ORANGE COUNTY SPECIAL

country dance tunes and blues

LP506

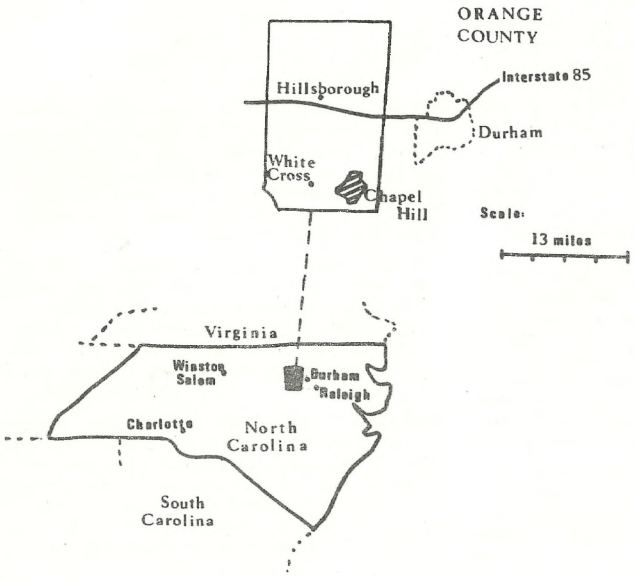
from orange county north carolina

SIDE 1

John Snipes	vcl/bjo	OLD RATTLER RUN THE FOX
Wilburt Atwater	vcl/gtr	SHINE ON
Jamie Alston	gtr	McKINLEY
John Snipes	vcl/bjo	HELLO MY DARLING, HELLO MY BABE
Wilburt Atwater	vcl/gtr	MY BABY'S LEAVING
Willie Trice	vcl/gtr	WILD BILL
Wilburt Atwater	vcl/gtr	GOIN' AWAY BABY AND I SURE DON'T WANT TO GO
Wilburt Atwater	gtr	GO UP ON THE MOUNTAIN

SIDE 2

Willie Trice	vcl/gtr	SWEET SUGAR MAMA
Jamie Alston	gtr	STEP IT UP AND GO
John Snipes	vcl/bjo	LAURA LEE
Willie Trice	vcl/gtr	I AIN'T GOT NOBODY TO HELP ME
Willie Trice	vcl/gtr	MAMIE
Wilburt Atwater	vcl/gtr	LONG TAILED BLUE
John Snipes Jamie Alston	bjo, gtr	MOLLY HARE
Wilburt Atwater	hca	MOLLY HARE
Jamie Alston Tom Carter	gtr, fiddle	DON'T LET THE DEAL GO DOWN



Orange County lies in Central North Carolina, a rural county in the arc of urban industrial towns like Raleigh, Durham and Greensboro. It is bisected east-west by Highway 70, the main communications link between these towns until the postwar building of Interstate Highway 85. The small town of Chapel Hill, in the southeast corner of the county, exercises an imbalance in that since the late eighteenth century it has housed the highly regarded University of North Carolina, injecting, nowadays, some 20,000 students into an otherwise typical southern rural setting. Nevertheless, its twin town of Carrboro, despite having many of these students, exhibits more of the southern small-town flavour than does the university town. Small black bars are there and this is where blacks congregate of Friday and Saturday when they come into town. Two miles out in the country and the university might never have been there. To all intents and purposes, it has had no effect upon the black population, other than providing jobs for some. Socially the old schism between black and white is as marked as ever.

In the 1920's the university held two of the more remarkable scholars in a remarkable institution; a liberal oasis in a recalcitrant South. Howard W. Odum had collected blues in the field as early as 1904 in Mississippi, and was the first active field-collector in the southeastern states, collecting in Newton County, Georgia between 1906 and 1908. Heading the sociology faculty at Chapel Hill, he collaborated with Guy Benton Johnson on collecting negro folk music, and published such studies as early as 1925. Johnson, by 1927, had shrewdly analysed the double-entendre nature of blues lyrics...interestingly, in the "Journal Of Abnormal and Social Psychology"! Sadly by 1930 both these men were so actively engaged in other interests that their earlier, pioneer efforts were no longer extended. Both men collected from local musicians, and were primarily interested in current material, not the XIXth Century 'hangovers' that had interested most folklorists until that time. They collected from Robert Mason, the fine 12-string guitarist remembered by most musicians in the county, who if still around Morrisville, near Raleigh where he probably moved to, must be over 80 today. Intriguingly, Mason's is the only musician's name mentioned by either collector. Not only does this say something for the regard in which they held his ability but also makes us wonder, tantalizingly, just who else they heard and saw!

