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THE JIMMY DRIFTWOOD STORY

A Biography with Songs, Photos and Tributes



JIMMY DRIFTWOOD AT HOME WITH HIS "GRANDPA GUITAR", 1978 Photograph by Wanda J. West

Richard Kent Streeter

The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project™
www.JimmyDriftwoodLegacyProject.com

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By
Richard Kent Streeter

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Respectfully dedicated to:
The Rackensack Folklore Society,
Past and Present.

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THE JIMMY DRIFTWOOD STORY
JIMMY'S 100TH BIRTHDAY EDITION
(June 7, 2007)

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Photo by The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project

AUTHOR STREETER AND JIMMY VISITING AT THE JIMMY DRIFTWOOD BARN IN
MOUNTAIN VIEW, ARKANSAS, SEPTEMBER 1995

THE JIMMY DRIFTWOOD STORY, PART 1

Portions previously published in “The Jimmy Driftwood Primer, A Biography”

Guest Foreword

By Glen Branscum, President
Rackensack Folklore & Music Society
Mountain View, Arkansas

We get calls and mail from all over the country, and from out of the country, too, inquiring about Jimmy Driftwood’s recordings, songs and poems—he is credited with writing about 6,000—and about the continuing programs at the Jimmy Driftwood Music Barn in Mountain View. It seems Jimmy is as popular now as he ever was.

Shortly before he died in July of 1998, he wanted me to promise that I would keep “the Barn” going strong, as he and his wife, Clede, had done since its construction in 1976. I told him I would do my best. He knew I have always helped him with “the Barn” and the programs there. I did more work building it than anybody did.

The outpouring of love and support from visitors and locals alike since Jimmy’s passing has been very encouraging. Jimmy and Clede loved people. Every one was special to them. They used their resources to help others. They didn’t have a greedy bone.

Jimmy was a dear friend. I knew him all my life, and I worked for his dad, Neal, when I was a kid. When I was older, I traveled tens of thousands of miles with Jimmy and we played hundreds of shows together for 30 years. He will always be missed. He was authentic—the real thing. His songs are deep—penetrating and exciting.

Clede, the love of his life, now resides in Fayetteville, Arkansas where she is receiving care following a near fatal car wreck in 1999. She welcomes visitors and maintains an active interest in what we are doing at “the Barn” and with the Rackensack Society. We miss them both very much here in Mountain View, but with everyone’s support we will carry on with what that precious couple, our friends Jimmy and Clede Driftwood, did here for so many years.

We are thankful to the talented musicians and volunteers and supporters whose efforts have kept the Driftwood legacy alive for future generations. And this book by Rich Streeter is the result of loving research and deep affection for a mountain man and his songs. We hope there will be more to follow.



Photo by Samm Wooley Coombs

JIMMY (1907-1998) & CLEDE (1918-2004) TOGETHER AT THE RANCH, 1990

Author's Foreword

Read all the newspaper and magazine articles you can find about Jimmy Driftwood and the jackets of his record albums. Go through all the boxes, drawers and files at the archives of stuff he saved through the years. Chase down what can be known of his ancestry and include visits to ancestral cemeteries. Visit with him and/or his relatives, friends and associates. Then, with some amount of applied motivation and talent, you could write about him as well as I.

The subject of Jimmy Driftwood presents challenges because the man lived so long and did so many things that involved a great many people, places and events. I approach this man—one of my all time favorite people—with a two-phase attitude. One: I have loved him and his music for over 40 years, ever since I first heard his recordings during my college years; therefore, I am humbled and awed now that I am motivated to write about him. Two: I believe he approached living and learning as a scientist, a heaven-sent soul-in-the-raw, so to speak, who took on any subject that came into his mind or that came before him as he walked the earth. I think he believed he could know everything, that there was an answer for any question his inner-self conceived. And, like any soul so disposed, he learned as an introvert, no matter how apparent it is that he expressed himself as an extrovert. Therefore, I have tried to be careful to not misread him anytime I attempt to interpret and explain his words or actions.

I believe we can know Jimmy Driftwood now, not by reading this book or anything written about him, but by reading his poetry and song lyrics and by listening to his recordings and to others when they sing his songs. If, indeed, he did approach life and learning as if every day were a laboratory and he could discover everything and answer every question, then he put whatever were the results of his discoveries into his written words. I, therefore, have a personal challenge to handle his works with studious humility and awe.

His propensity to teach as well as to learn is betrayed by simply counting the nouns he used. Only a person with a tremendous curiosity and drive to discover could be affected by so many diverse topics—to find treasures in things others would regard as dull or unworthy of their attention. He spared few subjects: Nature, silent and terrible; Mythology, clever and mysterious; Humanity, struggling and dreaming; Deity, silent and still, everywhere and in everything. The teacher used his talents and unique interpretations of the world to make it easy for others to find treasures, too.

In all that he wrote and in stories he told that others wrote down, we notice that Jimmy left out details about people, places and events that we'd like to know. What was the name of his great-grandmother from Tennessee? Who was the grandmother who first called him "driftwood?" Who were his "Cherokee uncles?" Where is Richwoods Valley? What about his high school in Mountain View? Gathering details to fill in some of the blanks was one of my goals for this book.

The people I met and talked with about Jimmy, who gave me information for this book, are numerous. They know who they are. I am thankful for each one no matter how brief the contact. I got transcripts of interviews, copies of articles, photographs, maps and drawings. I got leads to go and talk with people who knew Jimmy, who taught school with him and Cleda, and haven't gotten around to all of them yet. I visited the archives at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway where his personal and professional treasures are kept, as well as the Ozark Cultural Resource Center at the Ozark Folk Center in Mountain View. At Stone County Historical Society and Stone County Library I got much needed attention and aid. The willing and able guidance and encouragement of Glen and Nellie Branscum, successors to the legend at the Jimmy Driftwood Barn—home of the Rackensack Folklore & Music Society and the Folk Hall of Fame—has been priceless.

Frankly, the name "Jimmy Driftwood" is associated with a lot of things, including several wide-ranging projects that had to involve many people from many stations in the community and every walk of life. Jimmy played influential roles on many important teams. He was without doubt an exceptionally talented man of experience and vision, of unusual willingness to be of use to his fellow man. The wealth he had from his music gave him the means to do and go without having to depend on what might limit others with similar talent and willingness. Naturally, there was controversy.

To the community of Mountain View I brought my own mix of innocence, naiveté and partial know-

ledge. I am a better person because of meeting you and learning what I learned. Some of you are at the end of “the Jimmy Driftwood era” while others are at the beginning of another. I hope this book will be part of a healthy and happy future for all of us.

+ + +

Since the preceding was written and published in an earlier edition, we at The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project have traveled many a mile and have dug into huge amounts of Jimmy’s files to discover treasures that might otherwise be hidden and neglected. Personally, we have gotten more insight into Jimmy’s life, times and career and, as far as we are concerned, all the sentiments we have held from the outset of our search are still in play.

This present edition, which we’ve chosen to title “The Jimmy Driftwood Story,” carries more facts, more photographs and more illustrations from Jimmy’s full life of literary competence and service to his community and our nation than “The Jimmy Driftwood Primer, A Biography” does. We’ve also added an expanded version of another previously published work as Part 2.

Among the cherishable additions to this edition are photographs from the files of GRAMMY® winning longtime Grand Ole Opry photographer Les Leverett.* The *Stone Co. Leader* has granted us a couple of superior moments from the camera of Lori Freeze, and we’re also sharing special input from the Archives at the University of Central Arkansas. The photos of Samm Wooley Coombs are taken from work associated with his great book on Stone County and the Rackensack Folklore Society, “A Pickin’ and A Grinnin’ On The Courthouse Square, An Ozark Family Album” and we are also very thankful for photos from longtime friend of the Driftwood’s, Wanda J. West of Minneapolis. We have not been able to learn the origin of some of the material in this book and would be happy to acknowledge such if we should learn it.

* Les Leverett’s “Blue Moon of Kentucky” (Empire Publishing, Madison, N.C., 1999, 1996) is a showcase of approximately 75 of his favorite photographs of bluegrass and country music stars. His “American Music Legends” (Cumberland Records, Nashville, Tenn., 2005) is an intimate reflection of 50 years of music for Cracker Barrel Old Country Store by the photographer who knew them personally.



Photo by Les Leverett

SCHOOLTEACHER/FOLKSINGER JIMMY DRIFTWOOD WITH FAVORITE AUDIENCE, MAY 1959

Introduction

Making Jimmy Driftwood into a folk legend of much more than local stature began long before his death in 1998, aged 91 years and 22 days. The so-called “Legend of Jimmy Driftwood” was started partly by Jimmy himself when he recounted tales of his ancestors’ migrations to the Ozarks, of his own birth in a remote valley cabin and of walking 14 miles each day to attend high school. He told about his youthful adventures to Oklahoma and Texas to visit Cherokee-blood kinfolk, to play cards, drink and work with the cowboys there.

Everywhere he went he listened to people tell stories about times gone by and how they matched sorrow, loss and hard times with faith, cunning and determination. He learned about natural things: how the mountains, streams, woods, wildlife and all of Nature showed the clever and loving hand of Providence.

He went to a college where he said he started a bakery and he went to Phoenix, Arizona, where he won a talent contest and was awarded a radio show where he demonstrated his musical talent. All the time, industrious kinfolk and future in-laws in Arkansas were doing things that would help to make Jimmy Driftwood a legend in his own time. He married a girl who was once his 6th-grade pupil and they built a house together with their own hands, where they lived till death did them part.

The couple completed their teaching degrees and they kept their appointments as teachers in small Ozark mountain schools where the husband gave lessons with songs he wrote until he became an RCA Victor recording star and a member of the Grand Ole Opry.

Legends are made when enough people are bragging on somebody else—Jesse James, Davy Crockett, Andrew Jackson, Babe Ruth and the like. Although Jimmy did not brag on himself, a national treasure was developing in the path of his personal appearances, especially after his most identifiable song, *The Battle of New Orleans*, was discovered and he started singing it and playing his homemade guitar and “the longbow” on the Grand Ole Opry. He got real famous and rich for writing the song Johnny Horton sold millions of copies of but Jimmy himself would prove over and over again that he had the talent and genius for writing, singing, teaching, and much more that he willingly gave to his fellow man. Before very many years passed, the Arkansas country schoolteacher would take his place among the all-time favorites in American folklore.

After being a schoolteacher for three decades, Jimmy Driftwood found himself in a whirlwind of activity as a performer of traditional Ozark folk music and as a teacher of American history and folklore. Few others have ever been so active or so honored for their achievements. His record label, RCA, along with booking agents and political officials had him appearing at concerts, folk festivals and college campuses, on boards and committees and as goodwill ambassador to foreign nations. Magazines and newspapers sought him for articles about his fascinating life and music. It has not been an easy task to locate those articles, and it is virtually impossible to track all of his traveling.

