virtual proof of his presence there."

Circa 1953/1954 Houston cut eight sides for the Hollywood label in Los Angeles with the sessions purchased by King Records. The sides were never issued and have been reissued for the first time, this year on the 2-CD *Hollywood Blues* on the JSP label. Houston's military service ended in December 1961 and he spent the rest of his life in various Californian communities, ending up in Lancaster, where he worked as a custodian at the California State Museum. He died of pulmonary disease on December 3, 1999. Houston's life story can be found in *Blues & Rhythm* magazine issue 215 written by Guido Van Rijn and Chris Smith. Credit: <http://sundayblues.org/archives/tag/lawyer-houston>

Jonesville Store – T. C. Lindsey & Company General Store

The T. C. Lindsey & Company General Store in Jonesville, Texas, has been in continuous operation since 1847, when Alabaman William Harrison Jones arrived and established the Jones Trading Post near the store's present location. Jones also operated a stagecoach line from the Jonesville settlement to Swanson's Landing, a key steamboat stop for cotton exports on Caddo Lake at the Louisiana/Texas border. Stagecoach service was supplanted by the establishment of the first rail line in northeast Texas in 1856, operated by the Southern Pacific Railway from Swanson's Landing via Jonesville to Marshall, Texas. During the Civil War, the twelve miles of track between Jonesville and Swanson's Landing were removed and used by the Confederate government to build the line east from Jonesville to Shreveport, Louisiana. By 1864, the line had been completed as far as Greenwood, Louisiana, just across the Louisiana border. Following the war, the store moved about a mile to juncture of the eastbound line to Louisiana where the Southern Pacific established a depot. The store is still located at this site. The current building was constructed in 1922. The Jonesville Trading Post was acquired in 1870 by Dr. Samuel Floyd Vaughan, the great-

grandfather of the present owners. Around 1900, his son-in-law T. C. Lindsey purchased and began managing the store. By 1947, brothers Sam and Tom Vaughan had purchased the store and the adjacent cotton gin. The store is owned today by descendants Patricia Ann Vaughan, Marty Vaughan, Ellen Vaughan Miller, and Leila Vaughan and is managed by Tom Miller. The T.C. Lindsey & Company General Store can best be described as a “living museum.” The store’s owners followed a practice of retaining at least one of every item stock item that was discontinued. Entering the store today is a trip back in time. The shelves and walls are adorned with relics of a by-gone day, ranging from farm implements, horse and buggy gear, patent medicines, and household items once essential to rural folk. The store has been featured in numerous magazine articles and TV shows and used in motion pictures and television movies. There can be little doubt that the generation that created boogie woogie music in this area during the 1870s would have passed through the Jonesville community and traded at the T. C. Lindsey & Company General Store, and the store would have appeared then much as it does today.

Joplin, Scott

The “King of Ragtime,” Scott Joplin was born into a musical family on a farm in Cass County near Linden, Texas in late 1867 or early 1868. He was two years old when his family moved to Texarkana, a railroad town divided by the Texas/Arkansas border. Biographers have suggested that his musical education began with young Scott teaching himself on a piano in the home of a white family in which his mother worked as domestic help. It is known that he came to the attention of one Julius Weiss, a German-born music educator in Texarkana, who instructed him in classical European forms including opera. In the 1880s, he worked as a railroad laborer and piano teacher and lived briefly in Sedalia, Missouri, in a neighborhood near the railroad populated by black families. By 1891, he was working with a minstrel troupe that travelled across the South and performed in his old hometown of Texarkana. In addition to piano, Joplin was also an accomplished instrumentalist on cornet, guitar, mandolin, violin and banjo. He returned to Sedalia in 1894 as a full time composer and piano teacher. Among his students were future ragtime composers Arthur Marshall, Scott Hayden, and Brun Campbell. Joplin began publishing his original music in 1895 and in 1899 he published “Maple Leaf Rag,” one of the most enduring and influential of all ragtime compositions. He moved to St. Louis, Missouri, in 1901 and continued to compose and perform, creating a company of 30 performers for a national tour of his first opera, “Guest of Honor.” Tragically, the score of this opera has been lost after it was confiscated with his other belongings when he was victimized by the theft of the box office receipts for his touring company and unable to satisfy his debts. He moved to New York City in 1907 and began work on what would later be considered his masterwork, the opera “Treemonisha.” A partial staging of Treemonisha was not well received, however and despite the success of his classic compositions such as “Maple Leaf Rag,” “The Entertainer,”

and "Bethena," Joplin never recovered financially. His health deteriorated rapidly after he contracted syphilis and he died in the Manhattan State Hospital April 1, 1917 and the age of 49. Joplin was buried in a pauper's grave at St. Michaels Cemetery in East Elmhurst that remained unmarked until 1974 when a revival of interest in Ragtime music and his accomplishments brought to his legacy the acclaim and success that eluded him in life. Much has been written about Joplin's life and his music and can be accessed through internet searches. There is considerable agreement that the vibrant musical environment of northeast Texas played a major role in shaping one of the greatest and most influential talents of his time.