If the academics were no longer able to follow up their early interest in black folk music in Orange County, the accidents of commercial recording meant that three Orange County bluesmen were to be recorded. James Baxter Long, a white store manager in Kinston, in eastern North Carolina, had begun to realise the potential of black recording artists. In 1934 he took Mitchell's Christian Singers, a black gospel group, to New York to record for the American Recording Company. In 1935, his business ability was such that he was transferred to the larger United Dollar Store at 2501 West Club Boulevard in north Durham. One day someone brought a blind street singer, Blind Boy Fuller, into Long's store and very soon, together with Blind Gary Davis and a guitarist-washboard player, George Washington, they too were off to New York during one of Long's vacations, to record for ARC. Fuller became the most-recorded of Carolina bluesmen and easily the bestknown and most influential, giving rise to a whole generation of younger men who found it hard not to reflect Fuller's marked style. As a side effect it was to mean that some of Fuller's Orange County friends were recorded.

Floyd Council, who then lived in Sunset, the black section of Carrboro, was a fine guitarist and through Fuller, became known to Long, who not only employed Floyd and his wife for a while, but twice took Floyd to New York to record on his own and with Fuller. Six of Floyd's songs were released and he played second guitar behind Fuller on many others; the only other known man,beside Gary Davis during Fuller's first recording trip, to back him. In one song, "I don't want no hungry woman" (Flyright LP106, Bull City Blues), Floyd sings of the 'black bottom' district in Sunset :

"Now I'm goin' down in Tin Can Alley,
and get as drunk as I can be,
Yes, get drunk as I can be,
Now, don't want no hungry woman
to lay her hands on me."

Richard and Willie Trice knew Fuller very well after he recorded in 1935. Mayo Williams had come to Durham in order to get Fuller to record for Decca, as Fuller had someone write to the company suggesting he would record for them. Fuller had told both the Trices to be at his house when Williams came.

"Fuller moved off Pryor to Colfax, right on the corner of Carfax. I sat down and played two. Fuller played him one. Then Fuller went inside and Mr. Williams went in there with him. So Fuller called us in there and told us he was going to carry us with him."
(Willie Trice)

They all recorded in New York in July 1937 but it transpired that Fuller was still under contract to ARC and J.B.Long. Long put pressure on Decca, who had released one record of Fuller and one by Willie Trice. They held off all other releases, including Richard Trice's, until Fuller's death. Richard first heard of the release of his record in 1969!

Perhaps the best-known Orange County performer

is Elizabeth Cotton, carried to fame on the wave of folk consciousness that struck the U.S.A. in the 1960s, thanks to the publicity given by Mike Seeger. In July 1972 she received the Burl Ives award at the Wolftrap Theatre in Washington D.C. in commemoration of her unique contribution to folk music. In no way wishing to detract from that award, made no doubt, in all good faith, and to a delightful folk artist, her style is no more than that of pre-blues Orange County and can be heard in other Orange County musicians on this album....Wilbur Atwater is a distant cousin but just how distant, musically, are "McKinley" and "Wild Bill" on this album? This gentle finger-picking style was doubtless part of a wider fabric of black secular pre-blues music in the State, for Elester Anderson's "Further Down The Road" (Flyright LP 505 "Carolina Country Blues") is from the northeastern section of the state. Certainly Elizabeth Cotton's material is of folk, pre-blues origins and is the only recorded material in any depth of secular black music of the turn-of-the-century years in North Carolina. That this music remained with her in her employment as domestic in a white house, where folk music was of supreme importance is less surprising than to find it still evident in the rural environment that gave rise to the music, perhaps nearly a century ago.

That really is what this album is all about.

Two factors are essential when collecting in the field; perseverence and luck. In gathering material for this album both featured prominently.

