

The History of Early Bluegrass in Texas¹

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Moag and Campbell: The History of Early Bluegrass in Texas

The literature on bluegrass music as a national phenomenon encompasses a broad spectrum of publications from sources as diverse as academia, the music industry, and the popular press. Coverage of bluegrass in Texas, however, is a different matter. Fleeting mentions of Texas bluegrass bands appear in books treating bluegrass as an American phenomenon. Festival notices, album reviews, and occasional stories on Texas bands have appeared in national bluegrass magazines.

Tom Uhr and Bill Parvin, 1951, "Promo pics" at WOAI Radio Tower, San Antonio, Texas, courtesy of Tom Uhr

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Bluegrass music in Texas has received even less recognition in publications from within the state than without. Joe Carr and Alan Munde's *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights: A History of Country Music in West Texas*, includes a 20-page chapter on bluegrass in West Texas.² However, most books dealing with Texas music have, at best, given bluegrass a passing mention and, at worst, given misleading information on the subject. Larry Willoughby's 1984 book, *Texas Rhythm—Texas Rhyme*, in

a single mention of bluegrass lists four bands—Grassfire, Leon Valley Boys [actually Leon Valley Bluegrass], the Shady Grove Ramblers, and Tennessee Valley Authority—characterizing them as "a part of the country music scene in Texas."³ *Singing Texas*, edited by F. B. Abernathy, is

a book of traditional Texas folk songs first published in 1983 and reprinted in 1994. It contains photographs of both Texas and national bluegrass musicians, but it does not identify them or even mention the genre of bluegrass.⁴ *The Handbook of Texas Music*, published by the Texas State Historical Association, in a single mention of bluegrass, reprints an erroneous statement citing Homer "Bill" Callahan (d. September 12, 2002) of the Callahan Brothers as a "Bluegrass, hillbilly, and western musician."⁵

While books about Texas music have given minimal coverage to bluegrass music in the state, a number of bluegrass newsletters published by regional bluegrass associations in the 1970s, as well as articles from local newspapers, provide important insight into the state's bluegrass history. Because regional bluegrass association newsletters did not appear until the 1970s, our understanding of the earliest days of Texas bluegrass relies largely on oral interviews. Fortunately, I was able to interview at least one surviving member of nearly every early band discussed in this article. I also have included a "Roster of Early Texas Bluegrass Bands" in order to provide additional information about the bands.

Since Texas has a unique fiddling tradition that blended various musical influences into Texas swing, one might wonder whether there is also a unique character to Texas bluegrass. We shall explore this question and look at the role of support mechanisms, such as recordings, radio and TV broadcasts, regional bluegrass associations, and festivals, in the development of Texas bluegrass. We shall see how, despite regional variation, bluegrass has come to be an independent and self-sustaining musical genre in nearly all parts of the state.

In looking at Texas bluegrass from the 1950s to the 1980s, I propose a two-stage model of the development of bluegrass as an independent musical genre, consisting of a "Subordinate Stage," in which bluegrass is merely a particular style of country music, and an "Independent Stage," in which a variety of support mechanisms and a distinct fan base give it an identity

completely separate from country music. I characterize the development of bluegrass music in Texas as a process rather than a binary switch from one stage to the other. This model accounts for the varying pace of transition and the distinct timelines found in the different regions of the state. To my knowledge, this has not been articulated before, though national writers, such as Neil V. Rosenberg and Bill C. Malone have previously identified many of the same trends and factors in bluegrass music's development.

A Brief Overview of Bluegrass Music in Texas

The story of bluegrass in Texas begins in 1950 with the Mayfield Brothers. Three members of a ranching family near Dimmitt, in West Texas, they modeled their music on that of Bill Monroe.⁶ Since many regarded Monroe's style as simply a type of "country music," those who played this music in Texas generally regarded themselves as "country" musicians. The term "bluegrass," derived from Monroe's band name, The Blue Grass Boys, first appeared in print in 1957.⁷ It gradually found currency through the folk music revival of the 1960s, which recognized bluegrass as a valid folk music distinct from commercial country music.⁸

The mid 1950s found one bluegrass group each in Houston and Dallas, where they played weekly radio shows and made 45-rpm records. Both groups made their final recordings in 1964, by which time three other bluegrass bands had formed in the Dallas area. However, Houston's next bluegrass band did not appear until 1966. Abilene was home to the Black Mountain Boys, who toured with George Herbert Walker Bush in his unsuccessful 1964 senatorial campaign.⁹ By the late-1960s, there was at least one serious bluegrass group in every region of the state.

The 1970s brought an increase in the number of bands, along with fans to support them. It also witnessed the spread of four trends (already operational in the eastern United States) that moved Texas bluegrass music toward becoming an independent musical genre in the state. These were 1) the introduction of bluegrass festivals, which provided new venues for these bands, 2) the emergence of bluegrass associations, most of which published newsletters and held festivals, 3) the proliferation of bluegrass radio shows, and 4) a large wave of second-generation bluegrass players, who had come to the music as a result of the folk revival of the 1960s.

Rosenberg has labeled the building of a constituency for this music as "the bluegrass consumer movement."¹⁰ Whereas first-generation bluegrass fans drew their inspiration from commercial country music of the 1940s and 1950s and avoided the rock-and-roll craze of the 1950s, second-generation musicians and fans embraced newer forms of music. As we look at the development of bluegrass in various parts of the state, we will

consider the ways in which younger musicians blended together traditional bluegrass with newer genres.

Bluegrass by Region

West Texas: There are several noteworthy aspects of bluegrass in West Texas, including the fact that the first Monroe-styled band in the state formed there. Secondly, the vast distances between communities and from other areas of the state helped isolate West

recalled that, “We opened up with the ‘Orange Blossom Special,’ then into ‘Uncle Pen,’ finished with a quartet number.” Once again, the audience responded enthusiastically. A top artist on the show, Webb Pierce, gave up his segment in order to satisfy the audience demand to “bring them cowboys back out here.” Not only were they invited to return to the *Hayride* in two weeks, but Randy Woods, A&R man for Dot Records, promised them a recording session when they returned.¹⁶

West Texas became home to the only full-fledged college curriculum on bluegrass music in the nation.

Texas bluegrass players delayed the region’s entry into the Independent Stage of development. Lastly, West Texas became home to the only full-fledged college curriculum on bluegrass music in the nation. This program, begun by Dean Nathan Tubbs of South Plains College (now South Plains University) in Levelland, has become very successful under the leadership of two pioneering figures in bluegrass, Joe Carr and Alan Munde.¹¹

In their book, *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights*, Carr and Munde provide a fairly complete discussion of early bluegrass in West Texas, including the Mayfield Brothers and Benjamin “Tex” Logan. The Mayfield Brothers—Edd on guitar, Herb on mandolin, and Smokey on fiddle—were apparently the first bluegrass group anywhere in Texas. Though other groups included Bill Monroe’s material in their repertoires, the Mayfield Brothers limited themselves strictly to the Monroe style of playing and singing. As Carr and Munde point out, “Although the Mayfield Brothers never featured a banjo...they nonetheless thought of themselves as disciples of the Monroe bluegrass style.”¹²

The Mayfields’ career took off with the addition of Louisiana-born performer Bill Myrick, who had played music with Edd Mayfield in the army. Myrick had worked with Monroe during the late 1940s as bass singer in the Bluegrass Boys Quartet and as guitarist and singer in The Shenandoah Valley Trio, a group of Monroe sidemen.¹³ Herb Mayfield, the one surviving brother, recalled how the band’s popularity earned it a spot on the weekly *KSEL Jamboree* in Lubbock.¹⁴ Hearing that Wayne Raney was going to appear on the *Jamboree*, the boys asked promoter Dave Stone to let them perform on the show. Stone reluctantly agreed to let them do one or two numbers. The audience response was overwhelmingly positive. “It was ten or eleven songs before them people would let us off the stage,” Myrick recounted.¹⁵

The special charisma of the Mayfield Brothers and Bill Myrick was in top form when the group made its first appearance on the *Louisiana Hayride* in Shreveport in 1951. Myrick

Following their appearance on the *Hayride*, the Mayfield Brothers were on the verge of a major breakthrough, with both a Saturday night radio show and an offer from a national record label. However, their idol, Bill Monroe, soon squashed it all with a telegram. Monroe needed a guitar player and made Edd an offer to become a Bluegrass Boy. Edd’s departure put an end to the group’s *Hayride* gig and recording contract. It would be nearly two decades before a Texas bluegrass group would again have an offer from an out-of-state label.¹⁷

Despite his work with Bill Monroe during the next few years, Edd returned home occasionally to perform with the Mayfield Brothers, including, for a time, on a daily radio program at KGNC in Amarillo. The brothers also recorded at least eight songs at the famed Norman Petty Studio in Clovis, New Mexico, with the intent of making an LP record, but this too was not realized. “We ran out of money,” Herb Mayfield confided.¹⁸ Though Edd’s death from leukemia in 1958 brought an end to the Mayfield Brothers, they were an inspiration to subsequent West Texas acts, including teenagers Buddy Holly and Sonny Curtis.¹⁹

Because there were few five-string banjo players in West Texas, Buck White’s group in Wichita Falls had to persuade Chet Atkins–style guitarist Doc Hamilton, stationed at the air force base there, to take up the banjo.²⁰ Doc was not the first five-string picker in West Texas, however. Jack Selby, who graduated from high school in 1959, reported, “There were half a dozen that liked and played bluegrass. Udell Gifford got me interested. Jody Grubbs played banjo. I was about 17...I picked up my mandolin and followed them to Pampa and picked half the night.”²¹ Other banjoists included S. G. Christian of the Black Mountain Boys and Bruce McBee of the Gore Brothers.²² The lack of any bluegrass “network” in West Texas meant banjo players and their groups were often isolated on the vast expanse of the prairie and did not learn about each other until they strayed beyond their region.²³



The Black Mountain Boys with George H.W. Bush in Coleman, Texas, 1964, courtesy of George H. W. Bush Library

Other West Texans who left the state helped shape the national bluegrass scene. Tex Logan from Big Spring had played fiddle with Hoyle Nix’s Western swing band but later formed the first bluegrass band in Boston while attending MIT. He worked with various country groups in the Northeast as well, including Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper and the Lilly Brothers. Logan also was a major influence on a new generation of northern urban bluegrassers, including banjoist Bill Keith, who later played with Bill Monroe. Logan also wrote “Christmas Time’s a-Comin’,” recorded by Bill Monroe with Edd Mayfield singing lead.²⁴

Another important West Texas bluegrass musician is Lynn Morris (b. 1948), who grew up in Lamesa, about 60 miles south of Lubbock. Her dad bought her a guitar, but she really wanted to play banjo. While at college, she became a member of the Denver-based City Limits. Lynn next joined Whetstone Run in 1982, based in State College, Pennsylvania, which played the Kerrville bluegrass festival in the early 1980s. After marrying Marshall Wilborn, she formed the Lynn Morris Band in 1988.²⁵ Together, the two Texans have gone to the top of the bluegrass field, receiving numerous accolades and industry awards.

Abilene’s first bluegrass band, The Black Mountain Boys, formed in the early 1960s. Their career was momentarily boosted when George Herbert Walker Bush hired them to provide entertainment during a two-week stretch of his unsuccessful senate campaign in 1964. Banjoist S.G. Christian reported that Barbara Bush was upset with George for hiring a bluegrass group, “but by the end of the tour she was making pillow cases with needlepoint on them for everyone on the tour.” Christian said that the Bushes’ enthusiasm rubbed off on the band members, but there was one member of the entourage who was less than enthusiastic about campaigning. “George, Jr., didn’t like crowds, so he stayed with us on the bus all the time.”²⁶

One might wonder why the elder Bush chose a band that played music more associated with Appalachia than with Abilene. This decision seems to have been part of a larger pattern of inept campaign strategies. Kevin Phillips’s recent book on the Bush dynasty points out that some criticized George H.W. Bush for wearing Bermuda shorts in largely Baptist West Texas, and for releasing a photograph of himself walking his pet poodle—a breed not highly regarded in a state where dogs are often used for hunting and other outdoor activities.²⁷ On the other hand, one must recognize that the candidate referred to as “a Connecticut carpetbagger” by opponent Senator Ralph Yarborough in 1964 went on to carry both Texas and the nation to become President in 1988. The Black Mountain Boys, however, had less long-term success. They had a 30-minute radio show on KBRC in Abilene in 1965 and made one record, “The Preacher and the Bear,” but stopped playing after a few years.²⁸

Another Abilene-area band first appeared in 1964. The Bluegrass Kinfolks had a longer run than the Black Mountain Boys, largely owing to the dedication of the band’s leader, Ronnie Gill. The group began as a family band, a time-honored tradition in country music that carried over into bluegrass and is an important part of the image of the music’s “wholesomeness” even today.²⁹ By 1969, the Bluegrass Kinfolks were very busy, with Ron Gill on banjo, wife Ann on bass, their 10-year-old daughter, Debbie, on rhythm and mandolin, Ann Dye on rhythm guitar and vocals, Ansel Shupe on mandolin, and Carl Fitzgerald on lead guitar and vocals. A letter to *Bluegrass Unlimited* (herein after BU), the leading national bluegrass magazine, reported the band’s activities. “We play on the radio and television, sometimes almost for nothing, just to expose bluegrass to Texans,” Gill wrote. That year, they won first prize in the band contest at the Peachtree Festival in DeLeon, Texas, and first-prize in Snyder, Texas, they competed against 18 other bands.³⁰

Another challenge faced by West Texas groups was a shortage of resources for learning the techniques of playing and singing bluegrass. Whereas traditional music was often taught within the family, the emerging musical styles heard on records and live radio performances came without pictures or written instructions. Aspiring imitators were left to their own devices for learning how to reproduce what they heard. The Mayfield Brothers had to depend on their ears and ingenuity to work out the fancy guitar runs of Riley Puckett heard on Skillet Lickers 78-rpm records.³¹ A particularly tough challenge faced anyone trying to master the revolutionary five-string banjo techniques of Monroe's legendary banjoist, Earl Scruggs. The four-string tenor banjo was common in western swing bands up to the 1940s and was better known and more widely available in Texas than the five-string variety.