At age 56, he chose to leave “life in the fast lane” and gradually return more or less full time to a life he would be in charge of from Stone County, Arkansas. The next 35 years would be filled with activities that generations to come would thank the likes of Jimmy Driftwood for. While living in his beloved Ozarks, he joined with dozens and hundreds more community-minded people to create natural and cultural shrines, and he placed more of his music in books and on recordings. He left us with the Jimmy Driftwood Barn where old-time folk and country “musicals” continue to hold forth each Friday and Sunday night.

You can find the legendary Jimmy Driftwood’s spirit alive and well in and all around Mountain View, a town I urge you to find on the highway map and visit there soon and often.

Chapter One: Genealogy

Jimmy often referred to people, places and events when he spoke, wrote and sang. He didn't always give names or any amount of detail when he used relatives and people he admired to illustrate a point he was making. Good schoolteachers, like good salespeople, are that way. With Jimmy, you always got a complete package—an entertaining schoolteacher and a teaching entertainer, equally at home in the classroom or on stage. Journalist Letha Mills declared,

Jimmy was a schoolteacher for most of his life, and many of the 5,000 or so songs he has written were composed as history lessons for the students. His students could better digest the dates, names and incidents of their nations past if those details were set to music.¹

Although he seemed never to be at a loss for a story, either to entertain or to teach, he might not be careful to tell the names of people he referred to, or give sufficient details for us to know exactly what place he had in mind. Did he reckon more detail wasn't necessary for a good story?

Maybe it will help some to place a few generations of Jimmy's and Cleda's relatives here at the beginning for you when you encounter a song or story and need to identify who he is talking about.

JOHN "JACK" MORRIS was born in North Carolina c.1791. He married Elizabeth "Betty" Arnold and is one of Jimmy's paternal gr-gr-grandfathers. He died March 18, 1900, in Tennessee.

STEPHEN TREAT was born on April 14, 1811 to John and Margaret Williams Treat. He married [#1] Isabel Wood, [#2] Sarah Reece and [#3] Elizabeth Morris. He was one of Jimmy's paternal gr-gr-grandfathers. He died on March 27, 1885 at Big Flat, Arkansas, and is buried in Big Flat Cemetery.

AARON ADKINS, a Cherokee Indian, was born in Tennessee in 1817. He is one of Cleda's paternal gr-grandfathers. He died in 1875.

JOHN ELIJAH "LIGE" MORRIS was born to John "Jack" and Elizabeth "Betty" Arnold Morris at Middleton, Tennessee, in 1830. He married Sarah "Sally" Treat and is one of Jimmy's paternal gr-grandfathers. He died March 10, 1900 at Big Flat, Arkansas, and is buried in Big Flat Cemetery.²

WILLIAM E. GOODMAN was born in Tennessee c.1831. He married Martha Caroline "Patsy" Merriman and is one of Cleda's paternal gr-grandfathers. He died c.1881 at Stone Co., Arkansas, and is said to be buried in Timbo Cemetery. (No stone found.)

MARTHA CAROLINE "PATSY" MERRIMAN was born in Tennessee c.1831. She married William E. Goodman and is one of Cleda's paternal gr-grandmothers. She died c.1880 at Stone Co., Arkansas, and is said to be buried in Timbo Cemetery. (No stone found.)

SARAH "SALLY" TREAT was born to Stephen and Sarah Reece Treat at Bloomington, Indiana, in 1832. She married John Elijah "Lige" Morris and is one of Jimmy's paternal gr-grandmothers. She died in 1878 at Batesville, Arkansas, and is said to be buried in Big Flat Cemetery. (No stone found. We presume she is next to her husband.)

THE STEPHEN TREAT FAMILY

3 WIVES

ISABEL WOOD, **SARAH REECE**, ELIZABETH MORRIS

23 CHILDREN

GRACE (WOOD), **SARAH (MORRIS)**, JOHN, JAMES, RICHARD, WILLIAM, EDWIN, SAMUEL, MARTHA (ROSE—McCOY), ELIZABETH (HALL), JACKSON, DAVID, THOMAS, TAYLOR, MASON, MARGARET (REECE), MARY ANN (TILLEY), HENRY B.F., JORDON J., GEORGE, MATILDA (SISK), FLIPPIN, GREENE
OVER 160 GRANDCHILDREN, POSSIBLY MORE WIVES, CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN.

GOD KNOWS. AMEN

FACSIMILE OF MEMORIAL STONE IN BIG FLAT CEMETERY. NAMES IN BOLD ARE JIMMY'S ANCESTORS.

¹ From "Jimmy Driftwood," *Country America magazine*, October 1991.

² The original slab of native sandstone with E M scratched in it is still there, but a marble marker indicating he was a Confederate States Army Sergeant with Co H 14th Arkansas Infantry has been placed by some caring party.

CARROLL R. CHAMBERS was born on October 5, 1834. He married Mary Jane Rollins and is one of Jimmy's maternal gr-grandfathers. He died on June 19, 1912 at Richwoods (Stone Co., Arkansas) and is buried in Fredonia Cemetery.

MARY JANE ROLLINS was born to H. R. and Sarah Ramus Whitfield Rollins in Texas on February 8, 1851. She married Carroll R. Chambers and is one of Jimmy's maternal gr-grandmothers. She died on May 7, 1919 in Mountain View, Arkansas, and is buried in Fredonia Cemetery.

LETSEY AMINTA ADKINS was born to Aaron and Rutha Adkins in Arkansas on June 14, 1851. She married Jesse Jefferson Goodman in Arkansas and is Cleda's paternal grandmother. She died on February 26, 1928 at Timbo, Arkansas, and is buried in Timbo Cemetery.

JESSE JEFFERSON GOODMAN was born in Tennessee to William E. and Martha Caroline "Patsy" Merriman Goodman on October 2, 1851. He married Letsey Aminta Adkins in Arkansas and is Cleda's paternal grandfather. He died on March 26, 1937 at Timbo, Arkansas, and is buried in Timbo Cemetery.³

JAMES MONROE "JIM" RISNER was born to George and Margaret Young Risner in North Carolina on October 5, 1853. He married Frances Elizabeth "Fannie" Chambers on May 13, 1889 and is Jimmy's maternal grandfather. He died on May 10, 1901 at Richwoods (Stone Co., Arkansas) and is buried in Fredonia Cemetery.

JOHN STEVEN MORRIS was born to John Elijah "Lige" and Sarah "Sally" Treat Morris at Big Flat, Arkansas, on May 26, 1854. He married [#1] Nancy A. Lancaster; [#2] Mary Ida Thompson and [#3] Adelia Evelyn "Lena" Broyles, and is Jimmy's paternal grandfather. He died on January 28, 1937 at East Richwoods (Stone Co., Arkansas) and is buried in East Richwoods (a.k.a. Case) Cemetery on Luber Rd.⁴

MARY IDA THOMPSON was born to John Henry and Emily Louise Paine Thompson at Okmulgee, Oklahoma, on May 10, 1861. She married John Steven Morris and is Jimmy's paternal grandmother, however she and John divorced before Jimmy was born. She died at Okmulgee, Oklahoma, on April 5, 1934 and is buried there.

FRANCES ELIZABETH "FANNIE" CHAMBERS was born to Carroll R. and Mary Jane Rollins Chambers in IZARD Co., Arkansas, on November 26, 1871. She married [#1] James Monroe "Jim" Risner on May 13, 1889 and is Jimmy's maternal grandmother. She was widowed in 1901 and married [#2] Levi Morris (Jimmy's "Uncle Grandpa") on September 21, 1904. She died on December 1, 1933 and is buried in Fredonia Cemetery.

WILLIAM LEVI MORRIS (twin) was born to John Steven Morris and [unknown Cherokee woman]⁵ in Stone Co., Arkansas, on January 13, 1876. He married Frances Elizabeth "Fannie" Chambers Risner, Jimmy's widowed maternal grandmother who insisted Jimmy call him "Grandfather"; but Jimmy called him "Uncle Grandpa". He died in 1927 at Cement, Oklahoma. Buried in the IOOF Cemetery there.

THEODORE "BIGGON" MORRIS (twin) was born to John Steven Morris and [unknown Cherokee woman]⁵ in Stone Co., Arkansas, on January 13, 1876. He married [#1] Ruth [unknown] and [#2] Pearl Gaddis in New Mexico. He died in 1942 in Clovis, New Mexico.

NEAL HAMILTON MORRIS was born to John Steven and Mary Ida Thompson Morris at Big Flat, Arkansas, on July 30, 1887. He married Allena Elizabeth "Allie" Risner on May 24, 1906 at Big Flat and is Jimmy Driftwood's father. He died on December 10, 1965 at Heber Springs, Arkansas, and is buried in Fredonia Cemetery, Richwoods.

ALLENA ELIZABETH "ALLIE" RISNER was born to James Monroe "Jim" and Frances Elizabeth "Fannie" Chambers Risner at Richwoods, Arkansas, on January 27, 1890. She married Neal Hamilton

³ A Baptist preacher, Timbo storekeeper and farmer. He owned "the Tennessee Stud."

⁴ John is Jimmy's grandfather in the "driftwood" name story and his new wife, widow "Lena" Broyles Johnson, is the grandmother. He made the famous "grandpa guitar." John was a peddler and singing teacher. Lena ran a store/post office in Luber/East Richwoods.

⁵ Family tradition holds that a Mr. Lack from Oklahoma acquired some land in Stone Co., Arkansas, (either through a legitimate debt or by gambling) and went there with some Cherokees to help with the work. One of the Indian women is the mother of the twins Jimmy often referred to as his "Cherokee uncles." Some Morris genealogists insist Levi and Theodore were not twins and were legitimate children of John Steven and [#1] Nancy Lancaster. Until we all can verify the facts, I ask everyone to accept family tradition that accounts for the Cherokee blood.

Morris on May 24, 1906, at Big Flat, Arkansas, and is Jimmy Driftwood's mother. She died on April 25, 1935, at Phoenix, Arizona, and is buried in Fredonia Cemetery, Richwoods.

JAMES CORBETT MORRIS was born to Neal Hamilton and Allena Elizabeth "Allie" Risner Morris at Richwoods (Stone Co.), Arkansas, on June 20, 1907. He married Cleda Azalea Johnson on November 1, 1936 and became known as Jimmy Driftwood and Jimmie Driftwood. He died on July 12, 1998, at Fayetteville City Hospital, Fayetteville (Washington Co.), Arkansas. His remains were cremated and scattered over the land on and around the Jimmy Driftwood Ranch at Timbo, Arkansas. A memorial stone is in Timbo Cemetery.