Ledbetter, Huddie "Lead Belly"

There is some confusion and uncertainty about exactly when and where, precisely, Lead Belly was born, and misinformation about his early life that abounds across the internet. Those who are interested in learning more about this amazingly prolific composer, singer, musician, and adapter of American folk music, prison and chain gang songs, and master of the 12 string guitar are advised to tread carefully. Probably the best all-around review of his life is the biography "The Life and Legend of Lead Belly" by Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell. Although it is generally stated that Lead Belly was born on the Jeter Plantation near Mooringsport, Louisiana, Lead Belly himself said that he was born in Leigh, Texas, a small, predominantly African American community just west of the Louisiana/Texas border. Both Leigh and the Jeter Plantation hugged the south shore of Caddo Lake near the old steamboat port of Swanson's Landing where the first railroad in northeast Texas began construction in 1856, running 22 miles to Jonesville and Marshall. During the Civil War, 12 miles of track between Swanson's Landing and Jonesville were pulled up and used to extend the railroad east from Marshall and Jonesville to Shreveport, Louisiana. By the time Lead Belly was born in either 1888 or 1889 near Caddo Lake on one side or the other of the Texas/Louisiana state line, boogie woogie music had arisen in the logging camps in the area and had begun migrating along the rail lines to towns like Texarkana and Shreveport. Lead Belly stated that he first heard boogie woogie "around Caddo" in 1899. Most reviewers have assumed that he meant "Caddo Parish, Louisiana," of which Shreveport is the seat of government. Given that Lead Belly was only 9 or 10 years old in 1899, and definitely living on his father's farm near the Leigh community close to the south shore of Caddo Lake, it seems more likely that he meant Caddo Lake not Caddo Parish. Boogie Woogie music was no doubt being played in the red light district along Fannin Street by that time, however, and Lead Belly recalled being influenced by it when he himself was beginning to develop his own musical style. Describing one old time boogie woogie piano player he admired, Lead Belly recalled "he played that Boogie Woogie. That's what I wanted to play on guitar - that piano bass. I always wanted to play piano tunes. I got it out of the barrelhouses on Fannin Street." Before Lead Belly reached world wide fame with hundreds of iconic songs

he either created or creatively adapted from folk sources, such as “Goodnight Irene,” “Midnight Special,” “Old Cotton Fields Back Home,” “In the Pines” and “Skip to My Lou,” he was frequently in trouble with the law and served hard time in both Texas and Louisiana state prisons for homicide and attempted homicide. It was while he was serving in Louisiana’s infamous Angola State Prison that he was first recorded by Library of Congress folklorists John Lomax and his son, Alan. Before he died of ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease) in 1949, the Lomaxes and others had recorded hundreds of his songs. He is buried at Shiloh Baptist Church cemetery on the Blanchard/Latex Road (Parish Road 6) 1.7 miles east of the Texas/Louisiana state line in only a few miles from Swanson’s Landing at Caddo Lake.

Milburn, Amos

The man Fats Domino called his greatest influence, Amos Milburn, was born in Houston, Texas April 1, 1927. Along with other Texas boogie woogie piano men Floyd Dixon and Little Willie Littlefield, Milburn helped popularize boogie and jump blues during the 1940s and 1950s. His greatest success with recordings were his legendary drinking songs such as “One Scotch, One Bourbon, One Beer” and “Bad, Bad Whiskey.” He scored major R&B hits also with “Hold Me Baby” and “Chicken Shack Boogie.” Milburn was the nephew of longtime Pemberton High School Principal G.A. Rosborough and travelled to Marshall on a number of occasions with his close friend Floyd Dixon to perform free concerts for Pemberton students. Blues Hall of Fame boogie woogie master Dave Alexander/Omar Sharriff often recalled that it was seeing Dixon and Milburn perform at Pemberton that made him determined to become a professional piano player and singer.

Nancarrow, Conlon

Conlon Nancarrow would best become known for composing works for player piano that were so complex they were beyond the technical ability for few if any performers to master. He was born in Texarkana October 27, 1912 and undertook the serious study of music in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Boston, Massachusetts in his early 20s. When the Spanish American War broke out, he went to Spain and fought Francisco Franco’s army with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade before being interned by the French in 1939. Because of his left wing political affiliations and the harassment faced by his Brigade colleagues, he moved to Mexico in 1940. Although he lived in relative obscurity in Mexico for the rest of his life, it was there that he created the work that is today recognized as placing him among the first rank of American composers. After Nancarrow discovered that he could present his original keyboard works best on the player piano, he obtained a custom made manual punching machine to prepare his rolls and he modified pianos to produce complex rhythmic patterns at a speed far faster than human hands. It was at the New Music America festival in San Francisco in 1981, that the full breadth and genius of Nancarrow’s

compositions began to attract interest and respect. In 1982, Nancarrow was one of the first recipients of a MacArthur Foundation “genius” award. His fame and reputation continued to spread after his death in 1997. The complete contents of Nancarrow’s studio, including the player piano rolls, the instruments, the libraries, and other documents and objects, are now in the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel.