When Ron Gill decided to learn to play bluegrass banjo, he had one advantage—his Alabama-born grandfather had played frail-

ger banjo pickers to emulate.³³

During the 1950s through 1970s, West Texas was clearly in what I call the Subordinate Stage of bluegrass development. There were no specific bluegrass venues, so West Texas bluegrass groups had to share venues with country acts and often travel great distances to perform. The Bluegrass Kinfolks appeared at least twice at the Thompson's Farm Bluegrass Show in Kilgore in East Texas—once in 1971,³⁴ and again at the third annual festival, July 12–16, 1973.³⁵ However, when Ronnie Gill organized the first Buffalo Gap Bluegrass Festival in 1976, West Texas finally had a local venue that specifically featured bluegrass music.³⁶

Gill has had a long career in bluegrass. He won the banjo contest at the first Oakdale Park Annual Bluegrass Jamboree at Glen Rose in 1972.³⁷ In 1975 his band cut an LP, *Big Country Bluegrass*, and did a 15-minute segment on a weekly country radio show called *Saturday Afternoon Shindig*, over KSTA in Coleman. He had second radio show around the same time at Merkel, a little

the Gores performed under the name Cool Water Bluegrass. Also performing with them frequently was Earl Miemeyer, probably the first chromatic banjo player in West Texas, and Dobroist and baritone singer Jim Liner of Anson.⁴⁰

The next step in the path from Subordinate to Independent status for West Texas was the formation of the Panhandle Bluegrass and Old-Tyme Music Association. Carr and Munde cite this Amarillo-based organization as “the most successful bluegrass association in West Texas.”⁴¹ According to longtime membership chairman, Joyce Hammack, the club was organized in 1979 and held its first festival at Mobeetie that year.⁴² Concerning West Texas festivals, Carr and Munde state, “None of these events use paid professional bluegrass musicians, featuring instead club bands and bands from nearby regions.”⁴³ Despite this informality, the Panhandle Bluegrass and Old-Tyme Music Association has grown from an initial 25 members to some 400 today from all parts of the United States.⁴⁴

Dobro; it was Jerry Douglas.” This was the birth of Boone Creek, the revolutionary late-1970s group whose imprint can still be seen in much of the bluegrass of today.⁴⁷

Houston: Houston has been a hotbed for country music since the 1930s, but mostly in the form of Texas swing and honky tonk. The 1956 *Country Song Roundup* carries a brief description of Hank Wilson and the Dixie Drifters. The writer characterized them as “a top-notch C&W outfit” and used the telltale wording, “The band specializes in mountain Folk music and ballads.”⁴⁸ In the country music journalese of the time, this description meant that the Drifters played music in the style of Bill Monroe and Flatt & Scruggs. Listening to several of their 45-rpm singles supplied by longtime Houston music researcher Andrew Brown verified this influence.

Houston's first bluegrass band consisted largely of transplants from the Deep South. The *Country Song Roundup* listed fiddler Hank Fannin as hailing from Alabama and banjoist Fred

Banjo players in the southeastern United States were better able to directly observe banjo players than someone in West Texas.

ing style on the five-string banjo, so, Ronnie knew which type of instrument he needed. He had difficulty, however, trying to recreate the three-finger style of Earl Scruggs. “There was a man named Bonham Shell who tuned the first string of his tenor up to make it sound like a fifth string, had a real unusual way of making it sound something like a five-string, but he said he couldn't help me,” Ronnie recounted. Then he met S. G. Christian, of the Black Mountain Boys, but was again disappointed. “It was three-finger style, but not Scruggs,” Gill said.³²

Banjo players in the southeastern United States were better able to directly observe banjo players than someone in West Texas. Flatt and Scruggs's television shows, sponsored by Martha White Mills, reached major markets throughout the South, and professional bluegrass groups such as Flatt and Scruggs, Bill Monroe, Reno and Smiley, and Jim and Jesse played in communities from Kentucky and West Virginia to Mississippi and Florida. Anyone wanting to learn bluegrass banjo in those states could find opportunities to observe competent players.

However, national bluegrass acts rarely came to the Lone Star State. Ronnie Gill did manage to get some tips from Washington, D.C.-based banjoist Bill Emerson. Finally, Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys played a show in Big Spring, probably in 1968, and banjoist Vic Jordan showed Ronnie a few licks. Later, Ronnie drove over 1,000 miles to Bean Blossom, Indiana, to Bill Monroe's third annual bluegrass festival in 1969, where he found plenty of Scruggs-style, three-fin-

town west of Abilene. Again, the characteristic of sharing country music venues, whether live or broadcast, is indicative of the Subordinate Stage of bluegrass. The Bluegrass Kinfolks disbanded, but Ronnie went on to conduct a dozen bluegrass festivals at Buffalo Gap from 1976–88. This was the first successful and long-running bluegrass festival in West Texas, and it helped that region reach the Independent Stage of bluegrass development. Ronnie organized a new band called Buffalo Gap Bluegrass, which included two former Black Mountain Boys, fiddler Bill Burns, and leader Robert Boyd on guitar.³⁸

The Panhandle had another “brothers” act that developed in the 1970s. Gary and Ron Gore began playing bluegrass in 1973. Unlike the Mayfield Brothers and Ronnie Gill, the Gores were not introduced to bluegrass through Bill Monroe and other first-generation stars. “The Whites and us, we joke about being bluegrass orphans, ‘cause we come out of swing and pop backgrounds,” Gary confided. The brothers had learned pop songs from their mother and became acquainted with the smooth Sons of the Pioneers harmony through Marty Robbins's albums. This background influenced their bluegrass performances. “We do one third gospel, one third traditional, and one third smooth country,” Gore related.³⁹

The Gore Brothers' first album in 1979 was notable for the participation of flatpicker Glenda Knipher, Ron's wife at the time, who subsequently moved to Nashville and joined Porter Wagoner's all-female band, The Right Combination. At times,

“Gone Forever” and “You Trampled My Heart” appears to be the first bluegrass recording made in Texas.

Another notable West Texas group was Concho Valley Bluegrass of San Angelo. Founder Nelson McGee was a contemporary of the Mayfield Brothers but did not form a bluegrass band until 1980. Nelson and his brothers played at ranch dances around their home in Maryneal, some 65 miles north of San Angelo. Although Nelson often played country music, he always preferred the bluegrass of Flatt and Scruggs. While in San Angelo, Nelson met Joe Kitts, a banjo player from Virginia. They made one cassette album together. Later, North Carolinian Marty Galyean replaced Kitts.⁴⁵ Marty was a veteran of the bluegrass scenes in both North Carolina and the Washington, D.C., area, which gave him a unique perspective from which to observe and comment on West Texas bluegrass. He recalled, “Texas musicians are different. Down here musicians have four or five things going, whereas musicians back in Tennessee and Carolina are strictly bluegrass. [In Texas] I sometimes go play guitar with a swing band.”⁴⁶

Jamming with the Golden Brothers in his native Mt. Airy, North Carolina, one night, Marty Galyean witnessed a seminal event in bluegrass music. Walking into the Boone Creek music store one evening, he saw his friend Terry Baucom on banjo. “Everybody's playing something different tonight,” Terry advised, so Marty picked up the Dobro, at which he was also proficient. Among the jammers was a young Ricky Skaggs. “Some kid with a gold earring came in. I put the Dobro down to go to the bathroom, and when I came back the kid had the

Wilson being from Arkansas.⁴⁹ What the article failed to mention was that leader and mandolinist Hank Wilson was also from Alabama.⁵⁰ In 1956, the group was doing just as the Mayfield Brothers and Bill Myrick had done, appearing on a Saturday-night country jamboree show—in this case the *Houston Jamboree*, aired over KNUZ (1230-AM).⁵¹ Hank Wilson had a unique and unimpeachable country credential; during World War II, he had roomed with fellow Alabaman Hank Williams when they worked the shipyards in Mobile.⁵²

Like Hank Williams, Wilson was also a songwriter. Everything that he cut with the Dixie Drifters was his own or a co-authored composition.⁵³ Their first release, “Gone Forever” and “You Trampled My Heart,” appears to be the first bluegrass recording made in Texas. There was at least one other first connected with the Dixie Drifters. Fred Wilson (apparently no relation to Hank) had the first Gibson banjo in Houston, the brand preferred by all the bluegrass players.⁵⁴

Appearing on Dobro on all of the Drifter's recordings was Robby Shipley. Shipley replaced Fred Wilson on banjo for a time and was noted for his unique approach to the instrument. Hampered by a lack of exposure to live players, Shipley developed a style of using his thumb and three fingers to play Scruggs-style banjo. According to Doc Hamilton, Scruggs sometimes referred to Shipley as “that three-finger banjo picker from Texas.”⁵⁵ Then high school student, and later deejay and banjo teacher, Tony Ulrich declared that “the Shipleys and Flatt

& Scruggs were very close [friends]. Whenever they came across this part of Texas, you could see the Flatt & Scruggs tour bus parked in front of the Shipley home."⁵⁶ Bruce Ramsey recalls being invited to the Shipley home to meet and visit with Flatt and Scruggs and their band on one of those occasions.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, Robby Shipley was later limited to playing Dobro after running a drill through his left hand, likely done while manufacturing tone rings for banjos.⁵⁸

Through his work at a Houston theater, Hank Wilson met Bob Smith and David Davis, who also played there as a Louvin Brothers-type country duo. When Davis moved back to North Carolina, Wilson invited Smith to take over mandolin for the Drifters. No longer on the *Houston Jamboree*, the Dixie Drifters taped one-hour gospel programs that aired Sunday mornings on KIKK in Baytown.⁵⁹ Hank Wilson cut his last 45 in 1964, "Are You Satisfied?" and "I Heard You Call," (Bluegrass 1001), both credited to Slim Wilson, most certainly a stage name for Hank. Bob Smith recalled that Wilson dropped out of sight around that time. The group would have been lost to history had it not been for the careful and broad-ranging collection of Andrew Brown, a collector whose main interest is local Western swing musicians.⁶⁰

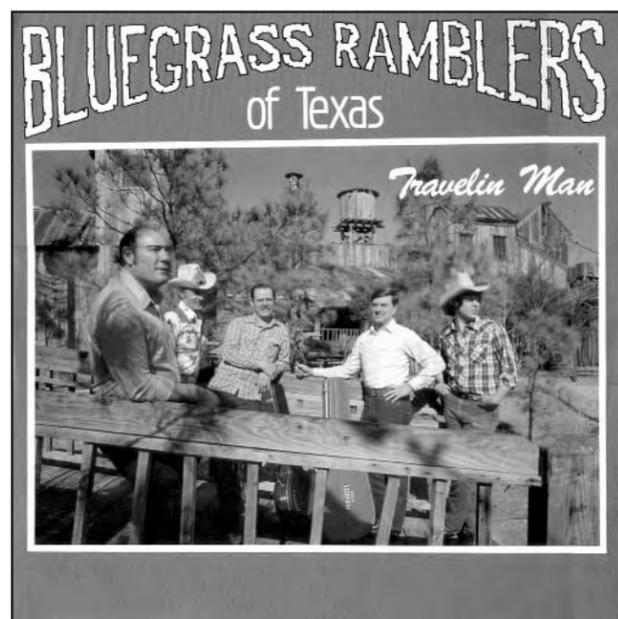
28 Around 1964, Roy M. Stone founded Stoneway Records in Houston. For the first three years, he released 45-rpm singles. Beginning in 1967, Stone produced at least 80 titles on LP, 11 of which were bluegrass either in name and/or style.⁶¹ Former Texas Playboys' steel guitarist Herb Remington, who also recorded for Stoneway, said, "Stone just loved instrumentals and had a hard time accepting anyone who sang."⁶² Indeed, the vast majority of Stoneway's titles featured individual instrumentalists, with more than half of his catalog (42 titles) being fiddle albums. According to the listing on the jacket of *The Million Dollar Fiddle* (STY-160), 25% of the label's catalog in 1976, 15 titles, were solo projects by fiddler Robert Russell "Chubby" Wise, famed in bluegrass circles for his participation in the classic Bill Monroe band, 1942–48, and in country circles for his long tenure as fiddler in Hank Snow's Rainbow Ranch Boys, 1954–70.⁶³

Smith recounted that he and members of The Bluegrass Mountaineers introduced Wise to Stone.⁶⁴ Wise cut his first albums for Stoneway in 1969, while he was still with Hank Snow. His biography in *Definitive Country: The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Country Music and Its Performers* states, "This subsequently led to him leaving the Snow band the following March and relocating in Texas. In Texas, Chubby found that he could earn a comfortable living as a guest fiddler at special dances, club appearances, and occasional Bluegrass festivals."⁶⁵ Houston fiddler Kenneth Holder said, "Chubby played around various beer joints in Houston with guitarist and bluegrass singer W. C. Averitt." Averitt also provided guitar accompaniment on many of

Chubby's Stoneway albums. Two of these albums were stylistically bluegrass—*Bluegrass, Chubby Wise Plays... W.C. Averitt Sings* (STY-108) and *Grassy Fiddle* (STY-157).⁶⁶