MAY MORRIS was born to Neal Hamilton and Allena Elizabeth "Allie" Risner Morris at Richwoods (Stone Co.), Arkansas, in [gravestone reads] 1910. She died in [gravestone reads] 1914 and is buried in Fredonia Cemetery.

ANDREW JACKSON "A.J." "JAY" MORRIS was born to Neal Hamilton and Allena Elizabeth "Allie" Risner Morris at Mountain View, Arkansas, on October 20, 1912. He is Jimmy's brother. He married Rubey Alta Bernice Bryant in 1936. He died in 2001 at Richwoods (Stone Co.), Arkansas, and is buried in Fredonia Cemetery.

JEANETTE "JEANNIE" MORRIS was born to Neal Hamilton and Allena Elizabeth "Allie" Risner Morris at Mountain View, Arkansas, on October 12, 1914. She is Jimmy's sister, married to Robert E. McLelland.

LILLIE MAE "LILLIE" MORRIS was born to Neal Hamilton and Allena Elizabeth "Allie" Risner Morris at Mountain View, Arkansas, on March 8, 1917. She is Jimmy's sister, married to Buchanan H. "Buck" Mays.

CLEDA AZALEA JOHNSON was born to Charles M. and Dulcena "Cena" Goodman Johnson at Timbo, Arkansas, on March 1, 1918. She died on April 25, 2004 at Fayetteville (Washington Co.), Arkansas. Her remains were cremated and scattered over the land on and around the Jimmy Driftwood Ranch at Timbo, Arkansas. A memorial stone is in Timbo cemetery.

CHARLES NEAL MORRIS was born to Jimmy and Cleda Johnson Morris at Timbo, Arkansas, on November 10, 1938. He died on November 26, 1944 at Marshall, Arkansas, and is buried in New Marshall Cemetery.

JAMES RISNER MORRIS was born to Jimmy and Cleda Johnson Morris at Timbo, Arkansas on January 3, 1940. He would not marry. He died on October 9, 1967, at Timbo and is buried in Timbo Cemetery.

(INFANT) MORRIS was stillborn to Jimmy and Cleda Johnson Morris at Timbo, Arkansas, on March 5, 1941. Grave location undetermined.

BING LEE MORRIS was born to Jimmy and Cleda Johnson Morris at Timbo, Arkansas, on January 11, 1943. He would not marry. He died on October 9, 1967, at Timbo and is buried in Timbo Cemetery.

Note: With the passing of James, Jr. and Bing Lee in 1967, the family line of Jimmy Driftwood ends. Jimmy's brother, A.J., and sisters, Jeannie and Lillie, have children who continue the Neal and Allie Morris line.



ROAD TO MOUNTAIN VIEW. TYPICAL STONE CO. ROAD, EARLY 1900s

Chapter Two: Humble Beginnings

*About one hundred years ago in Stone County Arkansas
The Richwoods Valley Morris had a baby to show Grandpa.
Grandpa reached the cabin first and wrapped a blanket up
To make the mountain woman think she was holding her new pup.
“Why it’s just driftwood,” she exclaimed when she pulled the blanket back.
Her words were like a prophecy for what she thought was in that sack.
Her “driftwood” became famous, left a mark upon his times
He wrote *The Battle of New Orleans* and a thousand other rhymes.
—From *Grandma’s Piece of “Driftwood”**

You cannot have a conversation about Jimmy Driftwood without talking about his music or a subject he sang about. You just can’t. All the things Jimmy did in his long and productive life on earth is about music: music in his head, in his heart, in his blood, in his bones, in his family, in his past; under him, over him, all around him. No matter how you examine his existence, there is his music, or something he sang about.

But many years have passed since he was nationally famous and sought after by community, state and national leaders. If you ask someone today if they know whom Jimmy Driftwood is, or was, they may say they do not know, but when you tell them he wrote *The Battle of New Orleans* and *Tennessee Stud*—his two biggest hits—they are likely to get affirmative on you. I tell you, it is all about his music.

If you ask someone if they know about the Ozark Folk Center, Blanchard Springs Caverns, Buffalo National River, the Rackensack Folklore Society, the Arkansas Folk Festival or Jimmy Driftwood Barn & Folk Hall of Fame, you may be back in the “I dunno” stream again.

Well, this book is meant to relieve you and others of the “I dunno” syndrome and get you into the flow of enthusiasm for what Jimmy Driftwood did and what he means to the many thousands who knew him or are presently acquainted with his life and music.

The Early 1900s

Drive south out of Mountain View on Arkansas Highway 9 and you will soon begin to wriggle up the north face of Dodd Mountain, that part of the Blue Mountain range that runs east and west for several miles through the middle of Stone County. After driving through a clearing at the top, you will descend into Richwoods Valley. Had you turned left onto Luber Road back at the summit, you would have been in East Richwoods, but now you are headed toward West Richwoods. At the foot of the mountain, you will cross over a couple of small creek bridges and pass Fredonia Cemetery Road. (The cemetery holds Risner-Morris history.) After drifting over a small rise in the roadway and making a few worthy bends, including coming to one where a one-room white church stands—formerly the grade school where Jimmy went for eight terms—you are smack in the middle of Jimmy Driftwood history.

Stop your car on the driveway at the church, or someplace safely along the road after passing it, and look eastward across the valley floor toward the mountains. That is Fredonia Hill rising in the background. Now, read the next part of this story.

Jimmy Driftwood was born James Corbett Morris in a log house at the foot of Fredonia Hill in West Richwoods, Stone County, Arkansas, on Thursday, June 20, 1907. His mother was 17-year old Allie Risner (pronounced *Rize-ner*) who had married Neal Morris 13 months before. Jimmy called the house a “double-log” or “saddle-bag” (you might say it was a “dog trot” or “dog run”)—two separate cabins joined by a floor and roof or upper story leaving an open hallway in between the two. Jimmy said this one was built with the hallway running east and west with the west opening wider than the east providing the “breezeway” with an increase in the prevailing southwesterly summer air. Within “shoutin’ distance” stood a similar cabin where Allie’s widowed mother, Fannie, and Jimmy’s “Uncle Grandpa” Levi Morris lived. Fannie’s folks, Carroll and Mary Jane Chambers, lived a mile or so north in Squirrel Hollow. Neal’s dad, John Morris and his new wife, Lena, lived a few miles back in the mountains in East Richwoods.

Allie’s parents, the late Jim and Fannie Chambers Risner, were owners of several hundred acres of

land in Richwoods Valley when the 57-year old patron passed away in 1901, when Allie was eleven. He was laid to rest in nearby Fredonia Cemetery (on Fredonia Hill) while the primitive settlement was deciding what would happen next.

Allie's widowed mother, Fannie, was now married to Neal's half-brother Levi. This is the arrangement Jimmy referred to when he said his grandmother "insisted I call my Uncle Levi 'Grandfather'." He settled on "Uncle Grandpa." He referred to this marriage when telling "The Mixed-up Family" story.

...There are some mixed-up families here in the Ozark Mountains. My Uncle Levi married my widowed grandmother; thus, she became my aunt and insisted that I call Uncle Levi 'Grandfather.' After this, Uncle Levi's brother Neal (my father) married Grandmother's daughter by Grandma's first husband. That made my mother my step-cousin and my father my great-uncle. When Aunt-Grandma told me that I was a half-cousin to my double-aunt Ruby, then I began to understand how the feller became his own grandpa.¹

Jimmy's grandfather, John Morris, lived several miles east with his newest wife, widow Lena Broyles, and her children where they ran a country store and post office. They made the trip on foot to see the baby and Jimmy later used their visit for his most enduring story. When you absorb this tale, there should be no doubt why the life and music of the legendary Jimmy Driftwood was characterized by humorous and "whopping" stories. He'd tell them as quickly on himself as on others.

The story goes that Grandfather John arrived to see his new grand baby ahead of his wife, and wrapped some sticks of driftwood in a blanket. Crossing a June-dry creek bed on the way over, he had picked up some for the gag. When he handed the bundle to "Grandma Lena," she turned the occasion into an American heritage statement. "Why, it ain't nothing but driftwood," she muttered.

Love that Jimmy and love that story! He and Cleda told it over and over again, at home and on their travels. "Everyone wants to know where he got the name 'Driftwood'," Cleda was quick to say.

Jimmy grew to school age in that "saddle-bag" log house. When he was three, baby May came along; then brother "A. J." (Andrew Jackson) followed by sisters Jeannie and Lillie. Four-year old May died before her two sisters were born.

The Richwoods schoolhouse was a mile or so across the valley westward with no hills for the lad to struggle over during the short school terms, only from May to cotton-picking time. At the end of eight terms there, 16-year old Jimmy took and passed the state teacher's exam at Mountain View and got a job teaching for three months at Parma, ten miles south of his home that did require negotiating handsome Sunnyland Mountain. He was paid \$40.00 per month and later allowed that was "pretty good pay then" and that he "wrote a lot of poetry on those walks," too.

Jimmy knew he wanted to go to high school and Stone County Academy was his next stop for formal education. For one thing, he admitted, "every time you did another year of high school, you got a little better license to teach." At the time, the only high schools around were at Yellville and Mountain Home, some 50 or more miles away. Mountain View was seven miles away although it was a tuition school and he had to scrape up the \$3.50 a month to attend.

Mountain View was not just seven miles away from home, but on the other side of 500-foot high Dodd Mountain. He negotiated the distance on foot each day from November to April for the 1924-25, 1925-26 and 1926-27 terms. He graduated along with four other students, Felton Lancaster, Ray Ramsey, Edith Lancaster and Walter Cooper. A history of the school remarks, "In this class we note James C. Morris, better known to many of us as Jimmy Driftwood. He has become world famous as a songwriter, folk singer, and preserver of folk music of this area."²

The three-year school, founded in 1895, was located on a "beautiful, well-shaded four acre campus" east of the square in the county seat where Mountain View High School later stood. It's stated aim was "to encourage independent thinking, insisting that the adage 'one thinker is worth a thousand dreamers' is true. And to carefully guard the morals of the student, so as to produce fine men and women."

Requirements for graduation included Latin, Greek, Philosophy and Physics, along with the basic curriculum of English, social studies, math, science, etc. Students graduating from the prestigious curriculum were permitted to enter the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville without an entrance exam,

¹ From "The Voice of the People" album cover.

² From "Heritage of Stone," Volume I, Number 3, 1972

or prepared “to do college work in any of the other colleges.”

Each spring when the term ended, Jimmy immediately went to his job teaching in the one-room schools in Stone County. Over the years, besides Parma, he taught at Big Flat, Roasting Ear Creek, Fifty Six and Timbo. (We won’t be getting ahead of our story, will we, to say Clede Johnson, one of his 6th grade students at Timbo in 1929-30, would marry her teacher and become Mrs. Jimmy Morris?)