In August 1969, a casual remark by Buddy Moss, one of the finest Piedmont bluesmen, suggested that Richard and Willie Trice (see Flyright 106 "Bull City Blues" for their complete recorded output) might still be in Hillsborough, North Carolina, where he had last seen them in 1951. A thin lead. A death record of a Willie Trice was located in Hillsborough but no trace of Richard. The postmaster suggested I try Chapel Hill, just a few miles down the road, saying that there were many Trices there. No Richard Trice was listed in the telephone book and none was known at the post office but a phone-call at random to the first Trice in the phone-book put me in touch finally with Thurman Atkins, who ran a cab company in Chapel Hill. Not only did Thurman know the Trices but directed me to where Richard worked in Durham. That afternoon Pete Lowry and I met Willie Trice. The death certificate had been for another Willie Trice. Luck . . . and perseverance.

Back in Chapel Hill in September 1972 I re-located Floyd Council, thanks again to Thurman Atkins. One evening at Floyd's, some two months later, his brother-in-law, Gallie Farrington, mentioned that he had tried to purchase a steel National guitar from someone about three miles up the road but had been unable to get it. Following up that lead, I ran across Jamie Alston cutting down trees near his home one Sunday afternoon. Sure, he still had the guitar. Sure, he still played it. With disbelief he listened to cassette recordings of Blind Boy Fuller and Floyd Council and invited me to his home a few days later. When I arrived Wilbert Atwater was also there. Wilbert's daughter had married Jamie's son, so they were close. It soon became obvious that both were good musicians but were out of practise. Wilbert was very quiet and seldom played. Jamie never does sing, and Wilbur was reluctant to do so at first. As meetings continued, they began to realise that I was serious and they became used to the different people who called by. In January 1973, Joan Fenton and Michael Levine came down from New York to videorecord Carolina bluesmen on a grant from Columbia University, made possible by Michael's father. We videotaped Wilbert and Jamie as well as Willie Trice, and the former two were beginning to get as much confidence as Willie Trice, whom I frequently visited and who had been heavily recorded by Pete Lowry for Trix Records. By the time Cecilia Conway of the English Department at U.N.C. and I were videotaping Wilbur, they were both now quite used to seeing tape recorders and equipment. They came to see the Blues Festival that I put on at the University in late March 1973 and even travelled over to see Peg Leg Sam and Henry Johnson play at a gig at Duke University in Durham the following week. By now it was going to be possible to record them.

Perhaps a note about the recordings first... they were informal as far as they could be. They were made in people's homes or at friends houses. Others were often present. Wilbur wanted to record out of doors one afternoon, as it was a nice day. Pete Lowry and I had to hope that the tractors in a nearby field and the aeroplanes from the local airport would somehow know what we were doing! The little girls being looked after by John Snipes' wife often joined in the music; other people turned up the Saturday night when John, Jamie and I were trying to get a few things down. Etc etc etc.. Despite such hazards, I am a firm believer in the fact that amateur musicians are always more relaxed, more "themselves", when being recorded - itself an inhibiting procedure - in their own homes. If the quality of the sound suffers, and I am by no means certain that it follows that it does, I'm convinced the music is better. If there are fluffs - and there are - they matter far less than the fact that a glimpse of a black musical culture is given. A glimpse, for it is no more than that...it doesn't even reflect the music of all black Orange County musicians. Yet to be covered are Floyd Council, Dump Fair, George Letlow, Dallas Baldwin...what it does show is the breadth of the musical tradition in just one small North Carolina county. How much more is there?

The answer must be clear.

I must admit that when I came to N.C. in 1970 to gather material for my book "Crying for the Carolines" (Studio Vista, 1971) I partly expected to be documenting the final chapter in the history of the blues in the Carolinas. However, listening to Willie Trice play, I began to have doubts. Tapes sent by local collectors Danny McLean and Ken Bass made it very clear that blues still remained in some quantity. Most of a year spent travelling with Pete Lowry while based in Chapel Hill has made it very obvious that there is still much fine, traditional music to be heard there.