The sole Texas bluegrass group to be featured on Stoneway was Earl Garner and his Bluegrass Mountaineers, based in East Texas. According to banjoist R.L. Johnson, "We recorded enough for two albums in that one session, 'cause it was all stuff we were playing all the time, so we didn't have no rehearsing or anything." The result was *Cuttin' Bluegrass* (STY-113) and *Texas Bluegrass* (STY-122). Garner's band also backed him on *Bluegrass Fiddler* (STY-120), all apparently recorded in 1971. The final bluegrass recording released by Stoneway appears to have been *It's Bluegrass Time Again* (STY-161), featuring a non-Texas group, Hubert Davis and the Season Travelers.⁶⁷

A brief note about an earlier Texas company, Starday Records, a label that released a significant amount of bluegrass, is needed here to clarify any possible misunderstanding about the label's activities in Texas. Starday, originally based in Beaumont, was a joint project of Jack Starnes and Houston country-music promoter Harold "Pappy" Daily. Starnes bowed out, and, by 1955, was replaced by former Four Star Records executive Don Pierce,



The Bluegrass Ramblers, courtesy of Russell Moore

who moved from the West Coast to Houston. In January 1957, Pierce moved to Nashville to oversee an arrangement with Mercury Records to issue recordings under the joint label, Mercury Starday. By 1958, both Mercury and Daily wanted out. As part of the dissolution, Pierce got the Starday name and Daily got certain artists, including George Jones, who recorded two bluegrass duet albums with Melba Montgomery. Both albums

appeared on United Artists, the first, *Bluegrass Hootenanny*, in 1963, the second, *Blue Moon of Kentucky*, in 1966.⁶⁸

A number of bands formed in the Houston area after 1965. The longest surviving and best known of these was Johnnie Martin and the Bluegrass Ramblers. Members included Bob Smith and fiddler Kenneth Holder.⁶⁹ The Bluegrass Ramblers performed widely. After playing Bill Grant's second festival at Hugo, Oklahoma, they came to Austin and bought an old bus. "We fixed it up and put a new engine in it," Holder recalled. Most national touring acts were using buses, and having a band vehicle was a real mark of professionalism for a semi-professional band.⁷⁰

Johnnie Martin and the Bluegrass Ramblers were the first bluegrass group to play Rod Kennedy's Kerrville Folk Festival. "Rod told Johnnie [Martin] he had a standing engagement there every year, as long as he wanted to come," Russell said. Later in the decade, Martin's health began to deteriorate, but he wanted to keep the band going as long as bassist Russell Moore stayed with them, which turned out to be until 1982.⁷¹ Banjoist Jim Moratto was with the Bluegrass Ramblers for only two years before joining Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys in October 1973. Moratto performed on a live album, *Lester Flatt Live Bluegrass Festival With Guest Bill Monroe* (RCA APL1-0588), recorded at Vanderbilt University March 18, 1974.⁷²

The last vinyl LP by Johnnie Martin and the Bluegrass Ramblers, *Traveling Man*,⁷³ features a youthful Russell Moore on bass. Moore left the Ramblers to join Scott and Curtis Vestal in Dallas in forming Southern Connection. The band moved to North Carolina in 1984, and a year later three of them joined Doyle Lawson's group, Quicksilver. Russell toured with this band for eight years and, in 1991, founded IIIrd Tyme Out, which became one of the most exciting groups on the bluegrass circuit.⁷⁴

In addition to the first bluegrass recording, the Houston area had two other significant firsts in the history of Texas bluegrass, namely the first bluegrass festival and, shortly thereafter, the first dedicated bluegrass radio show. The first Texas bluegrass festival was held in 1970 at the Blue Barn in Tarkington Prairie near Cleveland. The bill listed Texas bands the Bluegrass Mountaineers and the Bluegrass Ramblers, as well as national touring group, the Country Gentlemen. It is unclear who organized the festival, but it may have been Johnnie Martin, who hosted monthly pickin's at the Blue Barn during that period and was friends with the Country Gentlemen through his brother.⁷⁵

The Tarkington Prairie festival took place annually for three or four years, but, eventually, other festivals began vying for the attention of bluegrass players throughout the state. The first festival in East Texas took place at Kilgore in 1971. In September of that same year, Bill Monroe put on a large festival with multiple national acts in McKinney, near Dallas.⁷⁶ A homegrown-style festival was held in Milano in Central Texas in 1972, and the first annual Bluegrass Jamboree at Oakdale Park in Glen

Rose appeared the same year.⁷⁷ Rod Kennedy held his first Bluegrass and Country Music Festival at Kerrville in 1974.⁷⁸ It is noteworthy that of all the festivals that began in the early 1970s, only the Bluegrass Jamboree at Glen Rose survives.⁷⁹

The circumstances surrounding the establishment of the first bluegrass radio show in Texas involve both serendipity and confusion. Antone "Tony" Ulrich met KPFT deejay Ivan Cooper at one of the regular open-mike Sunday nights at The Old Quarter in the summer of 1971. Ivan invited Tony onto his show to talk about his three years on the streets of Nashville. However, en route to the studio the day before his scheduled appearance, Ulrich learned that the staff, including Ivan, was on strike. Ulrich said, "I knew little of KPFT at the time, other than the fact it had been blown off the air because of its liberal views" (KPFT was the Houston affiliate of KPFA, a non-commercial Berkeley, California, station promoting ultra-liberal politics and alternate lifestyles.) The station manager asked Ulrich to do the show the next day. "I had never even been in a radio-station control room before," Ulrich commented.⁸⁰

A couple of weeks later, Ulrich got the time slot on a permanent basis, calling his show *Nashville Three*, because it was three hours of country and bluegrass music.⁸¹ Again we see the phenomenon typical of the transitional period between the Subordinate and Independent Stages of bluegrass development in Texas, whereby promoters and deejays more than artists were still fearing that bluegrass alone was not strong enough to draw an audience. Hence, they would combine country with bluegrass to try to draw a larger audience.⁸²

Ulrich continued with the mixed format on his Houston radio show for a few months, but his listeners pointed him toward the future. He explained, "I realized that most folks who called the station were asking for 'more bluegrass.' So, after about the first five months, I changed the name to *The Bluegrass Express*." Houston was a major market that attracted many full-time traveling performers. Their presence made it possible for Tony to interview a wide variety of nationally known artists, including Mickey Newbury, Chubby Wise, Earl Scruggs, John Hartford, The Dillards, David Bromberg, Mance Lipscomb, Michael Murphey, Mac Wiseman, Alex Harvey, the Country Gazette, and others.⁸³

Because of the release of the movie *Deliverance*, which featured banjos and bluegrass music, and issuance of the seminal *Will the Circle be Unbroken* album with so many bluegrass stars, 1972 was a year of ballooning interest in bluegrass. By the end of that year, Ulrich had a full-time job teaching banjo. He developed a method of teaching called "BanjerTab," which he still uses today. Conducting annual banjo workshops in the late 1970s with Alan Munde, Bill Keith, and Larry McNeeley were highlights in Ulrich's teaching career.⁸⁴

Rod Kennedy made Ulrich a part of his festival staff in 1972, and Ulrich worked all the Kerrville festivals, from the first

Kerrville Folk Festival in 1972 through the 1978 bluegrass festival, including jazz and even classical music festivals. “Rod told me I had a lot to do with his decision to bring in a bluegrass festival. I always felt honored about that,” said Ulrich.⁸⁵

The 1960s brought a nationwide folk music revival, which introduced many urban Americans to bluegrass. Texan folklorist John Avery Lomax, Sr., helped lay the groundwork for this folk revival by spending much of the early twentieth century collecting folk songs throughout the South and Southwest with his youngest son, Alan.⁸⁶ John Avery Lomax, Jr., the senior Lomax’s second son, began the Houston Folklore Society with some friends in 1951, which appears to have been the first folk-music society in Texas.⁸⁷

Other societies had a role in the advancement of bluegrass in Houston. Both Bob Smith and Kenneth Holder, original members of Johnnie Martin’s Bluegrass Ramblers, had belonged to the Pasadena Music Club.⁸⁸ The first club specifically dedicated to bluegrass music was probably the Bay Area Bluegrass Association (BABA). The Spring Creek Bluegrass Association of Tomball formed in 1980 to facilitate jams in the northwest

work out a tablature.⁹¹ There was a lot of innovation among the first generation of bluegrass players, but their creative efforts were accomplished by working with the instrument until they found a sound and style they liked.

With both festivals and a dedicated bluegrass radio show, and with societies to promote the music, bluegrass had reached the Independent Stage in Houston by the mid-1970s. As the bluegrass scene in Houston matured, participating musicians continued to demonstrate how the state’s unique musical environment shaped their playing. Fiddler Bill Northcutt was one of the central figures in Houston bluegrass and also was respected in the Texas contest-fiddling circles. In addition to recording two fiddle albums for Stoneway with banjoist Doc Hamilton, Northcutt played in various bluegrass bands, including the Double Mountain Boys and the Big Sandy River Boys.⁹⁴

During the mid-1970s, Bob Smith played in the Houston area with Roma Jackson and his Tennessee Pals, as well as with the Humbert Brothers. Later, Smith rejoined Earl Garner, this time in the Garner Family Band. In 1978, Roy Marsh, original banjoist with Johnnie Martin’s Bluegrass Ramblers, invited

First-generation bluegrassers were intuitive learners, acquiring their musical skills in a nonsystematic manner, while the new urban generation sought to be systematic in their learning, analyzing licks and reducing them to written form.

Houston area.⁸⁹ All of these organizations are still functioning today.

The importance of the folk-music boom to the development of bluegrass music cannot be overstated. Ironically, however, folk music’s popularity has faded, while that of bluegrass has continued to grow. This is due in part to “folkies,” such as Tony Ulrich, who became part of the second generation of bluegrass musicians. This second generation tends to be urban, college-educated, and middle-class, whereas the first generation was mostly rural, working-class, steeped in country music, and had, at most, a high school diploma.⁹⁰ A further contrast is that the first-generation bluegrassers were intuitive learners, acquiring their musical skills in a nonsystematic manner, while the new urban generation sought to be systematic in their learning, analyzing licks and reducing them to written form.

This difference is why it is usually second-generation players who actively seek to teach lessons, conduct workshops, and write books and articles about instrumental technique. Few of the first generation of bluegrass players were comfortable giving formal lessons. When they were requested or required to give workshops at festivals, they would usually just play the audience’s requests. If a first-generation picker published an instruction book, it was with the help of someone else who would

Smith to join his new band, Texas Grass, along with fiddler E. J. Hopkins, the first fiddler to record an album on Stoneway (STY-101). When Marsh left the band, Smith and Hopkins joined former Bluegrass Ramblers’ fiddler Kenneth Holder in his new group, Flat Country.⁹⁵

Perhaps the most eclectic Houston bluegrass band of the 1970s and early 1980s was the Cypress Swamp Stompers, which included brother and sister Malcolm and Becky Smith, Becky’s husband Pat Fowler, and banjoist Dave Seeman. This group blended together everything from Django Reinhardt jazz tunes to Irish, Cajun, and other types of ethnic music.⁹⁶

Dallas and North Texas: The early days of bluegrass in Dallas begin with a banjoist named Eddie Shelton, who founded a group called the Country Cut-Ups.⁹⁷ The beginnings of this band are obscure, but the liner notes on its 1964 LP state that “the band originated about ten years ago in Dallas.”⁹⁸ By the late 1950s, Shelton and his group were making occasional performances on the Big “D” Jamboree. Recently, Dragon Street Records released one of these performances on CD.⁹⁹ Producer, David Denard, noted that the original performance was in 1957 or 1958.¹⁰⁰ Although they were introduced by Big “D” Jamboree announcer as Eddie Shelton and the Kentucky Mountain Boys, this band was most likely the Country Cut-

Ups, for the Cut-Ups were doing a weekly radio show and making 45-rpm records during that same period. In 1957, Bill Kruger heard the band’s recording of “Keep Your Cottonpickin’ Hands Off Of Me” (Skippy 101) over KPCN in Grand Prairie. Captivated by the bluegrass sound, Kruger went to Desoto, Texas, where some of the band members were living. He learned that guitarist and lead singer Wesley Balch was leaving the band, and before he knew it, Kruger had become Balch’s replacement. Kruger was soon christened “Skip,” after the Skippy label on which their 45-rpm single appeared.¹⁰¹

The Country Cut-Ups were a very active band for several years. “We played schoolhouses, Saturday night hoedowns, Majestic Theater in Fort Worth, shopping centers, new car openings, Big “D” Jamboree whenever we wanted to. They’d always invite us back,” Kruger reminisced. For about a year, the group did a weekly Saturday afternoon TV show on channel 7 in Tyler.¹⁰² This show was certainly the first regular television performance by a bluegrass group in Texas. Regularly sponsored TV shows by bluegrass groups were extremely rare in Texas. Holly Bond and his Bluegrass Texans appeared regularly on a Saturday night show from Panther Hall in Fort Worth in the early 1970s, but this gig was part of a larger country music program.¹⁰³

The Country Cut-Ups made one single on the Lecam label during Kruger’s six-year tenure with the band. “Bruce Shinell had a hit record on the label,” Kruger said. “They thought they’d try a bluegrass recording; guess they never tried another.” Kruger continued, “As far as I know, the Cut-Ups didn’t cut an album.”¹⁰⁴ Kruger, who still does a Saturday deejay show in Hillsboro, apparently lost touch with the band and was unaware of the LP that they put out in 1964, *The Country Cut-Ups Go to College* (Towne House LP 1001). Whereas they featured their own compositions on their singles, at least five of the twelve selections on their LP are covers of bluegrass standards.¹⁰⁵

By the time the Country Cut-Ups recorded their LP, three other bluegrass bands had emerged in the Dallas area. Joe Bass organized the Double Mountain Boys around 1960, and Joe Featherston put together the Country Travelers in 1962.¹⁰⁶ The third group was the Bluegrass Ramblers. All three groups are notable in particular ways. Joe Bass appears to hold the record for longevity, as well as for recorded output. The band has run continuously for forty-four years and made 17 recordings, 15 of them albums.¹⁰⁷ The Double Mountain Boys’ repertoire is perhaps the most country of any Texas bluegrass band. Their latest recording, *Double Mountain Boys Most Requested*, contains songs made popular by classic country stars Eddie Arnold, Merle Haggard, Webb Pierce, and Marty Robbins.¹⁰⁸ Bass ran two festivals in Stephenville for years, until May 2004.¹⁰⁹

Joe Featherston’s Country Travelers were typical of groups of the Subordinate Stage, playing shows in schools and wherever else they could. Unlike many, however, Featherston welcomed

the urban youth who were being turned on to bluegrass. “I formed a band where the hippies could come,” he recalled. Featherston also brought his daughter into the group, first as child vocalist, then as bass player.¹¹⁰

Featherston’s group exemplifies the “drafting” method of personnel recruitment. Because of the scarcity of bluegrass players, often the only means of acquiring band members in those early days was to find someone who was willing to learn from scratch. This was the case for two of the original members of the Country Travelers. Recruitment was most often from family or friends.



