

Goebel Reeves

Reeves, Goebel: Goebel Leon Reeves, popularly known as “The Texas Drifter,” was born in Sherman, Texas, on October 9, 1899. He was one of six children born to Icil Burchett Reeves, a traveling shoes salesman, and Alice Tutt Reeves, a voice and piano teacher who taught her son to sing. Goebel Reeves began singing in the Baptist Church at an early age and also was able to play the guitar, trumpet, and piano .

When Reeves was fifteen years old, his father was elected to the Texas State Legislature. The family relocated to Austin, where the teenaged Reeves reportedly met a homeless man who made such an impression on the boy, that Reeves soon became fascinated with the “hobo” lifestyle. While spending time around some of these homeless men, he met vaudeville artist, Al Wilson, who taught Reeves to yodel.

In 1917, Reeves enlisted in the U.S. Army, where he served as a bugler. He was wounded on the front lines while fighting in Europe during World War I and was later discharged. Upon returning to the United States, Reeves began living the itinerant lifestyle that would earn him the nickname “The Texas Drifter,” writing and singing songs about traveling as a vagabond. Although he never achieved great success as a songwriter, he did pen “Hobo’s Lullaby,” which became a very popular song for acclaimed folksinger Woody Guthrie. Apparently, Reeves did spend time around legendary country singer Jimmie Rodgers, but Reeves’s claim that he taught Rodgers how to yodel probably was not true.

Reeves made his recording debut with OKeh Records in 1929, using the names “The Texas Drifter” and “George Riley, the Yodeling Rustler.” Throughout the 1930s, he made approximately thirty-five recordings for a variety of labels, mixing together yodeling, comedic pieces, romantic ballads, and insightful “hobo commentaries.” Reeves made his final recording in 1938 for the Macgregor Company based in Hollywood. He performed throughout the United States and Canada and appeared on such popular radio programs as the Rudy Vallee Show and the Grand Old Opry.

Following World War II, Reeves rarely ever performed in public. During the 1950s, he developed heart problems, and, on January 26, 1959, he died of a heart attack in the Long Beach, California, Veteran’s Hospital.

Candace Goodwin