Traditional music, and not only blues. Once I made the initial contacts around Chapel Hill, it became clear that there remained in considerable depth the older pre-blues dance music. This has never been adequately documented although occasionally such items are recorded, as in Blind Boy Fuller's raggy dance numbers or the folk songs of Elizabeth Cotton. I found not just a vague recollection of such material but musicians who not only recalled such tunes easily but as in the case of John Snipes, were unable to play in any other style. Thus this glimpse of the black secular music of Orange County well shows the diversity of the tradition and I have given special weighting to the pre-blues traditions, as they have been almost entirely neglected. What was most interesting was that the musicians themselves never made the ethnocentric distinctions of blues and non-blues that we make. When asked for old pieces, Jamie Alston saw little difference between "Old Joe Clark", which he played with a white string band, "Long Tailed Blue", an old black banjo piece, "Holy Ghost", a hymn, or "Baby let me lay it on you", which he got from Fuller's record.

Orange County, before the 1920s and the advent of race phonograph records, abounded with musical talent. Many fine black banjo players existed then and Willie Trice recalls his Uncle Luther:

> "Luther . . he was older than any of them (other uncles). Played banjo. He was good. Right too. Played 'Coo Coo was a fine bird', 'Old Black Annie'. He played that song about 'Reuben' you know, on banjo; he played 'John Henry'. If he could have met someone back then who was in the business of making records, he'd bin a good one. He'd a bin a whole lot better than ones as was out. He was the onliest man as could play that 'Shine on harvest moon'. If he'd take a guitar and tune it in Spanish, he could play it too. He died in 1933. He called them ragtime songs. He played blues and could play rags; he didn't call them blues then you know. He was still playing when I was starting out."

John Snipes learned most of his songs before 1900 from three of the finest banjo players around Orange County. Duke Mason was from Durham and his brother Robert, born c.1890, was one of the best twelve-string guitarists around. Will Baldwin was Wilbert Atwater's father-in-law, and the finest banjo player in the county, by all accounts. Jamie Alston's grandfather, Dave Alston, was another banjo player, and besides handing some of his skills on to John Snipes, taught his son, Jamie Snr., who became one of the best dance tune guitarists in the county. Jamie Alston Snr.,(Bud or Buddy to his friends) played most of the time with John Snipes; indeed it seems John played on his own if not playing with Buddy Alston.

Orange County had many other fine musicians. Bill Britton, long since dead, was a banjoist. Willie Cotton, one of whose sons married Elizabeth Cotton, was a good guitarist but also played banjo. Matthew "Matty" Hackney's brother used to play banjo and mandoline, and although Matty tried the latter, he mostly played guitar - he doesn't play now but Jamie and Wilbert remember him as a good player in Spanish tuning. Some 77 years of age and a veteran of the First World War in France, Matty Hackney recalls playing with a string band in Chatham County, to the immediate south of Orange County. Round Chapel Hill, Floyd Council played guitar with Thomas Stroud on mandoline or ukelele, and Leo Stroud, his brother, playing tambourine and drums. Sometimes Thomas would play ukelele using a bass drum and he and Floyd would play for parties around the county. Floyd also played with George Letlow, who played tenor-banjo and mandoline. Jamie Alston's brother-in-law, Jim Baldwin also played quitar with Thomas Stroud and was by repute as good a musician as Floyd Council. Baldwin died as late as October 1971.

This is by no means exhaustive of the musicians who played around Orange County and who still live there; merely an expression of the influences felt by some of the men who appear on this album. Orange County had a lot of musicians in the 1920s and 1930s; and by no means all of them black. It is significant that some of those named by Snipes and Jamie Alston as being good musicians were white. John Snipes recalls the only fiddler he knew as being white - and it seems he only played occasionally with him. It was a white man who fixed his splendid fretless banjo, obtained 50 years ago from his brother Floyd, after its neck had been broken. Willie Trice, trying to recall fiddlers in the county, recalled a father-son fiddle-guitar duet with whom he often played, as they lived on adjoining farms. It slowly became apparent that they were white. If there is overlap, or interrelationship between white and black country dance music dating effectively from pre-blues times, Jamie Alston epitomises this, for he was the only black member of an otherwise all white string band. Carey Lloyd played fiddle, Tom Bradshaw banjo and Jamie guitar. Sometimes Leo Wilson was added on fiddle and Grady Snipes on banjo; sometimes Lloyd or Bradshaw's sons would sit in on banjo and John Mann would come up from Chatham County to play

guitar also. But Jamie was the only black musician. This was in the mid-1930s and Jamie's repertoire reflects influences of traditional white country pieces, country dance pieces of the black tradition, pop tunes featured by the string band and blues learned from local musicians and trips into Durham and Hillsborough.