Joe Featherston’s Country Travelers, courtesy of Joe Featherston

“Bill Martin...bought a Dobro and learned to play it; his wife was our comedian,” Featherston said. At other times, someone could be recruited from another style of music. “Darrell Lewis, a trumpeter in a Bohemian band, learned to play the bull fiddle.” In 1972, Featherston moved to East Texas, where he formed a new group and started the Salmon Lake bluegrass festivals.¹¹¹

By 1963, mandolinist Mitchell Land had organized The Bluegrass Ramblers (one of three groups to carry this name), who appeared on a live television show from Fort Worth’s Panther Hall every Saturday night. Around 1961 or 1962, a bluegrass band called The Duck Creek Four did a radio show over KYAL in McKinney, a town that has since become the home of a major North Texas bluegrass festival. The group’s bass player was Harless “Tootie” Williams, who had played bass with Bill Monroe’s Blue Grass Boys off and on for 20 years.¹¹² Both the Duck Creek Four and the Bluegrass Ramblers are perhaps most significant in that they were feeders for the most successful Dallas-area bluegrass band of the 1960s, the Stone Mountain Boys, which launched the national careers of two of bluegrass music’s most celebrated players.

The Stone Mountain Boys formed in 1966 with Mitchell Land on mandolin, Alan Munde on banjo, Harless “Tootie” Williams

on bass, and Louis "Bosco" Land on guitar. This group attended Bill Monroe's first festival in Bean Blossom in 1967 and was invited to back singer Red Allen on stage.¹¹³ The following year, they returned to Bean Blossom and won the band contest. By this time Munde had left to tour with Jimmy Martin and was replaced by his mentor Eddie Shelton, formerly of the Country Cut-Ups. Also with the band for a time was fiddler Byron Berline, who was stationed at Fort Polk, Louisiana.¹¹⁴ Both Oklahoma natives, Munde and Berline attended the University of Oklahoma. They were not the first college graduates in Texas bluegrass bands, but they represented the new generation of college-educated bluegrass musicians in the 1970s.

Berline was atypical of college bluegrass players in that he was traditionally trained, having learned Texas-style fiddling from his dad and having participated in numerous fiddle contests as a boy. While in college, Berline met and played with Eddie Shelton. After graduating, Berline did a six-month stint with Bill Monroe before going into the army in 1967.¹¹⁵ After completing his military service in 1969, Berline moved to the West Coast to join Country Gazette, which Alan Munde also joined later. Berline's protégé, Dave Ferguson, joined the Stone Mountain Boys later (1973–75), but they had no fiddler when they won the 1968 band contest at Bean Blossom.¹¹⁶

At a national festival in Winfield, Kansas, in 1972, Berline met the Stone Mountain Boys again, who now included James Durham on guitar and Bob Davis on lead vocals and lead guitar. Impressed by their vocals and arrangements, Berline told Jim Dickson of Takoma Records about the group.¹¹⁷ Dickson, who had produced recordings by both the Dillards and the Hillmen, recorded the Stone Mountain Boys at Dallas's famed Sumet Studio.¹¹⁸ This 1974 album, *Stone Mountain Boys* (Takoma-Briar BT7204), was the first by a Texas bluegrass group to be released by an out-of-state national label with more than mail-order distribution. Berline played fiddle and produced the record, and West Coast Dobroist Skip Conover also performed.¹¹⁹

The Stone Mountain Boys went on to play the *Big "D" Jamboree* radio show for 18 months and were the only Texas group featured at Bill Monroe's first Lone Star Bluegrass Festival, held in McKinney on September 4, 5, and 6, 1971.¹²⁰ In 1978, Ridgerunner Records released the *Stone Mountain Boys Reunion* album, bringing together most of those who had played in the group over the years.¹²¹ By this time, the band had ceased playing, and the members had gone their separate ways, but the impact of the group can hardly be overstated.

Other North Texas bands included the House Brothers, The Shady Grove Ramblers, and The Bluegrass Texans. The House Brothers made bluegrass history, as well. In 1967 they were playing a live all-gospel radio show over KSKY, a longtime Christian station in Dallas. Bill Grant's wife in Oklahoma was trying to tune in the Grand Ole Opry one night on 650 KHz and caught a House Brothers' broadcast on 660 KHz by mistake. She liked what she heard and asked her husband to book them for the bluegrass festival he was planning. Thus, they were the

first Texas group to be booked at the famous Hugo, Oklahoma, festival in 1969.¹²²

That same year, the House Brothers recorded a gospel album for Uncle Jim O'Neal's Rural Rhythm label. This California-based label sold its records by mail order only; hence, though the album pre-dated the Takoma-Briar release of the *Stone Mountain Boys* album, it was not afforded the level of exposure and distribution that the latter album received. Nevertheless, the impact of the House Brothers within Texas was tremendous, owing to their long career (1962–90) and to their powerful vocals.¹²³

The House Brothers had a succession of sidemen, but two of them bear note, because of their colorful reputations. The fiddler, George Giddings, is usually spoken of as "Crazy" George by those he played with, for he never seemed to stay with any group for long. Joe Carr revealed a couple of telltale incidents. George had a Bowie knife, of which he was especially proud. "He was

always sharpening it, and he liked to carry it in his back pocket unsheathed." George did some kind of contortion acts while he fiddled, and on one occasion, he apparently forgot about his knife and pierced his buttock during a deep knee bend. Crazy George moved to Branson, Missouri, in 1983 and, according to all reports, is still there.¹²⁴

House Brothers mandolinist Charlie Taylor was part of the Austin music scene, and though "Crazy" has not become a part of his nickname, acquaintances often referred to him as being somewhat eccentric. Bill Malone said, "I knew Charles Taylor quite well and used to play with him in San Marcos. His father was head of my department [history] when I went to Southwest Texas State (now Texas State University-San Marcos). Charles was a good musician, but also very strange. He fled to Mexico sometime later after having been implicated in the death of his sweetheart's or wife's husband."¹²⁵

San Antonian Tom Uhr (pronounced "ore") began teaching and coaching in Irving schools in 1958 and would become an important figure in the North Texas bluegrass scene. Already a seasoned performer, Uhr found that the country music career he was pursuing was incompatible with his day job. He recalled, "From 1958–60, I was a single vocalist signed with Twentieth Century Fox, called 'the Singin' Coach.' I was teaching school in Irving and on the *Big "D" Jamboree*; they wanted to make me a regular but I had to go scouting on Saturday nights, so I couldn't do it." From 1961–65 Uhr was a member of The Coaches Three, a group capitalizing on the folk music craze of the time.¹²⁶

Uhr formed the Shady Grove Ramblers in 1966, the second-longest continuously performing bluegrass band in Texas. Joining Tom was Bob Emberton, who later founded Amazing Grass, and Eddie Green, another schoolteacher. Mandolinist Loyd "Stinky" Hinch, who came on board in 1967, is still a member today.¹²⁷

Whereas most regional bluegrass bands in Texas or elsewhere play mainly cover tunes, the Shady Grove Ramblers' shows and albums include many of Uhr's compositions. He was voted Songwriter of the Year for four years running (1974–78) by the Society for the Preservation of Bluegrass Music in America. Uhr and his band are by far the most awarded Texas bluegrass band and bluegrass artists, for SPBGMA also voted the Shady Grove Ramblers Best Vocal Band in America in 1974. Loyd Hinch was voted Mandolinist of the Year and Ferrell Stowe Best Dobro Player of the Year, also in 1974.¹²⁸ Uhr himself received

Best Male Vocalist—Traditional in 1975 by SPBGMA and was nominated for Best Male Vocalist—Contemporary by the same organization the following year.¹²⁹ The zenith of Uhr's songwriting career occurred when Ricky Skaggs recorded his "You May See Me Walking." The song went to No. 5 in 1981 and received an ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers) award as the No. 5 most-played country song that year.¹³⁰

The next band to achieve prominence on the Dallas scene was Holly Bond and his Bluegrass Texans. The "In The Clubs" section of BU for June 1973 lists them as playing the monthly Bluegrass Night at Panther Hall in 1973.¹³¹ Their first recording was a single, "Make Me a Pallet on the Floor," which received air play on Bill Mack's country show on WBAP, Fort Worth.¹³² This song was the last known bluegrass single to be released, and the last to receive recognition by a country deejay. The group

next did a self-released LP, on which two of Joe Featherston's now-disbanded Country Travelers, including Cajun banjoist Hunter Jones, appeared.¹³³

For about a year, the Bluegrass Texans did the 30-minute opening segment of a weekly, syndicated, country television-show broadcast from Panther Hall in Fort Worth. The show was seen in 17 markets in 11 states. These performances were the last regular television appearances by a bluegrass group anywhere in Texas. In the summer of 1975, Bond rented the Texas Hall at the University of Texas at Arlington on Saturday nights and ran triple-header shows featuring one band each for blue-

grass, Southern gospel, and country.¹³⁴ Once again, we see that bluegrass was teamed with country music and not perceived to be a strong-enough pull on its own for either television or live shows.

Up to this point, bluegrass musicians in Texas, even those with college educations, had received their musical training by informal means, for example, from records, industry periodicals, and by learning techniques and licks from more advanced practitioners. This training changed in the early 1970s. The University of North Texas in Denton had had a jazz curriculum for at least 20 years, but few could have imagined that it would produce bluegrass players who would tour nationally.

The first North Texas graduate to go on to a national career actually had his musical training outside of class. Joe Carr took a degree in sociology in 1973. Typical of the urban second-generation bluegrassers, Carr came to bluegrass through an interest in folk music. He recalled, "I thought I was the only person

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STONE MOUNTAIN BOYS (Texas)
BUCK WHITE AND THE DOWNHOME FOLKS
Saturday, September 5 —
10 AM — Workshops on all bluegrass instruments
2 PM — Main Show
ADMISSION — FRIDAY — \$3.00
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1 PM — Main show followed by
BLUEGRASS REUNION ON STAGE
SATURDAY — \$5.00
SUNDAY — \$4.00

Bill Monroe's Lone Star Bluegrass Festival, courtesy of Ruth Barr



Courtesy of Holly Bond

into my kind of music. I'd subscribed to *Sing Out!* in high school and listened to Library of Congress field albums and other stuff at the public library. I had a cheap pawn-shop banjo." Playing his banjo on campus, Carr attracted two other players who did have formal musical training. The first was music minor Dan Huckabee and later classical piano major Gregg Kennedy.¹³⁵ Huckabee said, "I saw a banjo player [Joe Carr] in the cafeteria in Gregg's dorm...I told him I was a Dobro player, and I had to scrounge a bar to prove it."¹³⁶ Dan Huckabee is today one of the leading producers of musical instruction videos for Dobro and many other instruments used in bluegrass, country, and rock music.

It was a similar story for pianist Gregg Kennedy. "I met two guys [Joe Carr and Dan Huckabee] playing bluegrass in the park one day. I'd never heard of the music then, but we became friends and I joined them in the Bluegrass Roadapples." Gregg played bass with several groups in which Carr and/or Huckabee were involved. Unimpressed with the bass player on Bill Monroe's Denton show in 1973, Kennedy approached Monroe and suggested that he could use a better bass player. Monroe auditioned Kennedy and then hired him to tour with the Blue Grass Boys. In the band at the same time was Texan banjoist Jim Moratto, as well as Bill Box and Kentucky fiddler Kenny Baker, who had been strongly influenced by the western swing recordings of Bob Wills.¹³⁷

Replacing Gregg Kennedy on mandolin in the Bluegrass Roadapples was versatile musician Gerald Jones. Joe Carr played both banjo and guitar at first, but eventually limited himself to guitar. By 1974, Carr had put together two new groups. The longer-lived of the two was Roanoke. Carr said, "We got Gerald [Jones] to play banjo in Roanoke with Dan [Huckabee] and I, with various bass players. We won the Kerrville Bluegrass Festival [band contest] in 1974 and got a booking for the following year."¹³⁸ Huckabee continued the story. "Gerald Jones was our first banjo player while we were rehearsing, but Mark Maniscalco when we started playing out." It was San Antonian Maniscalco who played on their one LP, *Roanoke* (Ridgerunner RRR0010).¹³⁹

Before Roanoke, Carr had started the band Super Grass with Gerald Jones and guitarist Debbie Bridgewater. They played a few festivals as a trio, but the band lasted only about a year.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Debbie's hiring by these musicians stands as one of the few cases in Texas bluegrass in which a woman was hired strictly because of her talents and abilities, and not because of family membership. The other case within Texas appears to be Lisa Rogers's participation in the Austin-based Birds of a Feather, headed by banjoist Johnny Thompson, around 1975. Lynn Morris became a member of bands in both Colorado and Pennsylvania, but she joined these bands after leaving the Lone Star State.