Phil Records

Phil Records was located at 216 Lucille Street in Marshall, Texas and was active in 1957-60 in the “hillbilly bop” genre. Their best known recording was Mack & Gwen’s “Baby I Want Another Date With You.”

Porter, Roy

Roy Lee Porter was an American jazz drummer who was born in Walsenburg, Colorado July 30, 1923. During his career, Porter played and recorded with such jazz greats as Dexter Gordon, Teddy Bunn, Howard McGhee, Wardell Gray, Teddy Edwards, and Art Farmer, among others. One of the principal musicians in the Los Angeles Central Avenue jazz scene, he is best known for his recordings with Charlie Parker on the classic Dial releases “Moose the Mooche,” “Yardbird Suite,” “Ornithology,” and “Lover Man.” In 1991, Porter’s memoir “There and Back,” written with David Keller, was published by Louisiana State University Press. Porter devotes a full chapter describing how as an aspiring young musician in Colorado he was determined to enroll in Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, and become a member of the famed Wiley Collegians Jazz Band. Porter’s friend, LeRoy Kirven had been accepted to Bishop College, also in Marshall, in 1941, and Porter decided to accompany him after they had earned enough money for train fare. When he arrived in Marshall, broke, Porter made such an impression on Wiley President Dr. William Dogan that Dogan admitted him to school and provided him a job in the school cafeteria to pay his tuition and board. Before completing his freshman year, Porter was given an audition and soon became a featured solo performer with the Collegians. His memoir also candidly chronicles the substance abuse and racial discrimination that characterized the world of jazz musicians in the 1950s, and his own harrowing experiences, including a prison sentence, with heroin addiction and alcoholism that interrupted a brilliant career. He regarded his time in Marshall and at Wiley College with the Wiley Collegians as the happiest of his memories.

Presley, Elvis

The man who would become the King of Rock and Roll got his first national exposure on the Louisiana Hayride, the iconic country music show broadcast from the Shreveport

Municipal Memorial Auditorium in Shreveport, Louisiana. Elvis's first appearance on the Hayride was on the radio program in 1954. His first television appearance was on the TV version of the Hayride, March 3, 1955. During the period Elvis was a regular on the program, from 1954 to 1956, he and sidemen Scotty Moore and Bill Black frequently performed at high schools, dance halls, and clubs throughout the Arklatex. The first known photograph of Elvis and his first of many Cadillacs was taken at Caddo Lake State Park. A photo of 19 year old Elvis standing on the dock of Johnson's Ranch Marina in Uncertain, Texas, hung for many years in the number one dressing room of Memorial Auditorium. Presley soared to stardom after Colonel Tom Parker bought his contract from the Hayride and secured him a recording contract with RCA. Elvis's final performance on the Hayride was March 31, 1956. Under the terms of the buy-out of his contract, Elvis returned to Shreveport's Hirsch Memorial Coliseum December 15, 1956 to perform a benefit concert for a sold out audience.

Ritter, Tex

Woodward Maurice Ritter was born in the community of Murvaul, Texas, near Carthage January 12, 1905. He attended Carthage public schools before his family moved to Beaumont, where he graduated high school and enrolled in the University of Texas. Adopting the name "Tex," he began singing on KPRC radio in Houston in 1928, and decided to pursue a career in show business in New York City. By 1934 he was an established radio and Broadway performer, specializing in Western and Cowboy songs. When his friend John Lomax brought Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter to New York City to perform for the Texas Exes Club, Ritter used his influence to help Lead Belly with publicity and additional engagements. Years later, when Tex Ritter was a major recording and movie star in Hollywood, he again helped Lead Belly by introducing him to film and record company executives. Tex Ritter was a pioneer "singing cowboy" who was a founding member of the Country Music Association in Nashville, Tennessee, and a lifetime member of the Grand Ol' Opry. The Tex Ritter Museum and Texas Country Music Hall of Fame in Carthage was established in his memory with considerable assistance from the extended Ritter family, many of whom still live in the Carthage and Murvaul area. Ritter recorded many hit records. Among his best known recordings is the theme from the movie High Noon ("Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darlin'." He was the father of popular TV star John Ritter and grandfather of actor Jason Ritter and singer Carly Ritter.