To get his fourth year of high school, Jimmy went to live in Marshall where there was a 4-year high school by then. “They put a little more in your pay check if you were a high school graduate,” he told. “I borrowed \$350 from a woman and went and finished high school at Marshall High School, 25 miles away.” He graduated May 24, 1928, about a month before he turned 21 years old on June 20th.³

After High School: The 1930s

The dates, places, etc. that I have discovered so far are not sufficient to bear witness to Jimmy’s activities for a few years after his graduation from high school. However, we do not need to dwell on the lack of detail to know it was a most important time in the young man’s development as a person, as a teacher and as an entertainer.

After finishing high school, he continued to teach but longed to go to college, also. He took classes at Arkansas State Teachers College in Conway and by the time he enrolled at John Brown College in May of 1931 he had credit hours in Educational Psychology, U.S. History and General Methods of Education.

He also took time between school terms to go out to Texas and Oklahoma and visit relatives. There, he said, he “worked with Mexicans,” ate hot tamales, tortillas, venison and black beans, rattlesnake steak, drank goat’s milk and sipped tequila. “All the time hearing their beautiful songs and wonderful stories,” he said. “Most summers I taught school in one room schools in the Ozarks and then worked somewhere or went to school.”⁴

By reading his poetry during this period we can tell the young man did some deep thinking. In 1932, he wrote *Night Thoughts*, a poem that shows a contemplative mind, the likes of which we would see more of in his poems and songs.

What’s LIFE to me?

Just a rest of mortal years; the school-room of eternity, ‘mongst doubts and fears;
where each one dons mortality to only doff the same,
and put on immortality or die in shame.

And what is SHAME?

Is it living life a-miss, or is it just another name for Judas’ kiss?
If I do wrong and know it well—against my conscious mind I live a life that’s only hell;
Ah! shame is blind. MORTALITY—What is that to you and I?
The budding of eternity; then what’s to die?
Yea! All who live shall surely die and all who die shall live;
the dying seed sends stalks of rye, new seed to give.

A question mark is eternity to all.

But what’s it to the dying lark when he doth fall?

A million years is just a day;

A billion days a year; eternity is as to say, “I’m always here.”⁵

From May 1931 to May 1932, he went one round of summer-fall-winter terms at John Brown College (now John Brown University) in Siloam Springs, west of Mountain View near the Oklahoma line. He said they promised him work when he got there, so he got some money together by playing local dances and struck out on foot for his next adventure. “I walked the 172 miles over there,” we’ve heard him say, “but Clede’s grandfather walked a good 400 miles, all the way to the Ozarks from middle-Tennessee.”

³ We have a copy of Jimmy’s diploma from Marshall High School, but a transcript from John Brown University states that “entrance credits” were from Mountain View High School. Jimmy’s diploma from Stone County Academy on April 28, 1927 reads “Mountain View High School,” because Stone Co. Academy was being turned into M.V.H.S. as the new school was being built on the same acreage.

⁴ From Western Lore, Book 7 “The Voice of the Hills” series.

⁵ From Deep Water, Book 8 “The Voice of the Hills” series.

The work they gave him at John Brown was in a huge garden where he was duly bored claiming he already knew how to garden and had come to college to learn things he didn't already know. He offered to work in the dairy, having learned that the dairy people weren't required to attend study hall and he knew he could learn more by going to the library in the evenings than attending mandatory study hall.

According to Jimmy, the day came when he actually met the Reverend Dr. John Brown himself and suggested to him that a bakery might be established in a vacant building on campus to provide baked goods for the students and to have additional income for the school. Suppressing the more honest side of his nature, Jimmy told the California evangelist that he was a baker, that all he needed was a place to apply his trade. By the time the bakery equipment was set up, Jimmy had indeed learned how to make bread at a bakery downtown.

For his class load, among heavier subjects Jimmy took Piano, Harmony and Voice, plus Composition and Rhetoric, and English Literature, all of which he would find practical use for in future years. (You didn't ask, but he got straight A's for three semesters of Gardening!)

Jimmy knew his mother was gravely ill and might benefit from the dry climate in Arizona. In 1934 he left John Brown and went to Phoenix where his adventures included winning a talent contest by singing a song he wrote, *Arizona*. That got him a show on KOY radio sponsored by Bayless Grocers, where he worked.

Oh! The Tamaracks are waving in the valley where the mountains raise their heads unto the skies,
And the sheep and cattle graze upon the ranges where the beautiful Saguaro never dies.
Oh! The Snow is shining white upon the mountains, looking down to where the flowers always grow,
And the white-wings in the air fly on forever in the valley where the Gila waters flow.

CHORUS: Arizona, Arizona, you are always on my mind.
Arizona, Arizona, I will leave all else behind.
From the shelter of your border, I will never want to roam.
I'll be happy there forever in my Arizona home.⁶

Soon, by the good graces of a General and Mrs. Everett Starbird who befriended Jimmy after hearing him on KOY, Mother Allie arrived in Phoenix by train. Jimmy continued to work at Bayless Grocers and keep up with his radio show. Whenever he talked about that year in Phoenix, he was glad that his mother was happy hearing him on the radio, but sad that her health was failing and it was the most painful period of her life.

She died on April 25, 1935, from a lung disease caused, admittedly, by too much cigarette smoke and smoke from primitive wood burning stoves and fireplaces within the confines of the small dwellings they lived in. Jimmy called it "sidestream smoke."

Jimmy returned to Arkansas riding in the freight car bearing his mother's body. She was buried close to her father, Jim Risner, in nearby Fredonia Cemetery. Jimmy went back to teaching school, this time at Timbo where Mountain View High School senior Clede Johnson, teenage daughter of Timbo storekeeper "Cena," could keep her eye on the man she would marry in a year or so.

The Late 1930s to Late 1940s

There is no way of knowing for sure what all was going on inside of Jimmy's mind by now. His mother was gone and he had done some rambling. He was an adventurous, fun-loving individual, but one with a deep and serious side, too. He had been raised right and had absorbed the lessons necessary to make him a fine schoolman and a credit to any community he chose to settle in.

He knew poverty and the struggles everyone in the remote hill country lived with on a daily basis. His people and most of their neighbors were rugged Scot-Irish stock who had migrated by foot and ox wagon from Tennessee during the Civil War period. There were also Cherokee Indians, remnants of those who settled ahead of the Trail of Tears of 1838-39. All his life Jimmy heard their stories and learned their songs. He learned to play guitar and fiddle; Father Neal, Grandfather John, Grandmother Fannie and her mother, Mary Jane, were especially helpful in seeing that his talent for and interest in music was nurtured.

Although still a young man, he had been a schoolteacher for over a decade, knew what it meant to listen and learn, to talk and be listened to. He knew the hardship of walking many miles every day to get

⁶ From [Western Lore](#), Book 7 "The Voice of the Hills" series.

formal schooling, and was well aware that he and his family had benefited from the generosity of others, even from people they hardly knew.

By observing what we can of his early life, we can see his own inclination to be generous, to be a giver to others more than a taker from others. He knew how to work hard and, yes, how to be clever and cunning if he felt the circumstances required it.

Reading his poems and the lyrics of his songs is like looking at the man through a window and watching him dream and make decisions that might lead to the fulfillment of those dreams. Line after line reveal what we might say are his motivations, as much as his conclusions. From reading the lyrics and by listening to him sing, we can tell he was a keen observer of folks and their ways: what it took for them to survive and prosper, what was important to them, what satisfied them, what made them happy. By these “windows,” we can see well enough to observe some of his thoughts about God and goodness and what is required of a human life.

He studied nature and natural law, as much as religious teachings, in order to form his viewpoints on things unseen and how the universe and the planets function with or without mankind’s intervention. He wrote several poems and songs that reveal his passion for understanding the Divine in nature, in mankind, and in all things.

Barbara Heeb Sanders relates her impression of Jimmy’s poetry:

[One time while visiting at the Driftwood Ranch]...suddenly, Jimmy left the room and came back with a thick, mysterious notebook which he handed to me without comment. As I turned the pages and read the words, I realized that I was seeing into the soul of a man through his poems. A lifetime was there—laughter, tears, thoughts, history, dreams, fantasy, fears, memories and loves. A very private world.⁷

In 1934 (at age 27), he wrote a simple poem, *The Land of Liquid Gold*, seeming to put a spin on a well-known religious teaching. It shows his awareness of the struggles of others, and finishes with:

What is wrong with any nation; rich in clothes and food to spare,
That is filled with hungry people, naked, walking in despair?
Where the millionaires are thickest, and the Midases are bold,
In a land of milk and honey, that is filled with liquid gold.⁸

During the next year he wrote *This Is The People’s Country*, revealing his maturity in caring about the struggles others face.

Some say, “This is my people’s country and no other person’s at all.”
But, brother, I’ll never admit it so long as I’m able to crawl.
For I say it’s all peoples’ country where each one has paid his fare
To ride on the train of Freedom through everyone’s everywhere.
The red and the brown and the yellow, the white and the octaroon,
The black and the blended colors has each his share of the moon.
They mix their blood in transfusion, they dare or slip o’er the line
Of race but they’re all our people, they’re yours and I’m proud they’re mine.
You preachers of race segregation, take this for what it is worth:
No discrimination in heaven, then why should we have it on earth?
There’s Carver and Burbank and Lincoln. There’s Dunbar and Gates and Mark Twain.
Where Booker T. Washington’s sleeping, our Edison cools in the rain.
When War trains his big guns on us ‘tis not, “Are you black or red?”
But brothers and sons of Freedom lie down in a common bed.
They shovel us into the trenches, fragments of the white and black,
And sometimes a black man’s belly is piled on a white man’s back.
No, this ain’t a black man’s country, nor yellow, nor brown, nor white,
But this is the people’s country, made strong by the way of right.
The races of man all have made it with help from the powers that be:
I’m praying to God we can keep it the land of the brave and the free.⁹

⁷ From *Children’s Poems*, Book 1, “The Voice of the Hills” series.

⁸ From *Deep Water*, Book 8 “The Voice of the Hills” series. On my copy of this book, Jimmy wrote “Depression 1934” at the end of this poem. RKS

⁹ From *Deep Water*, Book 8 “The Voice of the Hills” series.

We have plenty of evidence that he had a lighter side, too, and why not? From his ancestors he learned many British folk songs and there are people still living who remember his father (who lived until Jimmy was 58) being a treasure chest full of early American ballads. Only a month after he and Clede were married, Jimmy wrote *Hog-Killing Time*.