Debbie's mom and dad, Lee and Betty Bridgewater, estab-

lished The Texas Bluegrass Association around 1970, putting out a mimeographed newsletter. This endeavor was the first such promotional organization for bluegrass music in Texas. The association numbered some 500 families at its peak and performed a variety of functions, including hosting jams and concerts by national bluegrass figures, such as Mac Wiseman. Debbie's mom sent each issue of the newsletter to the Library of Congress, where they still should be available to researchers. The Bridgewater discontinued the newsletter and the TBA faded away in 1976, perhaps in part because of the emergence of the rival Southwest Bluegrass Club. Lee Bridgewater, an excellent fiddler who had worked with several bands, continued playing in various groups and finished his career with Nelson McGee's Concho Grass of San Angelo.¹⁴¹

Roanoke, with Joe Carr and Dan Huckabee, went full time in 1976, working the Chelsea Street Pub circuit for some months, doing extended stints in several locations in and outside Texas.¹⁴² The Broken String Band from Houston also played this circuit beginning in September 1977.¹⁴³ Roanoke played their final bluegrass gig in the Bier Garten of the Armadillo World Headquarters in Austin and then evolved into a country band working six nights per week in a club, although Huckabee and Jones both had left the band. In the spring of 1978, Carr left to join California-based Country Gazette, of which Alan Munde was still a member, though Byron Berline had long since moved on. Carr and Munde were both eventually hired as faculty at South Plains College in Levelland, Joe in 1985 and Alan in 1986.¹⁴⁴

Dan Huckabee produced his first instructional LP in 1973, *The Solos of Josh Graves*. He changed the original company name, Workshop Records, to the Musicians Workshop when he entered the video market. His first video, *What's a Dobro?*, was released in 1979. Dan made two LPs for Ridgerunner Records, *Why Is this Man Smiling?* (RRR0004) and *Acoustic Steel* (RRR0023), but ceased public performing in 1986.¹⁴⁵

Ridgerunner Records was the largest label in Texas and the only one that actively promoted bluegrass artists. Its founder was the multi-stylistic musician Slim Richey. Richey started playing mandolin in a country band on the radio in 1952 over KALT in Atlanta, near the Louisiana line. "I got a mandolin in order to get into a band, because they already had two guitar players. We did a variety of material, including bluegrass, but nobody used the term then," he said. Later Richey operated a music store in Norman, Oklahoma, where he met Alan Munde and introduced him to Byron Berline. In addition to performing, Richey sells musical instruments and records and produces other musicians. After Alan Munde played with Country Gazette for a time, Richey asked him why he had not made a record. Munde replied, "I've had offers, but..." When Richey offered to record him, Munde readily agreed.¹⁴⁶

Richey worked hard to get Alan Munde's banjo recorded. Just as Chubby Wise accounted for nearly 20% of Roy Stone's Stoneway catalog, Munde had multiple releases on Richey's Ridgerunner label; eight out of Ridgerunner's thirty-five titles are under Munde's name, and he appeared on three additional ones—two by Country Gazette, plus the *Stone Mountain Boys Reunion* album. Around 1985, Slim Richey, went into the instructional cassette market. He also published two bluegrass songbooks. A superb jazz guitarist and multi-instrumentalist, Richey also performed a short stint with Salt Lick, a Fort Worth-based bar band.¹⁴⁷

Salt Lick was the name finally chosen by band members after they had played for several months as Dog Breath and the Denton Dudes at the Quiet Man on Knox Street in Dallas. The band built a following, and, by the end of 1974, had played four bluegrass festivals: Kilgore, Glen Rose, Pilot Point, and Gainesville. The group disbanded temporarily in May 1975, with two of its members, fiddler Earnie Taft and banjoist Lee Thomas, playing in Silver Moon. Salt Lick resumed playing after the members had all

Powell's band, the Country Rogues, which included his wife Agnes on bass, in the first issue (December 1974). In 1977, he started the Powell Family Band with his four children: Sheri (b. 1963) on fiddle, Jeff (b. 1965) on banjo, John (b. 1967) on mandolin, and Jennifer (b. 1970) on fiddle and mandolin. They played numerous festivals throughout the Southwest, including Rod Kennedy's in Kerrville, where they were the only child band ever allowed to play. The Powell Family cut two albums, the first in 1980 and the second in 1984, their final year as a band. Both albums appeared on Slim Richey's Tex-Grass label.¹⁵¹

Another family band, the Mitchell Family of Perrin, played country music at first, but converted fully to bluegrass in the 1970s, since the proliferation of festivals provided more venues for playing.¹⁵² The Mitchell Family band, officially, known as Bluegrass Southland, played Glen Rose and other festivals but was most noted for its own annual festival at Mitchell Park in Perrin, which continued after the Southwest Bluegrass Club withdrew its festival from that location.¹⁵³

No treatment of Texas bluegrass would be complete without

Ridgerunner Records was the largest label in Texas and the only one that actively promoted bluegrass artists.

taken day jobs, eventually recording three albums.¹⁴⁸

In several ways, Salt Lick is a North Texas parallel to the Austin Lounge Lizards. Both had their start playing bar gigs, and both wrote a good deal of their own material, often very tongue-in-cheek. Lounge Lizard songs tend toward political satire, while Salt Lick features social spoofs between their songs, such as an appeal for donations to the Salt Lick Foundation's Home for Wayward Girls. The most important aspect of the parallel, however, is their intellectual approach to the music. These musicians are very serious about their music, but they can also be very irreverent. Buddy Hale characterizes Salt Lick's music as "a strange and terrible amalgam...[which] comes out of Texas culture's rich mixture of sounds, including fiddle tunes, blues, Appalachian, ballads, classical, two-cylinder John Deere tractors and one-cylinder oil-pumping units popping, [and] cowboy songs."¹⁴⁹

The first dedicated bluegrass radio program in the Dallas area began in 1974. Stone Mountain Boys' fiddler, Dave Ferguson, and Doc Hamilton approached public station KERA-FM and got a Saturday night spot. Joe Carr took over the program in 1975, and it ran under his tutelage for at least a year. Fort Worth, too, had some bluegrass programming. Billy House had a Sunday morning show on AM station KJIM, where he did many remote broadcasts. He also had shows on KYAL.¹⁵⁰

In 1974, the Southwest Bluegrass Association formed in Fort Worth with the help of North Carolinian Charles Powell. *Bluegrass Reflections*, the association's newsletter, featured

tracing, at least briefly, the history of the Dixie Chicks. The core of the group has been two sisters, Martie and Emily Erwin, who began performing at an early age in a band called Blue Night Express. With them in this band were Troy Gilchrist and his sister Sharon.¹⁵⁴ The group played a festival organized by Bob Smith (not the same Bob Smith who played in Houston and East Texas bands) in Bronson, Texas, on May 18–20, 1984.¹⁵⁵ After forming the Dixie Chicks in the late 1980s, the sisters have gone through several lead singer-guitar players, finally stabilizing in the 1990s with Natalie Maines, a graduate of the bluegrass music curriculum at South Plains College in Levelland. For six months in 1991, Patty Mitchell was their third member and helped them to win the band contest at the Rocky Mountain Bluegrass Festival in Telluride, Colorado. Since then, the Dixie Chicks have gone on to become international recording stars, blending bluegrass, country, and pop.¹⁵⁶

Another important band well worth mentioning here is the Whites. Though Buck White moved his family to Arkansas in the late 1960s, the Whites have continued to be regarded as a Texas band. White himself is the only prominent bluegrass musician who was first schooled in the Western swing tradition, playing piano in local bands and occasionally for Bob Wills, when he came through Wichita Falls. Later he had a bluegrass group with his daughters, Sharon and Cheryl—Buck White and the Down Home Folks—recording one album for Texas-based Ridgerunner Records, *That Down Home Feelin'*, in 1977

(RRR0006). Changing their name to The Whites in the 1980s, the trio had a number of commercial country hits and was elected to Grand Ole Opry membership.¹⁵⁷

A second Dallas-area record label played a small part in recording bluegrass groups. The Bluebonnet label of Fort Worth, not to be confused with the earlier Bluebonnet label of

Ridgerunner Records was the largest label in Texas and the only one that actively promoted bluegrass artists.

Dallas, recorded a variety of old-time and cowboy performers, along with some bluegrass LPs, including BL126, *The Texas Bluegrass Boys* and BL130, *Bluegrass in the Cross Timbers*, both released in the late 1960s.¹⁵⁸ The latter album featured the music of the Cross Timber Boys, the northern-most bluegrass band in Texas. Based out of Gainesville, just a few miles from the Oklahoma line, this group played from 1964 through 1970 under the leadership of Robert “Bob” Davis, who subsequently joined the Stone Mountain Boys. Banjoist Joe Hood went on to play with some of the most respected bluegrass bands in Texas, including the Lambert Brothers and The Tri-County Boys. When asked about the long distances Texas bluegrass musicians often had to travel to play, Hood summed up the attitude of many “true believers” by saying, “No ride’s too long if it has bluegrass at the end of it.”¹⁵⁹

Central Texas: Austin has always been musically active, but no one played bluegrass there until around 1958. South Carolinian Jim Barr played in country bands while stationed first at an army base in Waco in 1949 and then at the air force base in San Marcos in 1953. Barr played electric lead guitar for the Colorado River Boys but always wanted to play bluegrass mandolin. Eventually, he formed a duo with Leon Campbell on guitar, calling themselves the Bluegrass Boys and opening for touring Opry acts booked in Austin.¹⁶⁰

The folk-music revival of the 1960s was sweeping college campuses, including the University of Texas at Austin. Fellow graduate students Bill Malone and Stan Alexander, both from rural working-class backgrounds, had grown up loving country music and were somewhat of an anomaly in the folk revival. Being comfortable hanging onto their roots, despite their upward mobility into a world of urban intellectualism, made them unique. Their student status notwithstanding, they were not a part of the campus Folk Club. However, they did attend the Wednesday night jam sessions at Threadgill’s, a restaurant on North Lamar Boulevard in Austin. At the Threadgill’s jams, Malone and Alexander sang old country duets, such as “The Knoxville Girl” and “Maple on the Hill.” Proprietor Kenneth Threadgill, was a fan of Jimmie Rodgers and would sometimes come out from the kitchen to sing and yodel a few tunes.¹⁶¹

Stan Alexander went from Austin to the University of North Texas in Denton, where he started the Folk Music Club, which had members, such as Michael Martin Murphey and Steve Fromholz, both of whom went on to careers as singer-songwriters.¹⁶² Malone’s doctoral dissertation from the History Department at The University of Texas, was published as *Country*

Music USA and is still considered the authoritative history of commercial country music.¹⁶³ Malone first taught history at Texas State University-San Marcos and then served for 25 years in the history department at Tulane University in New Orleans.¹⁶⁴

Lannie Wiggins and the Waller Creek Boys, a group growing out of the University of Texas Folk Club, often played folk music at the Threadgill’s gatherings. The band is perhaps best remembered because one of its members, a youthful Janis Joplin, strummed the autoharp and sang folk songs. Malone says there was some tension between Joplin’s group and his. According to Malone, Joplin once looked at him and commented to her friends, “He doesn’t want us here.”¹⁶⁵

Jim Barr’s next band, the Texas Bluegrass Boys cut a self-titled album for Bluebonnet records (BL126, released in 1969), but, due to problems with the label’s owners, the band never collected royalties.¹⁶⁶ For about a year, the Texas Bluegrass Boys had weekly live radio program over KHRB in Lockhart, and, in 1970 they were invited to tour with Ladybird Johnson and her former press secretary Liz Carpenter on a promotional tour for Carpenter’s book, *Ruffles and Flourishes*.¹⁶⁷

The very first festival in the Austin area was held near Dripping Springs in 1972.¹⁶⁸ Hank Harrison, leader of San Antonio’s longest-lived band, Tennessee Valley Authority, recalled attending this festival. “I saw an old guy sitting on the tailgate of a pickup playing guitar. Someone had loaned me a Martin guitar to carry around. He said, ‘Can you play...“Under the Double Eagle?” I did, and I guess I gave a fair account of myself. When I walked away, someone said to me, ‘Do you know who that was? That was Don Reno.’”¹⁶⁹

As in West Texas, live performances by professional bluegrass acts provided an invaluable opportunity for local pickers to learn licks they could not decode from records. Bluegrass festivals were particularly helpful, since there were usually many mandolinists, fiddlers, banjoists, and guitarists from which to choose. Festivals also functioned as meeting places where players from all around could get acquainted, swap lies and licks, and jam.¹⁷⁰ Individuals looking for someone to jam with could circulate through the campgrounds and find someone of their own style and level. Certain individuals or groups would set up camp, start “pickin,”

and see who might join in. Bands that needed an additional member could scour the campgrounds for prospective members. Typically, the stage shows ran through the afternoon and evening, with the parking lot and campground jams running into the early hours of the morning.