Orange County had a lot of music. As Jamie Alston said:

> "We used to play somewhere every night, it seems. We'd play a little party, or if we didn't do that, we'd be at the house playin'. You could stay in practice then. I remember we used to come down to your (John Snipes) house - me, my daddy and Uncle Walker (Baldwin). You used to play...could eat that banjo up!"

People would play over most of the weekend. Floyd Council took his guitar everywhere with him and was easily prevailed upon to play it.

> "Floyd - he'd get that drink and say it get in his fingers. He'd work with it then! We used to have a lot of fun back then."

As a small boy before 1920, Willie Trice remembered his mother playing for "eight-hand sets" - barndances - for dances and parties, often held at the schoolhouse. Music was an integral part of the social fabric. Barndances drew neighbours together, as did a barn-raising. Weekends always included music at somebody's house. Willie Trice would sling his heavy steel National over his back and walk the eight miles into Chapel Hill.. ..and more often than not, then walk up towards Hillsborough or even down towards Pittsboro... when he wasn't heading into Durham to the tobacco warehouse or out to Blind Boy Fuller's house. Weekends would see the local musicians moving a little farther afield. Rarely, Blind Boy Fuller would come out into the country north of Chapel Hill to play and Floyd Council remembers seeing him on the streets in Chapel Hill. Robert Mason would visit his singing partner, Odell Walker, in Chapel Hill and Thee McGhee would come into Hillsborough. It is too easy, in an age of convenient travel, to assume that local bluesmen travelled considerable distances, or that blues singing living a few miles from each other must have influenced each other.

Willie Trice, who lived some six miles outside Durham, and had done so since he was born in 1910, first knew of Fuller after the latter had recorded in 1935. Fuller had been resident in Durham for at least three years by that time. In fact, Willie had known Gary Davis - Blind Gary as he always calls him - since 1932, when they first met in Durham. Gary also stayed with a cousin of Willie's and obviously knew Fuller and still Gary recorded before Willie got to hear of Fuller.

Hardly surprising, then, that within the broader traditions of the blues in the Southeastern states, local traditions grew up.

Jamie Alston was born October 18th, 1907, in Chatham County but moved into Orange County when he was six years old.

> "My daddy used to play guitar and I watched him. I learned how to play guitar when I was big enough to hold it in my lap. Daddy held the guitar and I'd stand up aside that guitar and play it. I couldn't hold it in my hands. I didn't really get to playing it cos it took the time...I used to play with peoples all the time. At home I'd play by myself but I'd go out and play with others. We used to play square dances - I used to go out to Chapel Hill and White Cross - play the club there."

Jamie's father was a fine musician and Jamie was born into a musical family. Grandfather, Dave Alston, played banjo and even Jamie's sister, Minnie, played guitar. These musical links were extended when Jamie's son married Wilbert Atwater's daughter. Jamie was always too busy with work to take playing guitar as seriously as he would have wished, but the fact that he still had his steel National guitar proves that the music was important to him. Although he doesn't play it much, he is not far out of practice. He doesn't sing when he plays but is happy enough to play behind anyone else. His son was somewhat intrigued that people were interested in his father's playing but more than once asked his father to play his favorite, "Careless Love", before he went out for the evening. Not such a distant past...

"McKinley"* is melodically the same tune as the white country "White House Blues". It is one of the tunes most commonly played by both Jamie and Wilbert Alwater, and Wilbert plays a nice version together with John Snipes. Though this came from Buddy Alston, it is by no means purely local. "Step it up and Go" is perhaps Jamie's favorite number and was always on demand when he was playing with the string band. As Jamie ruefully but good-humouredly remarked, the crowd always clamoured for this tune from him and the band would leave him to play a long version while they took their break - meaning that Jamie often never got one! Perhaps surprisingly this is not the Blind Boy Fuller version - not only did Jamie not learn it from the disc but never even knew Fuller had made it! He learned it from a white musician, Jim Price, who used to play around the warehouses in Hillsborough. It is close to a number of white versions, and Sam McGee's will serve as a good example. He called it "Boogie" and it was issued on Folkways FTS 31007 (an album entitled "Milk 'em in the evening blues").