Go sharpen up your axes boys an' whet your butcher knives,
 And mould some bullets fer yer guns, we're gwine ter take some lives.
 The wind is from the north ye see; the sign is in the heart;
 The ground-hog seed his shadder so I think hits time ter start.
 "Hurrah, hurrah, I'll bet a dime, It's gonna be Hog-killin' Time."
 Now, put th' barrel in the hole and get th' water hot.
 Fill all th' kettles full an' then fill up the cider pot.
 And put some sand rock in the fire, we'll need them, hurry fool,
 We'll put them in the barrel when the water starts to cool.
 And get a spoon ter skim the slime it's gonna be Hog-killin' Time.
 Now, don't fergit the 'gambling' stick, an' cut a hick'ry pole,
 Git a hoe to scrape the hair, be sure to clean the jowl.
 An' don't fergit th' tail and ears, th' snooter and the feet;
 If sores are on th' liver, well it ain't no good ter eat.
 Now, punch his eye and say a rhyme that's lucky at Hog-killin' Time.
 By gosh, we got the hair all off; let's put him on the stick;
 All set, together, up we go, that wasn't any trick.
 Now, rinse him off an' scrape him down, be careful where you cut,
 Go right on thru that fat my boy, but don't ye cut a gut;
 It sure would make Ma mad as crime to do that on Hog-killin' Time.
 The pork is in the smoke-house now all "kivered" up in salt;
 Th' cats or dogs ate all th' brains, but that was not our fault.
 We got th' lard a boilin' too, th' sassage in th' mill,
 An' Ma's a-makin' liver cheese, an' sauce, so listen, Bill,
 That's cracklin' bread. I'll bet a dime Pa'll shore 'turn thanks, Hog-killin' Time.¹⁰

Jimmy always said he wrote what was to become his most famous song, *The Battle of New Orleans*, in 1936. He was teaching at Timbo and undoubtedly feeling high on the inspiration true love gives to a person. He put lyrics to a popular barn dance tune, *The Eighth of January*,¹¹ itself named for the date of the fight between Andrew Jackson's American army (a rag-tag bunch, including volunteer "squirrel hunters") and the British under Sir Edward Pakenham. The lyrics reflect the songwriter's humorous side: "They stepped so high and made their bugles ring, we stood beside our cotton bales and didn't say a thing." When the shooting started, and after a few rounds from the cannons and "squirrel guns," the scorekeeper reckoned "there wuzn't nigh as many as there wuz awhile ago." When their cannon melted down, they "grabbed an alligator...filled his head with cannon balls...powdered his behind and... 'teched' the powder off" and "fought another round." Everyone knows the celebration anthem: "Well, they ran through the briars and they ran through the brambles, and they ran through the bushes where a rabbit couldn't go. They ran so fast that the hounds couldn't catch 'em, on down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico." He concludes the boast with, "Every time we think about the bacon and the beans, we'll think about the fun we had way down in New Orleans."¹²

Just how many people heard the song beyond classroom walls before he recorded it in 1957 is hard to tell. The teacher claimed he wrote it to find a way to help elementary pupils keep the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War sorted out in their minds. Whether he could explain it at the time, his use of songs to teach history was genius. The entire life of hill kids was oriented to working and playing in the outdoors, mostly deprived of books, magazines and such to train their minds to academics at an early age. Music, however, was something they all related to. Some of his students likely knew the same

¹⁰ From [Science, Nature, Folklore](#), Book 3 "The Voice of the Hills" series.

¹¹ The original version of *Jackson's Victory*, or *The Eighth of January*, is the *British Battle March*, popular with the royal armies in the century before the War of 1812.

¹² From "The Battle of New Orleans Songbook" and [The History Lesson](#), Book 2 "The Voice of the Hills" series.

old ballads their teacher did. When replying to remarks that he taught history with his songs, Jimmy would say with characteristic wit, “I try to put a little truth in every one I write.”

And upon the many occasions when he’d be ask to speak on how children learn, he would usually say that what he was doing to inspire learning and subject matter retention was what educators later called “enriching the curriculum.”

Whatever else was going on during the mid-‘30s, 29-year old Jimmy Morris and 18-year old Clede Johnson were married on November 26, 1936. They settled down as well as they could at the Johnson store in Timbo with Clede’s widowed mother. Father Charles had died in 1929, when Clede was almost 11. She and Mother “Cena” had been managing their income and the girl’s schooling alone for a number of years.

Within weeks the newlyweds would say “good-bye” to more precious family members. Peddler, singing-school teacher, grandson of a Tennessee fiddle-maker and Jimmy’s grandfather, John Steven Morris—the one who pulled the “driftwood” gag on Grandma Lena, and the one who made the to-be-famous-one-day “grandpa guitar”—passed away in January. In March, preacher, Timbo storekeeper, horseman and Clede’s grandfather, Jesse Goodman—who owned the “Tennessee Stud”—left them. Jesse was one of Jimmy’s most beloved and honored men.

...He became a famous Baptist preacher, owned a good farm on Little Red River, later a farm at Timbo and a store. He had a race track on the farm that Clede and I now own at Timbo, had race horses and always had a stallion called The Tennessee Stud. ... When it became a violation of the law to race horses, Uncle Jess turned the racing field into a cotton field, and when it became against the law to sell whisky in a store, Uncle Jess filled his barrels with vinegar and salt and sugar. In the early days, he was a great bear hunter of this area, a mighty man, I knew him well. He was a good man and a great preacher. He was Baptist and a Mason.¹³

Being married didn’t dry up Jimmy’s pen for writing poetry. In December of 1936 alone he inked *Have You Heard, An Old Fireplace In The Heart Of The Hills, The Violin And The Fiddle, Beckoning Mountains, The Voice Of The Hills* and *Hog-Killin’ Time*. They are all flavored with Jimmy’s understanding of home and show both his serious and lighter sides. (Maybe we ought to suggest that Jimmy just might not have written all those poems all at once, so soon after getting married, that is. Let’s allow that Clede gathered up a bunch of loose papers from the bachelor’s place and typed them up for him. Her propensity for keeping Jimmy’s active calendar updated and giving his life some needed order is part of the legend of her man.)

The newlyweds made plans to accomplish at least two more or less immediate goals for themselves: further their education by taking classes at Arkansas State Teachers College in Conway and build a home of their own. That would happen in time, but more natural things were to happen as well: babies. In two years, on November 10, 1938, the young couple welcomed little Charles Neal to their storefront home. A year later, on January 3, 1940, son James Risner arrived. But on March 5, 1941, the young couple was stunned when the next expected arrived stillborn. Their fourth son and youngest, Bing Lee, joined the family on January 11, 1943. Jimmy was a dedicated teacher at the Timbo School less than a half-mile from where they lived. Clede and her mother were kept totally busy managing the store and caring for the babies and toddlers. Then in November of 1944, the unthinkable happened again when six-year old Charles Neal was struck with appendicitis and died.

But the families all hung together. They all had experienced losses before and all knew they had the resolve to get on with their lives. At Christmas-time 1944, their immediate families included Jimmy and Clede and their two sons, James and Bing Lee, Jimmy’s father, Neal, and Clede’s mother, Cena. Grandma Fannie and “Uncle Grandpa” had moved to Oklahoma where he died in 1929 and she in 1933. Jimmy’s brother, “A. J.” and sisters Jeannie and Lillie had married and were busy with their families nearby in Stone and Searcy counties.

“Original” Folkways Festival: 1941

Singer, songwriter, musician Jimmy Morris was becoming rather well known around the Ozarks for

¹³ From “The Family Records of: Vicki Gower-Gragen Researcher-Compiler” and “Mona Fay Gammill-May, Researcher-Compiler.”

his musicianship and ability to entertain a crowd. The Folkways Festival in August of 1941 would be another seed planted in his fertile mind that would bear fruit in future years.

What happened was, the Stone County Home Demonstration Club Council intended to sponsor a “Stone County Folkways Festival,” aiming to bring together all the people of the county “for a day of merrymaking and fellowship.” The Souvenir Program said,

The folk arts and folk craft in which this region abounds will be the featured attraction of the day’s program, to the end that worthy traditional expressions among the people of Stone County may be preserved or revived and take their rightful place in the cultural heritage of America. It is hoped that this Festival becomes an annual event, as it has much educational and historical value.¹⁴

Well, it did not become an annual event until the 1960s—the Second World War interrupted—but one “Stone County Folkways Festival” did happen on August 20, 1941, at Mitchell Cave near Blanchard Springs in the Ozark National Forest. Dozens of artists and craftsmen, poets, pioneers and descendants thereof, as well as musicians and dancers, showed up for the event that showed vision and foresight by the sponsors. Thirty-four year old Jimmy Morris played the “leafola” on the “Old Day Musical Instruments” portion of the show. He later said he had not yet learned to play the “pickin’ bow” that would have been a great addition to the old instruments program. He also remembered hearing Oda Boyles Gammill and sister “Sis” sing an old song, *Dodder*. “Gosh! That was a great old song,” he remarked. “I didn’t learn it then, and wished I had. But I did learn it later.” Neal Morris was there and sang an old ballad, *The Nightingale*. (Cultural heritage pioneer Alan Lomax would one day get him to record that and many others for his “Southern Journeys Series,” now available on Rounder Records.)

Noted Ozark folklorist John Quincy Wolf, Jr., who attended the festival, was quoted in a local newspaper, *The Mountain View*, “That young Jim Morris who played the guitar was awfully good – obviously a man to watch.”

¹⁴ From “Heritage of Stone,” Volume XXII, Number 2, 1998.