The first of the regional festivals in Central Texas came in the early 1970s, when Gene Graham held three festivals in 1972 and 1973, billed as the Central Texas Bluegrass Music Roundup, in Milano, northeast of Austin.¹⁷¹ As the festival flyer indicates, only local bands were present. Nonetheless, it gave these bands added exposure for the purpose of building a fan base. Also, it served to encourage the “consumer movement” in local bluegrass, a phenomenon described by Rosenberg on the national level. In attendance was promoter Rod Kennedy, who was planning to start a bluegrass festival himself.¹⁷²

Kennedy had already booked some bluegrass acts at his folk festival in Kerrville, but he wanted to have a separate bluegrass festival on Labor Day weekend. However, he was cautious and elected to bill his festival as The Kerrville Bluegrass and Country Music Festival, since he believed that bluegrass was not that widely known in Texas yet. Despite initial concerns, Kennedy hosted a series of fifteen Labor Day Kerrville bluegrass festivals, each featuring national as well as Texas talent, and both band and instrumental contests.¹⁷³

Unlike some festival operators, Kennedy had a clear vision of what he wanted the festival to accomplish. “I’d been in the entertainment business since age 16, been a big-band singer in the 1940s. I knew music and I tried to find the local groups that played in tune, began and ended together, and had the high harmony.” In addition to high musical standards, Kennedy wanted to combat the parochialism of the bands and their members up to that time. “I brought them from all over

to try to get them to know each other,” he said.

Indeed, Kennedy said, “One thing I’m proud of—one of the best bands met in my parking lot, Hickory Hill.”¹⁷⁴ In 1979, Kennedy established the Buck White International Mandolin Championship, with the best mandolin players in the nation as judges. This competition drew entrants from all over the country and lasted through 1985.¹⁷⁵

Jim Barr’s Austin-based Texas Bluegrass Boys were regulars at the Kerrville Bluegrass festivals, and, they were one of the longest lasting and most innovative of the Central Texas groups. In 1972, Barr added his nine-year-old daughter, Sherri, to the group, as a snare drum player. Her presence prompted Rod Kennedy to suggest renaming the band Grassfire, since it was no longer all-male. The new name seemed to go well with the group’s growing success. Around 1974, the addition of Leonard Kasza on Dobro gave the group a fuller sound, along with tight arrangements and vocal harmonies. Barr had always wanted to make his mandolin sound like a banjo, so he became a master of the cross-picking style developed by Jesse McReynolds.¹⁷⁶ A true highlight in Grassfire’s career was a ten-day tour of Mexico in July 1981, under the joint sponsorship of the United States and Mexican governments through the Partners of the Americas and Fonapas programs. The

band received celebrity treatment from local officials and met with wildly enthusiastic crowds everywhere.¹⁷⁷

Another notable Austin band was the Alfalfa Brothers, headed by Dennis “Hoot” McDaniel, who came to bluegrass through a conversion experience. He said, “I was playing electric guitar in an all-black blues band. Some guy traded me a Bill Monroe album, and, buddy, that was it. I gave up everything else to play the mandolin.”¹⁷⁸ McDaniel organized Balcones Back Yard Bluegrass, which played from 1971 to 1974, and formed the Alfalfa Brothers in 1976. The latter was composed



Hand-drawn poster for Milano Festival, courtesy of Ruth Barr

of McDaniel on mandolin, Doc Hamilton on fiddle, Marshall Wilborn on bass, Wyatt Dietrich on banjo, David Montgomery on fiddle, and others. The Alfalfa Brothers had regular Wednesday night gigs in Austin at the Armadillo World Headquarters and also at Maggie Mae's.¹⁷⁹

Although they enjoyed playing together, by 1984, the Alfalfa Brothers had split up, in part because of poor pay. On the way back from playing Big Bill Lister's show one night, fiddler David Montgomery remarked, "We must be getting better. This gig only cost me \$35."¹⁸⁰

In the early 1970s, Marshall Wilborn and Ginger Evans formed the Austin band Kinfolks and Friends with native East Texan Corkie King. As King developed into an accomplished songwriter, the band became one of the first bluegrass groups in Austin to build its repertoire on original material—something quite unique among local bluegrass groups.¹⁸¹ Austin-born Marshall Wilborn eventually went on to a national career as bassist, first with



Grassfire, courtesy of Ruth Barr

Whetstone Run in Pennsylvania, then with the Johnson Mountain Boys, and finally with the Lynn Morris Band, formed with his wife Lynn in 1988.¹⁸²

Tom Ellis and Thomas "Doc" Hamilton are two other individuals who were an important part of the Austin bluegrass scene in the late 1970s and 1980s are. Ellis played mandolin and bass in several bands and became a world-class builder of mandolins. Ellis has sold his instruments to such renowned artists as Ricky Skaggs and Buck White.¹⁸³

Doc Hamilton, from the South Texas town of Vanderwilt, joined the Air Force and was stationed in Wichita Falls, where he played banjo with Buck White. In 1964, Hamilton went to Shreveport and worked a shift running the control board at KCIJ, a small station in the area. The announcer, known locally as Bob Smith, later gained fame on the Mexican border radio station XERF under the name Wolfman Jack. Smith recorded Hamilton's band and sent the tape to Uncle Jim O'Neal, who put it out on his Rural Rhythm label. This became the first national release that featured a Texas banjoist.¹⁸⁴

Hamilton then moved to Houston, where he hooked up with Dobro player and former "three-finger banjo player" Robby Shipley and formed a group called the Moonshiners. Hamilton also participated in two Stoneway albums by fiddler Bill Northcutt.¹⁸⁵ Much of Hamilton's earlier work had been strictly Scruggs-style, but his playing behind Northcutt was almost exclusively "chromatic-style," a style of banjo playing featuring cascades of single notes rather than rolls, which had been brought to national attention by Bostonian Bill Keith when he played with Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys in 1963.¹⁸⁶

On January 22, 1978, Austin-area bluegrass musicians formed the Central Texas Bluegrass Association (CTBA). According to Ken Brown's "CTBA: a 25-Year Retrospective," bluegrass aficionado Ted Miller was the "chief sparkplug for the founding of the organization." In May 1987, "the CTBA established the *Central Texas Bluegrass Bulletin*" as its regular publication, putting it out as the *CTBA Newsletter* ever since. As with associations elsewhere, the CTBA sponsored shows and festivals throughout the Austin area. Though it remains active today in organizing performances, coordinating fundraising events, and hosting a weekly Sunday afternoon jam session at Artz Rib House on South Lamar in Austin, the CTBA membership, according to Ken Brown "has never grown to any great size. It probably peaked in the mid-1990s, but has declined since."¹⁸⁷

The final band treated in this section is quite unique and became a national touring band without ever intending to. The Austin Lounge Lizards formed as a bar band in 1980. Banjoist Tom Pittman was also playing pedal steel in a country band at the time. The songwriting team of Hank Card and Conrad Diesler came from Princeton University to attend law school in Austin. "We always assumed that when they finished law school they'd leave, so we never had a game plan," Pittman said. "That gave us some unintended integrity." But they stayed, and people responded to the quirky and irreverent humor in their lyrics, and this "gave us direction," Pittman said.¹⁸⁸ The Lizards, as they are known locally, entered the band contest at the Kerrville Bluegrass

Festival in 1983. Festival producer Rod Kennedy reported, "The bluegrass audiences didn't appreciate them, so the following year, I had them on the Folk Festival, where they belonged."¹⁸⁹ Though the group used primarily bluegrass instrumentation, the topics of their songs were far outside the norms of traditional bluegrass, for example "That Godforsaken Hellhole I Call Home" and "Jesus Loves Me (But He Can't Stand You)."¹⁹⁰

The area between Austin and Dallas produced two important bands. Waco was the home base of Brazos Grass, a group that lasted only a few years but launched the long bluegrass careers of three of its members. The group formed, as several did, out of a festival jam session. In 1976, Tom Ludwick heard Hoss King playing mandolin under a tree at Glen Rose. After meeting banjo player Travis Rawlinson and his son from Waco, they all formed Brazos Grass. A young Karl Shiflett soon joined. After two years, King and Ludwick left and Shiflett's sister Karen, nicknamed Grannie, joined on bass.¹⁹¹ In 1978, Brazos Grass traveled to AM station KMIL in Cameron to play a live show with deejay Gene Smitherman.¹⁹² This performance appears to be the last semi-regular radio gig for a bluegrass group in Texas and marks the rather late end to an era when small local stations welcomed country and bluegrass groups to play live.

Soon afterwards, Brazos Grass broke up, but Karl Shiflett continued playing with various groups, including the Humbert Brothers, Jackson County in 1983, and the Sullivan Family. Shiflett started his own Big Country Show in 1993, which has been touring successfully on the national circuit since.¹⁹³ Two other former members of Brazos Grass, mandolin and fiddle player Ernest "Hoss" King and Tom Ludwig, formed Leon Valley Bluegrass, which became the longest lasting band in the area. Though the group had a succession of banjo players — Danny Barnes (1978), Wayne Ross (1978–84), Raymie Moore, and finally Eddie Shelton until his death on December 31, 1999—Tom's guitar and Hoss's piercing tenor brought a consistency to their sound, as well as cohesion to the group.¹⁹⁴

East Texas: In his latest book, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class*, Bill Malone makes a convincing argument that his native East Texas belongs culturally to the South.¹⁹⁵ As such, it would seem that bluegrass music would have taken root there sooner than in other regions of Texas and would have more devotees than elsewhere. This is not the case, however, for the number of bluegrass bands in East Texas was smaller and the various support mechanisms, in general, developed later than in the adjacent Dallas and Central Texas regions.

One of the earliest bluegrass musicians in East Texas was R.L. Johnson, who began learning the five-string banjo while a high school student in Athens, Texas, in the early 1950s. He explained, "There was nobody to learn from. Nobody played Scruggs style...I slowed down Flatt & Scruggs records and could

learn some of Earl's breaks that way." Johnson also got up at 3 a.m. to hear Flatt and Scruggs on the Martha White Mills show broadcast five days per week over WSM in Nashville.¹⁹⁶

In 1963, Johnson found James Herron of Tyler, "the first guitar player that could play bluegrass," and they formed the Bluegrass Ramblers. Even then they had to recruit country musicians to fill out the group. Mandolinist Wayne Jones "wasn't a bluegrass player but an excellent country mandolin player." "Charlie Metcalf [played] jug". The Bluegrass Ramblers played paying gigs around Tyler for a couple of years but separated in mid-1965, because of varying work and family commitments.¹⁹⁷

Like many other Texans, R. L. Johnson went to Bill Grant's first festival in Hugo, Oklahoma, in 1969. There he met fiddler Earl Garner. They joined forces, and the Bluegrass Mountaineers were born, with Earl's brother Dorris playing guitar and singing lead. Garner's wife, Frances, joined the group and "played a guitar with rice paper between the strings" but later switched to mandolin. The Bluegrass Mountaineers rehearsed regularly and recorded. Their first 45 rpm featured "Whirlybird," a fiddle-banjo instrumental written by Garner, with "Georgia Bound" written by then-guitar-player Ronnie Stewart on the flip side. "It was...our most popular recording...on our own label, the F & M label, for Farmers and Merchants. That was the bank that financed it. They also financed our second 45."¹⁹⁸

Because of the festivals that were springing up, contact between bluegrassers from various regions increased, and this broadened the pool of musicians from which bands could draw members. R. L. Johnson's first band was made up of members close to home. The members of the Bluegrass Mountaineers lived nearly 100 miles apart. He next joined Holly Bond and the Bluegrass Texans, based in the Dallas area. The Bluegrass Mountaineers underwent other personnel changes and eventually became the Garner Family, continuing under that name for several years. Johnson later played with Amazing Grass of Carthage, headed by Bob Emberton, and then his own Johnson Family Band, with his sons and wife Bonnie.¹⁹⁹

After Joe Featherston moved to East Texas from the Dallas area in 1972, he re-formed the Country Travelers. By this time, daughter Michelle was old enough to be a full-fledged member of the trio, playing bass and singing. "We specialized in three-part harmony," Featherston told me. In 1979 or 1980, he disbanded the group because of his growing involvement in festival booking. In 1977, Floyd and Fanny Salmon began holding festivals on their property at Salmon Lake each Labor Day weekend. Featherston agreed to help with booking for these festivals. The Salmon Lake Festival (often referred to as Grapeland after the town adjoining the Salmons' property) has remained a fixture on the bluegrass festival calendar in Texas.²⁰⁰

A relatively new bluegrass club in East Texas operated a less



40 Country Cut-Ups, courtesy of Andrew Brown

successful festival for several years by. In May 1976, LeeRoy and Hazel Tatom established the Southeast Texas Bluegrass Music Association, modeled after the Southwest Louisiana Fiddlers' & Bluegrass Club.²⁰¹ As Eldridge L. "Matt" Mathews stated, "This was not to compete with the La. Club, but as an extension of promoting 'Old Time' and 'Bluegrass Music' in our area."²⁰² SETBMA immediately set about publishing a newsletter, organizing jams for members, and conducting festivals. Because of its very active recruiting, the SETBMA membership had risen to 370 by October of 1977, one year and four months after the club's inception. Edy Mathews continues as editor of the *Pick 'n' Bow*, 28 years after its first issue.²⁰³