* See Neil V. Rosenberg, "The 'Whitehouse Blues' - 'McKinley' - Cannonball Blues' Complex." JOHN EDWARDS MEMORIAL FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER; V:12, no. 10 (June 1968), 45ff.

"Don't Let The Deal Go Down" became popularised by Charlie Poole, who was from Almance County, to the immediate west of Orange County. It is very likely he put the words to an existing rag progression. Although not the first recording of the tune, Poole's became a 'hit', and the tune became known affectionately among white fiddlers of the lowlands and the Piedmont simply as the "Deal". Although fiddle is not Tom Carter's first choice of instrument - he plays banjo and can be heard on that instrument on the Fuzzy Mountain String Band's second release on Rounder - I wanted to use this rather than a guitar-banjo duet, partly because I have included a tune in which John Snipes plays banjo with Jamie's guitar, but also because Jamie used to play with white fiddlers, and this tune helps fill out that facet of Jamie's musical tradition.

Wilbert Atwater, born May 8 1905, has lived all his life around Orange County, within a mile or two of where he now lives. Unlike Jamie, he has never had any close relationship, musically or otherwise, with whites. Thus he appeared somewhat reticent yet always showed up whenever we had a musical gathering at Jamie's house. Slowly he lost some of his shyness, although he is by nature a quiet unobtrusive man, and showed that he had a wide repertoire of older songs. Many in his family played instruments. Rufe Atwater played fiddle, brother Tom plays harmonica; Wilbert's sister Betty, played piano and married Charlie Farris, a harmonica player, and his mother had married Will Baldwin, who was a fine banjo player. Will's brother, Walker Baldwin, played mandoline and a little guitar. Dallas Baldwin, still somewhere in Orange County, has a reputation of being a good guitarist, but we never did get to meet him. Like John Snipes, Wilbert learned a lot from Will Baldwin and his friendship with Jamie Alston, well before their children married, meant that Wilbert also learned from the wide repertoire of Buddy Alston. Wilbert never played with other musicians, and never in a band, as did Jamie. He'd play by himself, for himself, and occasionally play parties, but he never took the music as seriously as did Jamie, and for this reason his repertoire is narrower. However, it is also more traditional, for he never played the popular songs of the day such as the string band were asked to perform. Those popular songs he does share with Jamie come from Buddy Alston... like "You've got to see your mama every night" and "Yes, Sir! That's my baby".

"My baby's leaving" and "Going away baby" are both blues in Wilbert's very personal style. He is a true folk artist; not bothering with niceties like guitar introductions - he starts to sing almost immediately - he speeds up his time and sings verses when it suits him, unfettered by conventions. "Shine On" is an old blues from Orange County and Willie Trice recalls his Uncle Luther playing this - "he was the onliest man could play that 'Shine on Harvest Moon'". There seems little doubt that Blind Boy Fuller incorporated it in a number of his melodies. "Long Tailed Blue" is a very old local dance * tune and one can hear the obvious transposition from banjo. Indeed, John Snipes remembers it as the first tune he learned from Dave Alston. Wilbert probably learned it from Buddy Alston, Dave's son, as he did "Go up on the mountain", which Wilbert always plays as an instrumental piece. "Molly Hare" finds Wilbert playing harmonica, although he has not played for a long time. He uses the older 'suck-and-blow' style which Peg Leg Sam, a veteran medicine-show harmonica player, calls 'accordian style'.

John Snipes, born before the turn of the century, is a musical anachronism. His repertoire consists solely of the old black country dance pieces of pre-blues vintage. He knows no blues although he enjoys hearing others play them. He learned banjo when he was still a boy and picked up most of his songs from the older banjo players in Orange County. His brother, Floyd, gave him his present banjo some 50 years ago. It is a very small fretless model; entirely in the Appalachian tradition. John would play around in the county for parties and at dances and only ever played with Buddy Alston, who played guitar. He remembered he would come in from the fields at mid-day and take his banjo off the wall and play, then eat lunch, and play again till he had to go back to the fields. Farming all his life, he never had time to do more than play for his own enjoyment, but must have been a superb musician. He would keep saying, having just played a fine piece, that we ought to have heard him years ago when he was good. If Buddy Alston sought him out to play with him, he must indeed have been good. When I first located him, having driven over with Wilbert and Jamie in Jamie's car, he hadn't played for some six years. His banjo had two strings and no bridge. More strings and a chip off a nearby tree, whittled into shape, showed that he still had much of his ability. Intrigued to find he could still play, and people were interested in his music, he practiced a little.