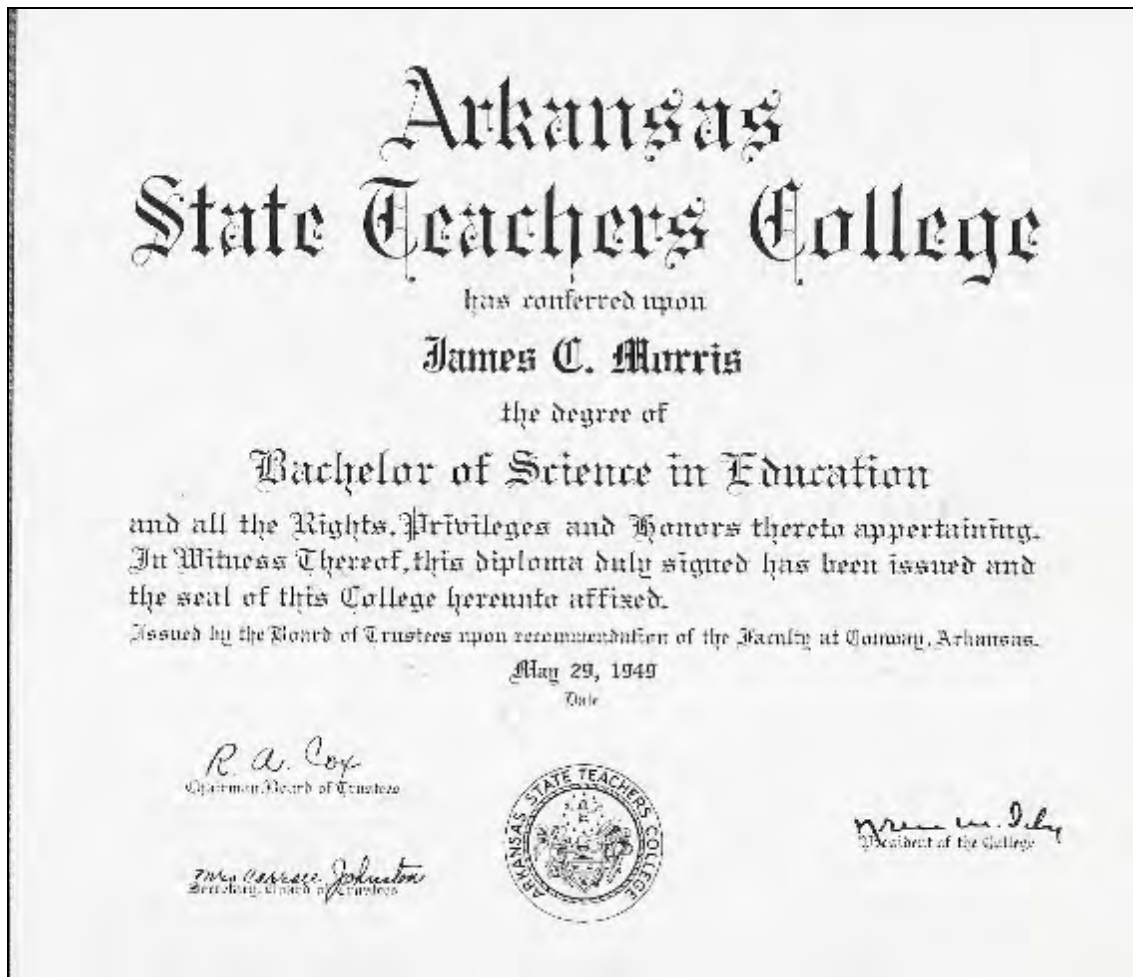
34-YEAR OLD JIMMY MORRIS PLAYING GUITAR AT 1941 FOLK FESTIVAL

A New House and A College Degree

By 1947, Jimmy and Cleda had purchased 150 acres of Jesse Goodman's land across from the school and devoted their time to clearing brush to make room for the house they would build with their own hands. Jimmy always said constructing a stone house didn't take much skill: "Just pick out a rock you can see will fit, mud it in and reach for another one." (Let's admit to a little remembered fact that good friend and local stonemason, Glen Branscum, likely did most of the work.)

The house was built between two school terms, without electrical wiring or plumbing other than the kitchen sink drain. Wood burning stoves (at least one homemade) heated and provided for stovetop cooking and an oven. "Aladdin" and other kerosene fueled lamps provided illumination on dark days and after the sun went down. A "hand dug" well at the backdoor, kept filled by collecting rain from the roof via a simple eve trough and downspout system, provided water. A pail of fresh well water on the sink counter in the kitchen made for handy thirst quenching by using a long handled dipper. Building a necessary structure (known politely as "the privy" or "the outhouse") and opening up a patch for the vegetable garden completed the original physical layout for the household. Woodshed, smokehouse, chicken houses, shelters for cows and horses and milking barn would be added as money and time permitted. The couple and their two sons moved in and so did Grandma Johnson, an arrangement that worked out perfectly so Jimmy and Cleda could finish their degrees at the teachers college in Conway.

Jimmy taught at Timbo and drove the 60-some miles to Conway for night classes and summer school and received his Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE) degree on May 29, 1949. He would soon turn 42 years of age. Nearly four decades later, the school (by then named the University of Central Arkansas) proudly selected Jimmy Driftwood for their first "Distinguished Alumnus" award.



JIMMY'S BACHELOR DEGREE, MAY 1948

From UCA Archives

He was very dedicated to teaching, but we are not about to say he didn't have other ambitions beyond the school walls. With his boundless energy and talent, he was writing songs to use with his history students and he also penned hundreds of poems and songs to express his politics, his religion, his love of nature and science, and anything of importance to him. For instance, the following poem indicates he kept up on national politics and that he had his own opinion about social issues. *The Dixiecrats Got Bested* was written two days after Harry Truman, the regular Democrat candidate for President, was elected in 1948. Jimmy's poem, written from the viewpoint of a segment of the population that had a huge stake in the system, illustrates his knowledge of human nature and his awareness of the human struggle for justice, as well as of religious and political posturing:

Sam Jones he done got arrested; he's in jail so people say,
 Cause de Dixiecrats got bested in de 'lection yisterday.
 Made de marshal an' de mayor jist as mad as a wet hen,
 Cause de colored folk was gayer when de 'lection news come in.
 Young folks laugh an' sing an' slap you; say dey gwine t' college school;
 Mister Truman gwine t' work to legalize th' Golden Rule.
 My, some folk sho' is molested; treat de pore folks awful way;
 Cause de Dixiecrats got bested in de 'lection yisterday.
 Passed de church house yister ev'nin where de white folks go t' pray;
 How de deacon was a grievin', said his rights all took away.
 I'll tell you a secret sayin' if you thinks I is reli'ble:
 All dat stuff de preacher prayin' didn't come out ob de Bible.
 Boss man say if we don't vote right somethin' awful gwine to be:
 Ku Klux Klan ketch us some dark night; dat's th' last o' you an' me.
 It's a fact dat's done been tested: rent went up fo' bits today,
 Cause de Dixiecrats got bested in de 'lection yisterday.
 Some Republicans are funny; talk of honey and of pie;
 Want t' bet yo' eben money: Mister Dewey didn't try.
 An' th' Wallaceites is caddy; say that Harry is th' man,
 But that Henry is th' daddy uv th' Truman social plan.
 Yo' kno' ole man Bill McGuamas? Boy, is dat man really foxy;
 He jist swears dat Norman Thomas is de president by proxy.
 I'se so glad dat I invested in th' man who won th' day;
 Cause de Dixiecrats got bested in de 'lection yisterday.¹⁵

People who knew Jimmy from those days say he always had a pen and paper in hand or close by to write down questions, answers and observations he had about anything that came into his mind or passed in front of him. He wrote many a poem from these notes and he left many unfinished, as well. (Many of these papers of notes were found in file cabinets at his house after his death and are now available for study at the Archives at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway.)

Longtime friend, Dr. John E. Windrow, publicity director for Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, explained Jimmy's propensity for and competence in accumulating and sharing knowledge:

[Jimmie Driftwood] is gifted;...has the drive to create and to write; ...has spent a large portion of his life in the schoolroom teaching. If genius is innate, as some psychologists think, certainly a major conditioning factor in the life of Jimmie Driftwood was his preparation for and experience in teaching. As a teacher, he learned about history and great literature; as a teacher, he mastered the tools and techniques of research; as a teacher, he developed orderly processes of mind; and as a teacher, he kept the common touch. ...Composing, singing and playing—this uninhibited genius of the Ozarks will go on and on helping his fellow Americans relive the exciting heritage of the past.¹⁶

In his early forties now, the man's "budding entertainer" side was about to blossom. He had collected or written hundreds, even thousands, of poems and songs. Some of those songs are what we call "straight country" or "hard country." Not all of Jimmy's stuff was folk music.

¹⁵ From *The History Lesson*, Book 2 "The Voice of the Hills" series.

¹⁶ From "Tall Tales in Song" album cover.

INTERLUDE: ILLUSTRATIONS

On the next few pages, we will show examples of how studious young Jimmy Morris was, along with one letter his father wrote on Jimmy's behalf. First, a letter Jimmy wrote to his dad.

332 South Center
 Conway, Arkansas
 October 3, 1948

Dear Dad:

We are all very well and very busy. Going to college is one the busiest jobsthat any couple ever had who have two children. It is dammed costly too.

In my history class each student has a theme to write on Arkansas, especially history if possible.

In looking through some old records I find that in about May or early June 1864 there was a ba ttle at Buck Horn. I think that is now St James. I will quote from the book:

Quote: Turning back Coll Shelby pressed on by way of Dover from Clarks ville through Clinton. In the moun- tains he came across many robbers and Federal Jayhawkers and guerillas, killing some and scattering the other to the great delight of the peaceful inhabitants. At Buck Horn alone he reported 47 killed and 2 captured and shot the next day. Crossing ~~the~~ White River 12 miles above Batesville he pressed on to that town only to find it deserted by Federal troops who had carried about 200 refugee families with them. Unquote.

Since 47 were killed at Buck Horn, surely a stand was made and since Jayhawkers were not prone to make a stand, surely those who made the stand must have been Union sympathizers. There is more to be written about this battle if the in- formation can be found. Think about this and perhaps you may run across something. If there a re old people living who know anything about this even from hearsay, it will give something to tie to. Better would be some old letters that might be found. And the graveyard where the killed were buried. Be interesting to find some of the living people of the slain. The Daughters of the Confederacy at Batesville might have letters of informa- tion. Would like to know the route that Shelby followed from Clinton to Buck Horn. Perhaps Mountain View had another name then.

I am sure that this will be interesting to you, and if enough evidence can be found my paper will become a part of the history of Arkansas at Teachers College if no further. Shelby was under Price though Price was in Missouri or North Arkansas at the time.

Lovingly,
Jim

Hello Grandma.
Perhaps Jim Berry saw Shelby and well someone should know something.

From UCA Archives

Father Neal's letter (below) reveals some information about Jimmy's early recordings we have not yet been able to verify, but are satisfied there is more for us to discover at the Archives at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway. We have retyped Neal's letter in order to get the original one and one half pages into the space allotted here. (Neal miscounted the number of discs, so the misnumbering is his. We're unable to identify Mr. Dale. In our retyping, we have also made it a bit more readable.)

La Plata, Mo.,
Nov. 14, 1952

Mr. Rex Dale,
Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Sir::

I am sending you 13 discs. On one side of one disc is just a letter to me marked, "A Letter to Dad" and on the other side is a song titled "You Talk in Your Sleep" and marked No.1.