Two other short-lived East Texas festivals deserve mention for various reasons, including the festivals at Kilgore, first held on June 5, 1971. Organized by Frank Thompson, it took place at his brother Willie Thompson's farm. According to the letter of invitation sent out by Thompson, the Bluegrass Kinfolk of Tuscola was the only Texas group booked at the 1971 event.²⁰⁴ R.L. Johnson reported playing there with Holly Bond and the Bluegrass Texans at least once but was uncertain of the year. The Bluegrass Texans were not listed on the advertisement in *BU* for the four-day festival in 1973.²⁰⁵

Later in the decade, East Texas State University in Commerce held a series of bluegrass festivals. Stuart Anderson (then a student at ETSU and more recently a faculty member there) organized the first festival. He recalled not only the bands he

booked for the first festival—Amazing Grass, the Shady Grove Ramblers, and Roma Jackson and the Tennessee Pals—but also the winning banjo contestants. Third-place winner was Andy Owens, who has served on the Board of Directors of IBMA (International Bluegrass Music Association) since 1991, with three terms as Chairperson of the Board, and was a leading figure in Dallas-area bluegrass in the 1980s. Unfortunately, the bluegrass festivals at ETSU did not fare as well as the fiddle contests—they were held for only about three years.²⁰⁶ *The Bluegrass Special*, a Sunday night bluegrass radio show on the university's FM station has done much better, airing almost continuously for over 30 years. During this time, Dave Heath, Bill Ogden, and Randy Perry have all served as hosts.²⁰⁷

The earliest East Texas bands went outside the area to record. The Bluegrass Mountaineers cut their first single in Dallas and their albums at the Stoneway Studio in Houston.²⁰⁸ On April 7, 1973, however, the tables turned when The Lambert Brothers brought their Tri-County Boys, based west of Dallas in Boyd, to Curtis Kirk's Custom Studio in Tyler to record their album *First Class Bluegrass*, which was released under Kirk's own label as Custom 119.²⁰⁹

The Tyler-based band Hickory Hill also recorded at Custom Studios. Their first album, *Coyote Nights*, was released in 1982. Banjoist and oldest member Don Eaves recalled, "I was looking for people to play with. I went down to Kerrville in 1979. Some folks told me of a group in Tyler who needed a banjo player. It was

John Early, Rolan Foster, Bob Stegall, and Ronny Singley, the basic Hickory Hill. I really liked their music. John said, 'Let's get together.'" The next year, Hickory Hill took fourth place at the Kerrville bluegrass festival and were booked the following year.²¹⁰ Hickory Hill is a good example of a group that transitioned from a jam band to a performing band, with regular gigs, recordings, and the other trappings of a successful semi-professional group.

Hickory Hill is sometimes characterized as a "folk grass" group. Though quite capable of playing hard-driving, straight-ahead bluegrass tunes, the majority of their material consists of story songs composed by the members, particularly leader John Early and local songwriter Jimmy Godwin. Many of these are found on their seven albums. Despite the more singer-songwriter character of the band, they have found acceptance with bluegrass audiences.²¹¹

By the early 1980s, bluegrass in East Texas had acquired all of the support mechanisms required to secure its future. Radio was the weakest of these support mechanisms, because the Bluegrass Special program from Commerce could cover only a small portion of the vast Piney Woods. Bluegrass radio in East Texas received a big boost in 1983, when Dave Rousseau took over a program called the *Texas Music Festival* on station KGRI-FM in Henderson. Hosted by Dale Herridge, the program featured some bluegrass but mainly focused on Texas fiddle music. Rousseau kept the name but changed the format to bluegrass. This show was unique in that it was on a commercial FM station rather than a non-commercial one, as most bluegrass shows were. KGRI was sold in 1996, and Rousseau's show moved to KWRD-AM, also in Henderson, where it continued until new owners cancelled the show in 2001. Following this, Rousseau moved to a much larger station, KKUS-FM in Tyler.²¹²

While Hickory Hill's leader and sidemen held together over the long haul, there were other musicians who worked in many bands over the years. For example, Richard Suddreth recalls that he "played mandolin for Joe Featherston & The Country Travelers, the House Brothers, and the Caanan Valley Boys; bass and guitar for The 5 Shades of Bluegrass; bass for Earl Garner & The Bluegrass Mountaineers, Lonnie Craft & Bluegrass, Inc., Tom Uhr and The Shady Grove Ramblers; banjo and bass for The Plain Ol' Grass; and bass for Texas Grass, Rural Route, and The Lone Star Grass Company, [and] Holly Bond & The Bluegrass Texans."²¹³

One of the more interesting bands to form in East Texas was The East Texas String Ensemble, a group composed of four professors at Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches. Though their instrumentation was identical to most bluegrass bands, non-bluegrass influences, especially folk, were prominent in their singing and repertoire. Bass player and English professor F. E. "Ab" Abernathy served as secretary and editor of

the Texas Folklore Society for a number of years. Stan Alexander, organizer of the folk club at North Texas University in Denton, started singing with Ab at Texas Folklore Society meetings. When an opening came up in the English Department at Steven F. Austin, where Abernathy taught, Alexander was hired, and the nucleus of the band was present.²¹⁴

The band also included professor Tom Nall on banjo and Dr. Charles Gardener on fiddle and mandolin, who later became president of the Texas Old Time Fiddlers' Association. The group began playing at faculty parties and community events in Nacogdoches. Abernathy was one of the organizers of the Texas Folklife Festival, the first of which took place in 1972, and the group performed there at the ribbon-cutting ceremonies and on one of the stages for some fifteen years.²¹⁵ The Ensemble made two albums, both undated, one cut in the R.H.B. Studio in Tyler, Texas, the second recorded live at the Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio. Although their repertoire contained several bluegrass standards, members of the band did not consider themselves a bluegrass group.²¹⁶

San Antonio: In 1946, an eleven-year-old Tom Uhr saw the now-classic Bill Monroe band at the San Antonio Municipal Auditorium. "People just came out of their seats when Earl [Scruggs] played," he remembered. Earl Scruggs's electrifying playing inspired the young Uhr to learn to play rolls with fingerpicks. He went on to play in a couple of country groups, and, in 1949, he formed a duo with Bill Parvin, in which he alternated between guitar and banjo as his partner switched between guitar and mandolin. The teens played drive-in theaters in the area, where they sold 8x10 photos of themselves. In 1950, Uhr recorded the Monroe song "Little Georgia Rose." Uhr kept broadening his musical education, learning swing chords from a local guitarist named Spud Goodall. When Merle Travis came to San Antonio during this time, Tom got to back him up. In 1951, he joined a western swing band, Boots Yates and the San Antonio Ramblers. "We rehearsed three times a week, and played Saturday mornings on KMAC with Charlie Walker."²¹⁷ Consequently, Tom Uhr was already a well-rounded musician when he moved to the Dallas area in 1958, where he became an important figure in the bluegrass scene.

Nearly two decades later, another unique bluegrass band, the Pyeatt Family, was playing weekly on KMAC radio in San Antonio. The band included father Tilman Pyeatt on fiddle, Marilyn, age 11, on guitar and lead vocals, Gene, age 9, on banjo, and Lehman, age 6, on mandolin.²¹⁸ Gene Pyeatt vividly remembers those early days of playing on KMAC. He is especially proud of having played on the same station where the "father of country music," Jimmie Rodgers, had appeared in the early 1930s. Though radio audiences would not have known, the three Pyeatt children were part Asian. Their mom was a so-called "air force bride" from Japan. Consequently, the Pyeatt Family band was the

first Asian-American bluegrass group to play in Texas.²¹⁹

San Antonio is a mere 80 miles from Austin, a distance allowing bluegrass pickers from both cities to easily link up with each other. Dennis McDaniel of Austin became friends with John and Jodi Brinegar, who were instrument collectors in San Antonio. "I was playing a little tenor banjo," John said, "We met Frank Box in the mid-'60s, and he got us started." Box was a Dobro player and collector. Their group, Back Woods Volunteers, included the Brinegars' daughter Susanne on upright bass.²²⁰ From 1971 through 1976, their banjo player was L. Wayne Ross, son of Dr. Luther Ross, guitarist in the Poverty Playboys of Kerrville, whom Rod Kennedy booked each year for his Kerrville bluegrass festival. After completing dental school in Austin, Wayne played for several years with Leon Valley Bluegrass of Belton, north of Austin.²²¹

The Back Woods Volunteers performed at the Steak and Ale, for private parties, occasionally on KMAC radio, and at several fiddle contests. The group made some 45-rpm records, but no LPs. In 1975, the Brinegars divorced, and wife Jodi became leader of the band, thus accounting for the double entry for the group in the Roster of Early Texas Bluegrass Bands. The Back Woods Volunteers survived only a few more years.²²²

At a flea market, the Brinegars met the Harrison Brothers, who were playing in the early 1970s. The Harrisons soon formed Tennessee Valley Authority, locally known as TVA, which played its first gig in 1972. A five-piece band at first, they became a four-piece outfit after mandolinist Harris Kirby moved to Dallas. Hank Harrison switched from fiddle to mandolin, his little brother Scott played bass, third brother Jeff was on Dobro, and Mark Maniscalco played banjo.²²³

Maniscalco played with Fort Worth-based Roanoke for a time but has essentially remained headquartered in San Antonio. The other two Harrison brothers dropped out along the way, but TVA has continued to be the most successful blue-

grass band in the San Antonio area. Their first recording, *TVA's Greatest Hits*, came out as a 7-inch vinyl EP (extended play), with two songs per side. The band's most notable success was winning the National Band Championship in 1984, sponsored by Kentucky Fried Chicken, on Monroe's birthday in Louisville, Kentucky.²²⁴

During the 1970s and 1980s, San Antonio had several good banjo players in addition to Mark Maniscalco and Lang Scruggs. One of these was Houston-born Janet Davis, who not only had a band, but also taught banjo, guitar, and other instruments, authored instruction books for Mel Bay, and operated a mail order business marketing instructional materials.²²⁵

After playing with the Coates Family, Janet organized her own band, enlisting her husband Jim on guitar and her son Derek on mandolin. In another example of recruiting friends for bands, Davis persuaded her neighbor, Mary Ann Cornelius, to play bass. "Here's a bass; we have a gig in two months," Davis told Cornelius. Cornelius not only prepared for that gig but also went on to a lifetime of making music. She performed with the Davis family until it moved to El Paso and then became bassist for TVA for several years.²²⁶

Though there were a number of bands in the San Antonio area and unique aspects to the bluegrass scene there (such as having two women band leaders) the support mechanisms for the music were more tenuous than in other regions of the state. Sometime in the early 1980s, the South Texas Bluegrass Music Association formed and held festivals, more like jam sessions, at Howard Van Winkle's farm in Von Ormy. The Association's publication, *The Bluegrass Newsletter*, inadvertently duplicated the name of the newsletter put out by the Central Texas Bluegrass Association. "Someone from Austin called down here and said we couldn't use *The Bluegrass Newsletter* name, because that was the name of their newsletter. So, I changed the name to *The Bluegrass News and World Report*," then-editor Harrison

related. This information is particularly curious, since the Austin-based club changed the name of its newsletter, produced by Don Rogers, adopting the name *CTBA Bulletin* in 1987. The STBGMA folded sometime in the mid-1990s, when only one person turned up for the Association's election of officers, but declined to run.²²⁷

San Antonio was even less fortunate when it came to a bluegrass radio show. It had none until the late 1990s, when Hank Harrison started his *Hillbilly Hit Parade*, a show heavily weighted toward bluegrass but including some western swing and cowboy music, as well.²²⁸ Such a show is more typical of non-commercial FM radio stations than of the Independent Stage of bluegrass development. Thus, San Antonio seemed to be acquiring all of the necessary support mechanisms for the Independent Stage of bluegrass development in the mid-1980s, but these have faded. As a result, San Antonio currently has a limited bluegrass music scene.

Conclusion: Bluegrass music has a history in Texas that now spans more than half a century. The foregoing pages have described the bands, important figures, and the support mechanisms that have brought bluegrass music to the Independent Stage, where it is largely a self-supporting musical genre in the state. Though nearly all of the performers are semi-professionals, the officers of the dozen or so bluegrass associations are volunteers, and the part-time bluegrass deejays are unpaid. However, bluegrass music has come to be a viable musical form, precisely because its "true believers" are willing to devote countless hours to it. Those musicians and supporters who have participated in the history of the music have come to bluegrass from a variety of socioeconomic and musical backgrounds—from working-class country music fans of the 1940s and 1950s, to the disillusioned urban youth of the folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s, to the country rockers of the 1970s—but all have come to share the common bond of extreme devotion to bluegrass music.