He played with Jamie on steel-guitar, with Wilbert in some fine guitar-banjo duets, by himself and with Tom Carter on both banjo and fiddle. Tom was a graduate student in folklore at the University at Chapel Hill and was collecting fiddle tunes from the hills. Tom is primarily a banjo player and sees John's banjo style as very close to the white tradition. John drops his thumb regularly over the middle strings, as in the clawhammer style, yet the drop thumbing seems to be rhythmic as opposed to melodic. A white mountain musician would tend to use the thumb to obtain a certain melody. Interestingly, when John Snipes plays a white dance tune, like "Soldier's Joy", the use of the thumb seems to be more melodic. Most of his pieces seem to be built on chordal progression instead of a melody line. A common one he uses (in the key of G) would be G-C-G-C_6-Eminus-G-D-G.

* (a minstrel song found in XIXth Century sheet music)

Learned from Duke Mason from Durham, "Ole Rattler" was obviously John's special number and is close to white versions recorded. He had played this a number of times before but had never quite caught it as he did here. Jamie and I had gone over to see John one Saturday night hoping he would feel in the mood to play, but we were constantly interrupted by a never-ending stream of visitors. John lives a long way down a red-dirt track, which becomes so sticky in wet conditions that I'd park my car on the top of the hill and walk down rather than chance getting stuck there until it dried out, but it was anything but isolated that night. Nevertheless, somehow everyone left and before John became too tired, we recorded his version of the "Fox Chase" as well as "Molly Hare", with Jamie's steel guitar adding a gentle quality to the banjo.

In the latter, Jamie misses a chord change, but with his string band training, soon picks up the melody. A mistake perhaps, but telling us something about his past. The other two songs by John Snipes were recorded when a small team came to videorecord local bluesmen. In John's tiny front room, there were John, his wife, two small girls that they were looking after, and five of us...plus machines and cameras. Somehow we avoided getting in each other's way and John - having got over the surprise of the camera - began to play well. Delighted to see himself played back on our portable television, his playing reflects the relaxed atmosphere of an otherwise very cold January afternoon.

Of all the musicians featured here, Willie Trice is best known to me. Pete Lowry and I first met Willie in August 1969, following that lead from Buddy Moss. Since that time Pete and I have frequently recorded Willie. He has been featured at two concerts at the University of North Carolina and is playing more guitar than at any time since he was a young man.

He was born to Lula Mae and Reuben Trice on February 10 1910, and has lived all his life in Orange County, within a mile or so of the Durham County line. Willie grew up in a strongly musical environment. Both his parents played instruments. His father played a little guitar and harmonica but his mother was a good guitarist, as well as playing organ for the church. His maternal grandfather played guitar and was a music teacher. He taught Willie's mother to read and Willie well remembered him playing when he was young. Although he lived until 1946 he had stopped playing years before then. Lula Mae:

> "she could play and when she got to pickin' we'd all sit on the floor. I said I had to get me one. I was little then. My daddy wouldn't let me put my hands on it. Yes sir, she used to play."

Both Willie's father and maternal grandfather played spirituals but his uncles Luther and and Albert Trice played the older country dance tunes. Clarence Couch, his mother's brother, played slide guitar, and from these three men the young Willie picked up the rudiments of playing guitar. Albert's playing partner, Bud Johnson, helped Willie play in open tuning.

> "Nobody didn't show me nothin'. I just started up...bottlenecking. Take a screen wire like that (points to the floor) and make a fine string and mama had a clothes line, and this string, cord, made the basses on it. I had two, three basses on it. I had two or three other strings on there and we'd cut nails, you know, and tune it up with. I'd get out there behind a tree and tune it up. It sounds good to me.
>
> When it come to rain, I'd leave my little old guitar outside laying out there under a tree, and all the strings went slack. I'd cut me a chip, a hard chip - as a bridge you know. I used to see my daddy coming in from the fields...he raised tobacco then...and I'd run and hide it. I didn't want him to see me with it. I'd be about nine years old."