- No. 2 - "I Am Afraid of A Pussy" and "Pass the Butt Around"
- No. 3 - "Don't Blame the Lord Because It Wasn't You" and "I Love You More than All the Angels"
- No. 4 - "The Rosary My Mother Gave to Me" and "I'll Think of Thee"
- No. 6 - "The End of the Trail" and "Beautiful White River Valley"
- No. 7 - "If Santa Claus was Single" and "I Dreamed I Spent Christmas with You"
- No. 8 - "I'm Living a Dog's Life Now" and "I'm as Close as Your Mail Box"
- No. 9 - "Put My Little Shoes Away" and "Spanish Lullaby"
- No. 10 - "Santa Claus" and "Hurrah for the Santa Claus Man"
- No. 11 - "Calamity Jane" and "I'll Tell the Texas Rangers"
- No. 12 - "Bring Me My Sweetheart for Christmas" and "I'll Hang Up My Stocking"
- No. 13 - "Drinking from a Fruit Jar" and "Hickory Leaf"

This musical on No. 13, the boy simply folds a green hickory leaf and puts it between his lips and he can play any tune on the leaf that anyone else can play on a violin. He simply blows the leaf and plays his own guitar.

All of these songs with the exception of one was composed by James C. Morris, who lives at Timbo, Arkansas. The song titled "Put My Little Shoes Away" was an old song 60 years ago. I heard my grandmother sign it when I was a small child.

If you are interested in any of the songs you can contact me at La Plata, Box 111, or call me collect at the Bus Station, at La Plata, Mo., and if I am not there just tell the manager to have me call you and where to call you.

I went to Atlanta this morning and played the records for your father and am sending you the records he selected as the best records I had so far. I know none of these records have ever been played in public and none of them have ever been offered for sale.

This boy, James, has more than 200 songs recorded and several hundred songs he has written in the last 3 or 4 years. He writes his own songs, puts them to music, sings them and makes his own records.

If you can use any of these records on your programs you have my permission to do so and you can make any compensation to me that you pay for records that are used on the programs.

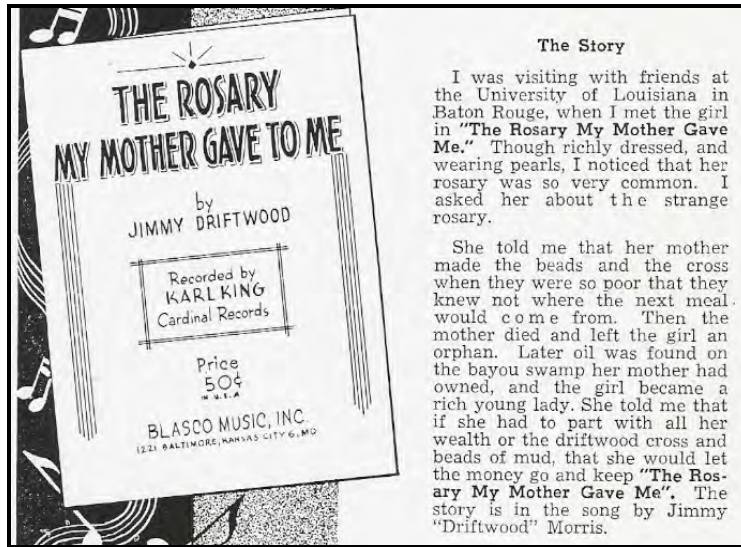
Any of the records that you cannot use I wish that you would return to me collect.

If there is any procedure that I haven't touched on, that I should have, I will be glad for you to advise me regarding same. If you wish to play these records on any program anywhere you have my permission to do so to see what the public response will be.

Yours truly,

Neal Morris
Box #111
La Plata, Mo.

Original letter from UCA Archives



From UCA Archives

ITEM IN A MUSIC MAGAZINE, MARCH 1953

Music in the School Curriculum by James C. Morris/Jimmy Driftwood

Taken from an incomplete essay probably written in 1961.

When I was in my late teens, I finished the eighth grade, read a few books of higher education, passed the county teachers' examination, and was hired to teach a one-room school of eight grades for three months at forty dollars per month far back in the Ozark mountains.

I'll never forget that first day when the children came in with their slates, pencils, tablets and books, hung their hats & caps on nails on the wall and set their dinner pails in the corner. Several parents were there along with the three school directors who examined the blackboard, looked for snakes under the house and presented me with a hand-full of hickory "switches". Both teacher and pupil went to work to learn something.

The second day they brought their raveled-sock balls & their bats. The boys played ball at recess and the girls played sing-song games that had their background in the British Isles. The second week they brought their banjos, fiddles, and guitars and there was much singing of old British ballads and early American folk songs. The third week someone brought an old gramophone with cylinder records. They played them over and over, and the teacher had his first lesson in how recordings "could" be used in school.

When the player was taken home, the kids missed it, so they started playing a game which they called "Gramophone". Someone was chosen each day to be the "gramophone" tomorrow. The songs were called records, and sometimes they would fight over who was to be the next "gramophone". That's when I first got the idea for using their songs and the old recordings in the teaching of social studies.

Since then as a teacher, principal, superintendent and county supervisor, I have encouraged the use of recordings in the classroom. There are many reasons when, where, and why they should be used. Every teacher already knows that we can use recording in the school for relaxation and appreciation. Then there are times when the [pupil needs music just for his own listening pleasure. Recordings may be used to reflect the flavor of the era or the area being studied. For example, when studying Germany in geography, what a wonderful time to introduce the great music drama of Richard Wagner, and on the topic of the mountains of Kentucky, how about "On String Fiddle"? I am sure that a teacher can get a much greater interest and response by using recording both in the study hall and in the classroom.

I have written hundreds of songs to be used in my own classroom never dreaming that I would ever sell one. Then after years of singing to teach, I was given a recording contract and one of my old teaching songs, The Battle of New Orleans, became a big song. I took a leave of absence from every-day classroom duty, but I am still a teacher. Not many weeks pass that I do not teach a class in some college, high school or elementary school room. I always wanted to attend a National "Teachers" Meeting, but just couldn't get money enough ahead to go, but last year that dream was realized when The George Peabody College for Teachers invited me to Atlantic City to sing some of the songs I had sung so many times to children, only in Atlantic City I was singing to a group of the nation's top educators.

Original item from UCA Archives

PIECE JIMMY WROTE EXPLAINING "MUSIC IN THE CURRICULUM", C. 1961

A close relative of Jimmy told me he recorded a total of eight sides for Cardinal at the Blasco Music studio in Kansas City, Missouri, including *Grapevine News*, *Peace of Mind*, *Honky Tonk Angel*, *How Much Do You Love Me* and *Hold My Love*. A song Porter Wagoner was to use as opening theme song for his 1960's TV show, *Howdy, Neighbor, Howdy*, was also recorded on Cardinal.

Another page in Jimmy's handwriting discloses, "Contracted October 21, 1954, Blasco Music Co.,



Inc., Kansas City; Shelter Music, Kansas City: *Key to My Heart*, *There'll Be No Blues in Heaven*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Stop Stop Stop*, *I'd Love to be A Fool Again* and *Your Kisses Grow Sweeter All the Time.*" And, "Sold: *How Much Do You Love Me*, *Hold My Love*, *Peace of Mind*, *Grapevine News*, *The Rosary My Mother Gave to Me* (Blasco) [and] "*Honky Tonk Angel* (Shelter)." And, "Contracted: *You Ain't Never Asked Me*, *I Washed My Blues Away*, *When You Love With A Broken Heart*, *Twist My Arm*, and *I'm the Devil* (Shelter)."

With these foregoing bits of information, we disclose that not all of Jimmy's stuff is what we consider "folk music," although his most popular recordings were known as "folk" and not "country." The term "folk music" has a very broad meaning and its application is usually reserved for the likes of early American songs, ones about the struggles of our nation's people as settlers, miners, seamen, railroaders, cowboys, etc. During the recent anti-Vietnam War era, however, the category reappeared with arguable vitality, and has even more recently gained interest following the phenomenal success of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* of 2000.

When Jimmy was "knocking 'em out" with his songs and stories all over the U. S. and in foreign countries, appearing for concerts, teaching Ozarks folklore, and all the rest—that would be starting in the late '50s—powerful currents of the so-called "hippie movement" were in full force. The "hippie era" was a major social movement in our nation's history and produced songs protesting the Asian war, all kinds of "human rights" issues such as racial segregation, low wages, unsafe working conditions, etc. These songs are now part of American folk music along with the oldest ones, although at the time Jimmy was expressing his views contrary to popular opinion about what is folk music and what isn't.

In 1955—ahead of the "hippie era"—he wrote "The True—Not Synthetic—Ozarkian Folk Songs" in *The Ozarks Mountaineer*, and is thereby and forevermore in the "arena of ideas" about American culture:

A true folk song is one of the folk that has stood the test of time. It has been handed down from generation to generation. It was a means of entertainment before we had the phonograph, radio and TV. It may run from a few lines to a hundred verses. It may be about love, hatred, war, murder or anything that has to do with human emotions. And it may be just a bunch of silly rhymes with a tune, wonderful now for helping children learn to speak clearly.

Music publishers have capitalized on the term "Folk Song" by calling today's songs, "Folk Songs," and their singers "Folk Singers." But the true Folk Singer sings the songs of the past, be he an artist on the stage, or a farm boy digging Ginseng....¹

He would soon broaden his definition of the term, but at that moment in history (and in my studied opinion), Jimmy had it right. As the era of collecting genuine folklore drew to a close—that is, as the influence of phonograph recordings, radio, television, wars, movies and the like took over more and more of the lives and thinking of "the folk"—what would become known as "folk music," "folk songs," "folk singing," etc. would change to include a broader range of subject matter. The subject matter would be less related to survival lifestyles and become more political. However, it is interesting to me that many of that era's population was also involved in "back to nature" or "back to the land" lifestyles which somewhat required the trade skills of the early pioneers.

Let's now look at some of the factors that produced the emergence and career of one Ozark farm boy

¹ *The Ozarks Mountaineer*, November 1955.

turned schoolteacher who would become known worldwide as a songwriter, recording artist and entertainer, folklorist and musicologist. (Jimmy would always call himself a schoolteacher.)

The Nashville Connection

“It was one of those historic meetings that will always be covered in legend,” Dale Vinicur wrote in her piece for “Americana—Jimmie Driftwood”. After the school term ended in the spring of 1957, two Arkansas schoolteachers whose combined salaries were less than \$5,000 per year drove to Nashville, Tennessee, to seek their fortune.

Here is some of what we know that got things moving for Jimmy and, thankfully, for us. Don Warden, steel guitar player for country music star Porter Wagoner’s “Wagonmasters”, had heard of Jimmy and one day in April 1957, Jimmy received the following letter from Warden telling him . . .

“Porter Wagoner and myself have recently formed a publishing company. Your name was given to me by Red Gale* from Harrison. Red as you may know works in the trio with us. Red informed me that you have written some very good songs. He mentioned some that I had heard. If you are not tied up with any publisher we would like to have some of your songs. We have had very good luck with our company. We have gotten nine songs recorded since the first of the year. You may send them on either tape or disc. We won’t ask you to sign a contract on the song unless we can help you with it. I’ll be looking forward to hearing from you. Sincerely, Don Warden.”