Finally, we return to the question raised in the introduction, "Is there a unique Texas character to the bluegrass music made in the state?" Carr and Munde say, "As West Texans, Mayfield and Logan brought a unique approach to this Eastern mountain music style called bluegrass," but this assertion may be somewhat difficult to support.²²⁹ Because western swing is a popular musical form in the state, one could expect some bluegrass players to have been influenced by it. Indeed, bluegrass and western swing have more in common than a casual listener might think.²³⁰

As far as groups go, however, I found only three that mentioned playing both types of music. Mike Bond, of the Blanco River Boys from Wimberley, near Austin, said, "We played Milton Brown and Flatt and Scruggs numbers on the same show."²³¹ The Gore Brothers of West Texas and TVA of San

Antonio who mentioned including western swing numbers on their shows. When I asked Rod Kennedy if he had noticed anything unique about the bluegrass played by the Texas groups that played his festival, he said, "Only in the fiddlers; they would often play a Bob Wills tune."²³²

Drawing material from the western swing repertoire was not limited to fiddle instrumentals, however. The House Brothers included "Darling, Where Do We Go From Here," composed by Leon Rausch, Dorothy Jean Petri, and Bob Wills, on their 1980 album, but this example is the exception that proves the rule.²³³ The vast majority of songs recorded by Texas bluegrass bands are covers of material by Southeastern bands or personal compositions. A large number of the originals are instrumentals composed by banjo or mandolin players.²³⁴

In addition to repertoire, a band's sound is the other area in which its music could be distinctive. One year, Rod Kennedy booked The Pinnacle Boys from Tennessee, who had used twin fiddles on their recordings. "I told them if they weren't bringing those twin fiddles, they could stay home," he grinned.²³⁵ The characteristic twin-fiddle tradition in Texas came out of western swing, but the occasions when bluegrass groups in the state used twin fiddles were rare, and usually done as a one-off specialty performance with a second fiddler as guest. Bill Monroe's use of triple-fiddle ensemble parts on his recordings in the mid-1950s was doubtless inspired by Bob Wills, but Texas bluegrass groups did not follow suit. Tom Uhr's Shady Grove Ramblers was the only group to use twin fiddles regularly, but this was for only about a year in the early 1990s.²³⁶

The long-bow technique characteristic of Texas-style fiddling is not unusual in bluegrass, either, for it is practiced by many famous bluegrass fiddlers, most notably Bill Monroe's long-time band member Kenny Baker. Therefore, the playing of Texas fiddlers does not mark their bluegrass as anything different; it is simply the style of fiddling heard on all of Monroe's recordings on which Baker played. Johnny Thorne from the Dallas area was the most Baker-like fiddler. In fact, when Baker came to a Texas festival, his first question was, "Where's Thorne?"²³⁷ We must conclude, therefore, that there is relatively little to distinguish Texas bluegrass from that of other parts of the country.

Texas is a large and diverse state, but bluegrass music has found a place in all regions, in the major cities as well as in rural areas, and even on college campuses. From the culturally Southern piney woods of East Texas, to the ranching and cowboy culture of West Texas, to the capital city of Austin, each region has had a somewhat unique place in the overall history of bluegrass music in the state. Still, though the timetables, actors, and local conditions have varied, each of the regions treated, in the timeframe considered, fits the two-stage model proposed in the preceding pages for the development of bluegrass music in Texas. ■



Pyeatt Family, courtesy of Gene Pyeatt

Roster of Early Texas Bluegrass Bands

Band Name	*Leader(s)	Location	**Albums	***Dates
West Texas				
Bill Myrick & the Mayfield Brothers		Dimmitt		1950-51
Billy Curtis & His Kin & Friends		Wichita Falls		
Black Mountain Boys	Robert Boyd	Abilene	+	1960s
Bluegrass Kinfolks	Ronnie Gill	Abilene	1	1969-75
	Buck White	Wichita Falls		1960-62
Buffalo Gap Bluegrass	Ronnie Gill	Tuscola		1976-present
Concho Grass	Nelson McGee	San Angelo	2	1980-present
Cool Water Bluegrass	Gore Brothers	Lubbock	2	1973-present
Flatland Bluegrass	Redman Brothers	Ropesville		Late 1970s
Gore Brothers	Gary & Ron Gore	Lubbock	1	1980-present
Green Valley Boys	Edd, Herb & Smokey Mayfield	Dimmitt		1955-58
Panhandle Country	J. D. Wigley	Amarillo		Late 1970s
Pierce Family	Charlie Pierce	Bridgeport		
South Plains College Bluegrass Band		Levelland		1975-present
Tri-State Bluegrass	Eddy Maxwell	Amarillo		Early 1980s
Houston Area				
American Heritage	Dan Huckabee	Houston		1977-78
B.A.R.E. Pickin'	Chris Hirsch, Don Eggers	Pasadena		1982
Big Sandy River Boys	Paul Langston	Houston		Late 1970s
Bluefield Express	Don Eggers	Houston		Early 1980s
Bluegrass Prediction		Baytown		Early 1980s
Bluegrass Ramblers of Texas	Johnnie Martin	La Porte	7	1967-82
Bluegrass Wranglers	Harry Hendry	Port Lavaca & Lolita		Late 1970s, Early 1980s
Brazoria County Bluegrass	Yankee Fischer	Brazoria		Early 1980s
The Broken String Band	Chris Hirsch	Houston		Late 1970s
Clear Creek Bluegrass	Bob Pair	Pearland		
Cypress Swamp Stompers	Becky Smith, Malcolm Smith & Pat Fowler	Houston		1973-81
Dixie Drifters	Hank Wilson	Houston	+	1955-64
Flatt Country	Kenneth Holder	Tomball		1981-90
Humbert Brothers	Emil & Keith	Houston	1	1970s
Lonestar	Chris Hirsch	Houston		1984
The Lonestar Bluegrass Band	Chris Hirsch	Houston		1984-Present
Road Runners	Slim Lovell	Hallettsville		Late 1970s
The Rocky River Boys	Chris Hirsch	Houston		1970s
Roma Jackson & The Tennessee Pals	Roma Jackson	New Caney		Late 1970s, Early 1980s
Salt Grass	Jimmy Fischer	Lake Jackson		Early 1980s
Texas Grass	Roy Marsh	Houston		Late 1970s, Early 1980s
Utmost Bluegrass	Ron Ut	Pearland		Late 1970s, Early 1980s
Dallas & North Texas				
All Timers	Jim Finch	Irving		Early 1980s
Back Woods Brothers		Perrin		
Bear Creek Express		DeSoto		
Blue Country Grass		McKinney		
Blue Night Express	Troy Gilchrist	South Lake		Early 1980s
Bluebonnet Country	Thrumman Winnett	Burleson		Early 1980s
Bluegrass, Inc.	Lonnie Craft			
Bluegrass Limited	J. R. Brown	Fort Worth		Late 1970s
Bluegrass Ramblers		Dallas		Mid-1960s
Bluegrass Reunion	Johnny Hughes	Fort Worth		Late 1970s
Bluegrass Roadapples	Joe Carr	Denton		1971-72
Bluegrass Southland	Willie & Frances Mitchell	Perrin	1	1970-77
Bluegrass Texans	Holly Bond	Dallas	+1, 5	1966-82
Canaan Valley Boys	Billy & Jerry House	Dallas	1	1966-75
Cedar Ridge		Fort Worth		
Cooke Brothers & Bluegrass Kinsmen	Billy Cooke	Waxahachie		Late 1970s, Early 1980s
Country Cut-ups	Eddie Shelton	Dallas	+3, 1	1954-65
Country Roads	Charles Powell	Fort Worth		1974-81
Country Rogues	Charles Powell	Fort Worth		1975-78
Country Travelers	Joe Featherston	Dallas		1963-71
Cross Timber Boys	Robert Davis	Gainesville	1	1962-72
Cuttin' Grass		Johnson County		
Davis & Company	Bob Davis	Colleyville		Early 1980s
Denton Rhythm Boys	Larry Shope	Denton		Early 1970s
Dixie Dewdrops	Salt Lick wives & friends			Mid-1980s
Double Mountain Boys	Joe Bass	Lipan	17	1962-present
Duck Creek Four	Lonnie Craft	McKinney		1961-62
Earls Brothers & Fox Creek Grass	Wayne & Donny Earls	Lewisville		Early 1980s

Band Name	*Leader(s)	Location	**Albums	***Dates
The Five Shades of Bluegrass	James Durham, Richard Suddreth	Dallas		1970-72
Grounds for Divorce	Robert Davis	Irving		Early 1980s
House Brothers	Billy & Jerry House	Dallas	2	1979-90
The Lambert Brothers & The Tri-County Boys	T.H. & Gilbert Lambert	Boyd	3	Late 1960s-1980
Lone Star Grass Company	Eddy Green	Irving		1978
Matt Melton & County Seat		Louisville		Early 1980s
The Meadowlake Boys	Jim Jones	Sherman		Early 1980s
Mitchell Family	Willie & Frances	Perrin	1	1978-present
Mom's Bluegrass Preserves	Joe Carr	Denton		Early 1970s
Money Family	Bing Money	Irving		Early 1980s
Mountain Creek Express	Bobby Sherrill	Grand Prairie		Early 1980s
Mule Creek Express	Ronny Schultz	Arlington		Early 1980s
No Mountain Boys	Joe Carr	Fort Worth		1973
Pickin' Tymes	T.J. Rogers	Irving	1	Late 1970s, Early 1980s
Plane Ole Grass	Eddy Green	Plano		1975-76
Powell Family	Charles & Agnes	Fort Worth	2	1974-81
Roanoke	Joe Carr	Fort Worth	1	1974-77
Rural Route	Eddy Green	Irving		1977
Salt Creek Express	Ron Hall	Garland		Late 1970s, Early 1980s
Salt Lick	Dee Lee Thomas	Fort Worth	3	1974-92
Shady Grove Ramblers	Tom Uhr	Irving	17	1966-present
The Shoemakers	Larry Shoemaker	Colleyville		Early 1980s
Silver Moon	John MacDonald	Dallas		Mid-1970s
Singing Halyards	Dale Halyard	Seagoville		Early 1980s
Spring Creek Grass	Don Carroll	Garland		1982-present
Stone Mountain Boys	Mitchell Land	Dallas	2	1966-75
Sundown	Mike Nelson	North Richland Hills		Early 1980s
Sunshine Harmony Boys		Fort Worth		Mid-1970s
Super Grass	Joe Carr	Fort Worth		1973-74
Texas Grass	David Robertson	Graham		Early 1980s
Texas Grass	Eddy Green	Irving		1976-77
Village Creek Ramblers	Del Washer	Fort Worth		
Central Texas				
Alfalfa Brothers	Dennis McDaniel	Austin		1974-80
Austin Lounge Lizards	Collective	Austin	9	1980-present
Birds of a Feather	Johnny Thompson	Austin		1975
Blanco River Boys	Mike Bond	Wimberley		1979-81
Brazos Grass	D. L. Rawlinson	Waco		1975-79
Cedar Fever	Buck Buchanan	Austin		1980-83
Grassfire	Jim Barr	Austin	2	1972-84
Grazmatics		Austin		1985-present
Hill Country Express	Pete Akinhead	Austin		1981-present
Jackson County	Bill Stokes & Karl Shiflett			1983
Kinfolks and Friends	Pete & Ginger Evans	Austin		1971-75
Leon Valley Bluegrass	Hoss King & Tom Ludwick	Belton	3	1978-2002
No Money Down	Tom Ellis	Austin		1977-79
Southern Heritage	Bill Stokes & Karl Shiflett			1984-86
Southern Select	Dan Huckabee	Houston, Austin		Late 1970s
Texas Bluegrass Boys	Jim Barr	Austin	1	1963-72
Wrygrass	Mike Bond	Wimberley		1981-84
East Texas				
Amazing Grass	Bob Emberton	Carthage		Late 1970s, Early 1980s
Back Porch Bluegrass	Waymon Bryan	Huntington		Late 1970s
Blackshear Family	Jan Blackshear	Beaumont		Late 1970s
Bluegrass Mountaineers	Earl Garner	Elkhart	2	1969-74
Bluegrass Ramblers	R. L. Johnson	Tyler		1963-65
Country Travelers	Joe Featherston	Tyler		1975-80
Crossfire		Rusk		
Dixie Grass		Sour Lake		Early 1980s
Fredonia Rebellion		Nacogdoches		Late 1970s
Garner Family Band	Earl Garner	Elkhart		Late 1970s
Hardin-Jefferson Bluegrass	LeeRoy Tatom	Sour Lake		Late 1970s
Hickory Hill	John Early	Avinger	7	1979-present
The Hurricanes		Port Neches		Early 1980s
Johnson Family Band	R.L. Johnson	Tyler		1977-80
Johnson Grass Boys	Stacy Cooke	Diboll		Late 1970s, Early 1980s
The Neslers	Bobby Nesler	Buna		Late 1970s
Peaceful Valley Ramblers	Slim Jackson	Tyler		1965

Band Name	*Leader(s)	Location	**Albums	***Dates
Shades of Grass & Fiddlers Three	Jim Wrinkle	Beaumont		Late 1970s
Southern Tradition	Dave Odegar	Orange		Early 1980s
Texas Bluegrass Band		Orange		Early 1980s
San Antonio Area				
American Tradition	Jacky Winkler	Hondo		Early 1980s
Back Woods Volunteers	John Brinegar	San Antonio	+	1968–75
	Jodi Brinegar	San Antonio	+	1975–?
Blueridge Connection	Janet Davis	San Antonio	1	1980–89
Half Grass	Howard Van Winkle	San Antonio		1980–present
The Ledbetters		San Antonio		1980–present
Poverty Playboys	Judge Bob Barton	Kerrville		1960s–present
Pyeatt Family	Tilman Pyeatt	San Antonio		1969–74
San Antonio River Coyotes	Pat Fagan	Tivoli		1970s
Southwind		San Antonio		1970s
String Factory Outlet	David Dyer	Kerrville		Early 1980s
Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)	Hank Harrison	San Antonio	+1, 2	1972–present
Location Unknown				
Back Yard Bluegrass		San Antonio?		
Bluegrass Overdrive	McLain offshoot			Early 1980s
County Fair				
Jacoby Brothers				
Laren Brothers				
Peripheral Bands				
East Texas String Ensemble	Collective	Nacogdoches	2	1968–89
Lost Austin Band	John Clay	Austin		1973

* Where there was no band member in a leader's position, a prominent member is shown. In a few cases "collective" is indicated.
 ** The number reflects the total number of albums released over the life of the group. Where the releases were singles, rather than albums, a plus mark is used.
 *** Dates indicate when the band was performing, as opposed to jamming.

Anyone having more complete information on any of these bands is invited to contact the author.

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