Roadmaster

The man known only as "Roadmaster" was an itinerant piano player in the Marshall and Longview area during the 1940s and early 1950s who was much in demand for house rent parties. Floyd Dixon, in an interview with Living Blues Magazine, described Roadmaster as

the best piano player he had ever seen and lamented that he had never been recorded. Research efforts are underway to uncover information about this mysterious musician. Although no clues to his name have been discovered as of yet, the fact that his nickname is a railroad term and several people have recalled seeing him walking from the direction of the railroad tracks when he would arrive to play a house party suggest that he might have been employed by the Texas & Pacific Railway company, which was headquartered in Marshall during this period. He has been described as short and rotund, always dressed in a suit and vest and wearing a derby hat. In his Living Blues interview and other comments he made about Roadmaster, Dixon said that he was a master of all the boogie woogie bass lines and could play virtually anything his enthusiastic audiences called for. Dixon also described the way Roadmaster often would talk about himself in the third person as he played.

Sharriff, Omar

See Elam, David Alexander.

Sims, Frankie Lee

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana April 30, 1917, Sims grew up in Marshall where he learned to play guitar and began his career as a singer and songwriter. He attended Wiley College and taught school in Palestine, Texas, before enlisting in the Marine Corps, serving three years during World War II. Sims was the nephew of blues singer Texas Alexander and the cousin of Lightnin' Hopkins. His greatest success were "Lucy Mae Blues" in 1954 and "She Likes to Boogie Real Low" in 1957. Now regarded as a major figure in post-War Texas country blues, Sims was a mentor to a number of blues musicians of note, including King Curtis and Albert Collins. He died in Dallas May 10, 1970.

Smith, Bob – "Wolfman Jack"

Robert Weston Smith was born in Brooklyn, New York, January 21, 1938. He became fascinated with radio as a child and became an avid fan of R&B music and an ardent student of the manic disk jockeys who were becoming popular playing R&B and rock records. After a stint as a door to door salesman, he enrolled in the National Academy of Broadcasting in Washington, D.C. Upon graduation in 1960, he adopted the air-name "Daddy Jules" and worked at WYOU radio in Newport News, Virginia. When that station changed formats to Easy Listening, Smith became "Roger Gordon and Music in Good Taste." In 1962, he moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, managing country music station KCIJ and hosting a morning show as "Big Smith with the Records." While still at KCIJ, Smith developed his most famous alter ego, "Wolfman Jack," and began tape recording shows for Inter-American Radio Advertising

company to broadcast over XERF-AM, a notorious high-powered “border blaster” station operating out of Ciudad Acuna in Mexico. His success took him from Shreveport to Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and New York City where he continued to thrive doing public appearances and radio as Wolfman Jack. George Lucas’s affectionate film about California teens coming of age during the early days of Rock and Roll, “American Graffiti,” features Wolfman Jack on the sound track and as himself broadcasting out of a tiny studio modeled on the border radio station XERB in Tijuana. He died in Belvidere, North Carolina, July 1, 1995.

Swanson’s Landing

Swanson’s Landing, one of the first inland ports in Texas, was established by Peter Swanson in 1833 on 20 acres of the south shore of Caddo Lake adjoining the border between Texas and the United States. Swanson constructed docks and warehouses and as the port of entry to Texas when it became the 28th state of the Union in 1945, Swanson’s Landing thrived. After Peter Swanson’s death in 1849, his son Thomas took over management of the family enterprise. In 1857, Swanson’s Landing became the starting point for the first railroad in northeast Texas. The line, which ran 22 miles to Marshall via Jonesville, was initially begun by the Texas Western Railway but completed by the Southern Pacific. During the Civil War, the tracks between Jonesville and Swanson’s landing were pulled up by the Confederate Army and used to extend the line from Jonesville toward Louisiana. It was in this area following the Civil War that logging camps connected to the expanding railroad, now operated by the Texas & Pacific Railway Company. Recently emancipated African Americans working in the logging camps and recreating in the camp barrelhouses originated a unique musical form that was first called “Fast Western” and “Fast Texas” and “Barrelhouse” music and ultimately became known worldwide as “Boogie Woogie.” No longer a port, Swanson’s Landing is private property that is no longer accessible to the general public.

Tennison, John

John Tennison was born in Texarkana, Texas, September 16, 1968. After obtaining his Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from John Hopkins University, Tennison worked in music and entertainment in Los Angeles before entering Stanford Medical School. Upon receiving his M.D., from Stanford, Dr. Tennison completed his psychiatry residency training at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio. With a lifelong passion for music, Dr. Tennison is a multi-instrumentalist who records and performs boogie woogie piano. He is also a respected musicologist and railroad enthusiast. His original research into the origins of Boogie Woogie music prompted the city of Marshall, Texas, to declare itself to be the “birthplace” of Boogie Woogie in 2010.

