

Herman Arnspiger

Arnspiger, Herman: Born in Van Alstyne, Texas, on November 13, 1904, guitarist Herman Arnspiger is best remembered as one of the first musicians to play alongside Bob Wills in the early days of western swing. Arnspiger and Wills met in Fort Worth in 1929, while Wills was fiddling and performing in blackface with a traveling medicine show. Arnspiger invited Wills back to his rented room, where they played for hours. Wills asked Arnspiger to join him, and the two performed together in the medicine show until it closed in December 1929. Although they parted ways, they rejoined in 1930 following a chance encounter in Fort Worth.

In the summer of 1930, Wills and Arnspiger were playing a house dance in Fort Worth when they heard another singer, Milton Brown. Wills invited Brown and his guitar-playing brother, Derwood, to join the band. They called themselves the Wills Fiddle Band and soon found work playing at the Eagles Fraternal Hall in Fort Worth and at other venues in the area. The group also landed a spot on KFJZ Radio before going on to play on WBAP Radio. Through their radio appearances, they attracted the attention of W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel, manager of Burrus Mill, who gave them a regular radio program on which they appeared as the Light Crust Doughboys. The group became so popular that, when station managers removed the Doughboys from the air, angry listeners flooded the station with letters and phone calls, pressuring the management to rehire the band.

Despite their success on radio, the musicians quickly became frustrated with O'Daniel's overbearing management style. Milton Brown left the group in September 1932 to form his own band, The Musical Brownies. Bob Wills departed in 1933, forming his own band, The Texas Playboys. In 1934, Arnspiger had a disagreement with O'Daniel and left to join Wills in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as one of the Playboys. Arnspiger continued performing with Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys until 1940, whereupon he became a pilot and instructor for Spartan School of Aeronautics. He also later worked for Douglas Aircraft as a test pilot. In 1945, Arnspiger set up the Aviation Department at the Sunray Oil Company, from which he retired in 1964. He lived the remainder of his life in Tulsa with his wife, Rowena Arnspiger, and daughter, Glenda Goodwin. Arnspiger died in a Tulsa nursing home on February 21, 1984, at the age of 79.

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