Pretty soon he became able to play simple tunes and other children would want him to play.

> "My uncle's children, they wanted me to play cos I played with a bottleneck. I had real strings on that old plank I had - sound pretty good too. I taken an old pail lid and nailed it down (for the body) on a plank and made some holes there, put the strings through and hooked them back on the wood, you know. Then I'd set my bridge under that and anytime it get too high, I'd cut it down. Then after I quit, I went out to work then, Richard, he'd make himself one."

Richard, younger brother by seven years, began playing with Willie in the early 1930s. Willie had effectively acquired his mature playing style by about 1927 and by the time he got to hear of Blind Boy Fuller in 1935, he had been playing over a decade. Richard began to follow Fuller's style and recorded postwar as Little Boy Fuller - very much in Fuller's style. Willie maintained his own style, as shown on his 1937 Decca sides, although he could and still can play in Fuller's style.

Although Richard was to record for Savoy during the 1940s (twice in fact), Willie never again recorded commercially. He stopped playing in about 1963, though he kept his steel National guitar. Since that time, Willie has lost both his legs through illness, which has meant that his guitar has offered him something to take his mind away from the fact he can no longer get about. His playing has improved steadily and today he has a most impressive technical ability. He constantly reworks songs - they

may appear quite different on consecutive hearings. Often he won't play a number until it is as close to what he wants as he thinks he will get it. Then he'll see how you like it. His repertoire is extensive and he is always pulling out another old number, often with little or no warning. He constantly makes up little dance pieces entirely in the older tradition, so much so that it seems they must be years old. Maybe they have the melodic strain of an old tune but Willie will have reworked it considerably. I saw a lot of Willie while I was in Chapel Hill; I'd be out chatting, listening to him play almost every week for some nine months and yet he never ceased to surprise me with his music. You just never grow used to him. He is a fine person and an excellent musician. There's something unjust about his inability to get about, so that few people will ever get to see and hear him. What a tragedy.

"Wild Bill" is a delightful dance tune in E that Willie learned from his Uncle Albert - one of the first he learned. This was the first time I have ever heard him sing to the tune. It came about quite unexpectedly as we were video-recording him. The camera-operator wanted a cut-away shot over Willie's shoulder and I'd just asked Willie to play anything while they filmed him...this was the result. A really beautiful example of black pre-blues country music.

"Mamie" was the first tune Willie learned to play and like "Shine On" was local to the region. Floyd Council also recalled it as one of the first tunes he learned to play. Blind Boy Fuller cut the song at a session when Floyd was present, two years after Fuller had met Willie. Willie proudly claims this as one of two songs Fuller obtained from him, yet most interestingly fills his version with many Gary Davis runs. Willie's admiration for Gary is evident and this must be one of the best uses of Gary's stylistic traits ever made.

"Sweet Sugar Mama" is most interesting in that Willie departs from his own highly personal, slightly staccato style to use Fuller's techniques. Willie never copies other artist's works in their entirety but often consciously uses elements in their style that he wants to work into his own numbers and he often draws on Buddy Moss, whom he knew very well, and Joshua White, as well as the more obvious artists that he knew in person.

"I ain't got nobody" is played in the key of A, capoed to B and is very much in the style of George Washington, better known as Bull City Red, a light-skinned Negro from Durham. Red played washboard with Fuller but also played guitar and recorded in this capacity when Fuller first went to New York to record (see Flyright LP 106 'Bull City Blues' and Flyright LP 107 'Piedmont Blues' Volume 2). It is very closely modelled on "Richmond Blues". Willie Trice's blues numbers on this album reflect many of the rich influences of bluesmen around Durham and Orange Counties in the 1930s.

Here, then, is that glimpse at the secular black music of a small North Carolina county, fortunate in having a number of fine folk artists but perhaps no more than a host of other Southern counties that may never be investigated. A whole lifestyle is vanishing and few people either realize or care. Let us hope a little of it can be documented before it is too late, because, believe me, there will be no going back.

bruce bastin