By late May, after an exchange of letters, Jimmy received an invitation to meet Warden in Nashville.

“We will be in town from now until the 6th of June. If you could come down at any time during that time we could get together. If you can’t come between now and June 6th let me know and we will arrange another date. I would suggest that you stay at the Clarkston Hotel. It is a moderate priced hotel and is next door to WSM. When you get in town call me at CA 8-3042. I’ll be looking forward to hearing from you. Sincerely, Don Warden.”

Jimmy and Cleda claimed the evening they arrived in Nashville, Jimmy sang *The Battle of New Orleans* for an executive at Tree Publishing who allowed that if that was the best he had, he should “forget it and go back home” and stick to teaching school. Bolstering her husband’s sagging confidence, Cleda insisted that if they had to eat cheese and crackers they would see Don Warden as intended.

According to Porter Wagoner, he and Don were having breakfast at the Clarkston Hotel in downtown Nashville when they met the couple. After a short visit, Don joined Jimmy and Cleda in their room where Jimmy sang more than a hundred songs, playing the homemade guitar his grandfather John Morris had made. He began with *Howdy, Neighbor, Howdy*, one of the songs he had recorded on Cardinal earlier. Porter would eventually get around to recording the lively number himself and it became an early theme song for his TV show. (By the way, “The Porter Wagoner Show” ran for 20 years.)

“I sang all night,” Jimmy would say many times about the hotel room concert. Finally, he got around to the song that caused so much pain the night before. “He started singing ‘In eighteen fourteen we took a little trip along with Colonel Jackson down the mighty Mississip...’ under his breath, like he wasn’t sure if he should or not,” Warden recalls. “I told him to sing it all. It was the best thing I had heard so far.”

The air in the room, formerly charged with Warden’s interest in several of Jimmy’s songs, suddenly exploded like dynamite. Warden took the balladeer to the Friday Night Grand Ole Opry so his friends could hear that song and other originals from his newly discovered talent.

Next day, the schoolteachers returned to their home in Timbo where they were soon visited by the publisher, this time with a contract in his hands. Don waited patiently while his future star finished his bath in a tub in the front room and got dressed. The contract was signed “James Morris”. (By then, Jimmy had been a popular local performer using the name “Jimmy Driftwood,” but Morris was still his legal name.)

When Jimmy and Cleda got to the RCA offices in Nashville soon after, RCA executive Chet Atkins listened to Jimmy sing the songs he and Warden had selected as most apt to be commercial successes. Atkins insisted on two things from Jimmy’s side of the project: they would use the name “Jimmy Driftwood” (and spell it “Jimmie”) and Jimmy would play the guitar his grandpa Morris had made for

* Jimmy often gave credit to Hugh Ashley of Harrison and to Dr. John Quincy Wolfe, Jr. of Batesville for suggesting he get in touch with someone in Nashville who would listen to some of his great songs.

him. (Jimmy said he never liked the spelling RCA made of his name, but said Chet and his people thought “Jimmie” looked more southern and “folksier” than “Jimmy”.) Of course, the “grandpa guitar” soon became a serious piece of Jimmy’s trademark. Another thing was the “pickin’ bow” Jimmy introduced to the world on his RCA Victor recordings. The “pickin’ bow,” or “mouth bow,” was very popular on his personal appearances.

The Arkansas couple was back in Nashville for their Sunday, October 27, 1957, date in the recording studio with producer Chet Atkins to record what would be his first album for the famous label. The eleven songs were completed in just three hours. “I knew those songs, boy, did I know those songs!” Jimmy would say again and again. (Then he might add, “Today, you know it would take three days.”)

That first RCA Victor album was titled “Jimmie Driftwood Sings Newly Discovered Early American Folk Songs,” a 33 1/3 rpm LP [Long Playing] released in June of 1958. It would later be relabeled and repackaged as “The Battle of New Orleans.”

On that historic day, the world got much more than another song about another battle in another war. Jimmy’s RCA Victor recording of *The Battle of New Orleans* would send the singer-songwriter on a trip that would eventually include you and me and millions more on the highway.

If we fail to honor those first days and the people who animated them, we shall have missed the keystone in the archway to fame and the legacy of Jimmy Driftwood—and Mountain View, Arkansas, for that matter—and the heritage of American Folk Music, as well. Everything would be as piles of potential building stones with little definition were it not for the keystone in the archway that leads us to so much joy and delight from Jimmy’s songs and poems. (Every time I see Don Warden on re-runs of “The Porter Wagoner Show”—and in between times, too—I say, “Thank you, Don.”)

Jimmy completed the 1957-58 term as principal of the school at Snowball, Arkansas, then said “Goodbye” to a career that began in 1923. Cleda would continue to teach third grade at Mountain View.

The Battle Over *The Battle*

The album “Jimmie Driftwood Sings Newly Discovered Early American Folk Songs” (at least the single of *The Battle of New Orleans*) was sent to record stores and radio stations in June of 1958. Tens of thousands were sold in stores immediately, but radio stations hedged on playing *The Battle of New Orleans* because Jimmy used the words “hell” and “damn” in the song because there was a prohibition on those words in broadcasting. Jimmy sang, “Old Hickory said he didn’t give a damn, he’s a-gonna whip the britches off of Colonel Pakenham” and “We held our fire till we seed their faces well then we opened up our squirrel guns and really gave ‘em hell.”

Radio prohibitions notwithstanding, the country music industry—struggling for survival under the negative impact of upstart “rock and roll” music—had a huge hit song and RCA Victor had a rising star. The Grand Ole Opry in Nashville arranged to have “the folk singer and longbow player from the Ozarks” on their famous stage at the Ryman Auditorium. He would be a frequent guest until becoming a performing member of the cast in 1962.

Although he appeared at the “Mother Church of Country Music” regularly for more than five years, he often missed in order to appear at the Louisiana Hayride in Shreveport and on the Ozark Jubilee in Springfield, Missouri. It was on the weekend of January 24, 1959 that he met country star Johnny Horton, a regular on the Shreveport show.

In an earlier telephone conversation, Horton told Jimmy he had heard *The Battle of New Orleans* on Ralph Emery’s “Opry Star Spotlight,” an all-night disc jockey show on WSM, and wanted to record it himself. Reckoning it was not likely Ralph would have played it since Ralph would be careful not to show disrespect for broadcasting rules, Jimmy said so. Horton supposedly replied with, “Well, it may have been when Ralph was in the restroom but somebody played your song.” Emery later said he thought Jimmy’s version caught on with listeners because of the rare use on the air of the two forbidden words. “Someone would say, ‘That man said hell and damn. Here, let me play this record for you’.”

Jimmy said he spent the rest of that mid-winter weekend rewriting the song so Horton could record it. Within the week, Columbia Records had it done by the man who already had a career going with a #1 hit, *When It’s Springtime in Alaska*. On April 27th, Johnny Horton’s pepped-up version of Jimmy’s “Battle song” appeared on the Billboard Country chart where it stayed for a total of 21 weeks, including a 10-

week ride at #1. A week later, on May 4th, it entered Billboard's Pop chart where it was #1 for six of its 21 weeks there.

Jimmy told a story about his understanding of the music industry. He said he thought that if he made any money it would come from the record company. So, when he picked up his mail at the Timbo post office, he was careful to place envelopes from RCA quickly inside his pocket. One day, soon after the first album reached the stores, he found an envelope from Warden Music Co., the publisher who owned the rights to the songs RCA had recorded. Not as careful with this one, Timbo storekeeper Thurmond George stood nearby curious for anything that would make news in the village. He saw the \$25,000.00 check in the envelope Jimmy opened and exclaimed, "Goddamn, twenty-five hundred dollars!" "He didn't have much education," Jimmy humored, "and I never told him any different." With that money, Jimmy and Clede bought some more land to add to their 150-acre homestead at Timbo. Jimmy often said he put his money in the "Clay and Soil Bank," not the First National.



Photographer unknown. Provided by Les Leverett

JOHNNY HORTON, DON WARDEN & JIMMY DRIFTWOOD AT RYMAN AUDITORIUM, C. 1960

Another wonderful “Battle song” story is told. Seems that *Atlantic Weekly* magazine reported “a foreign entertainer” stole Jimmy’s song, “changed the name and it became a #1 hit in Europe.” Don Warden called Jimmy and said, “He’s offering to give us half of what he’s made if we don’t sue him. What do you want to do?” Jimmy replied, “Well, let’s take the money and hope he steals another one.”

Jimmy always gave credit to Andrew Jackson for everything he had. “If he hadn’t won that battle, I would not have written that song,” he was quick to say. Others would allow that Jimmy got more benefit out of the fight than Jackson did, even though the patriot got to be U. S. President.

A Very Busy Period

This part may turn into a boring chronicle or “grocery list” of Jimmy activities but, believe you me, we won’t get even half of his travels and dates recorded here. You can check the chapters on “Chronology” and “Awards”, and the “Discography” and “Bibliography” sections to get more detail.

However, following is a sketch of some of the activity of a very, very busy period of traveling and recording and of Jimmy appearing regularly on the Opry, the Hayride and the Jubilee and at numerous folk festivals, with time at home in Arkansas to fill in any empty spaces on his schedule.

For one thing, he went to Washington, D.C., for the National Folk Music Festival there. Jimmy’s long-time attorney, Roy Danuser, told that then-President Eisenhower declined the invitation to attend saying, “I never did like that kind of music.” However, when told that Jimmy was to perform, Ike said, “If Jimmy Driftwood is going to be there, I’ll be there.”



Photo by Les Leverett

JIMMY & JAMES JR AT NATIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL IN NASHVILLE, 1959

On Friday, April 3, 1959, he was in New York City for one of his most renowned appearances, headlining “Folksong: ‘59, A panorama of the contemporary American folk song revival” at Carnegie Hall. Jimmy was the first “folk artist” to appear at the famous concert hall. Also on the Alan Lomax and Louis Gordon bill was Memphis Slim, Muddy Waters, Mike Seeger and Pete Seeger. Nineteen-year old son James Morris (“Jimmy Jr.”) performed on stage with his father. Program notes for the event read:

Jimmie Driftwood, born deep in the heart of the Ozark Mountains in Arkansas, learned to sing ballads from his grandfather and to play the mouthbow, a primitive instrument never before found in America, from the old people of the district. ... He is a representative of the folk bards who created our native American ballads.²

In June, he was in California for the 2nd Berkeley Folk Festival. While there, he also spent several hours recording with Bing Crosby, Rosemary Clooney and Sam Hinton for RCA Victor’s 2-LP release “How the West Was Won.”

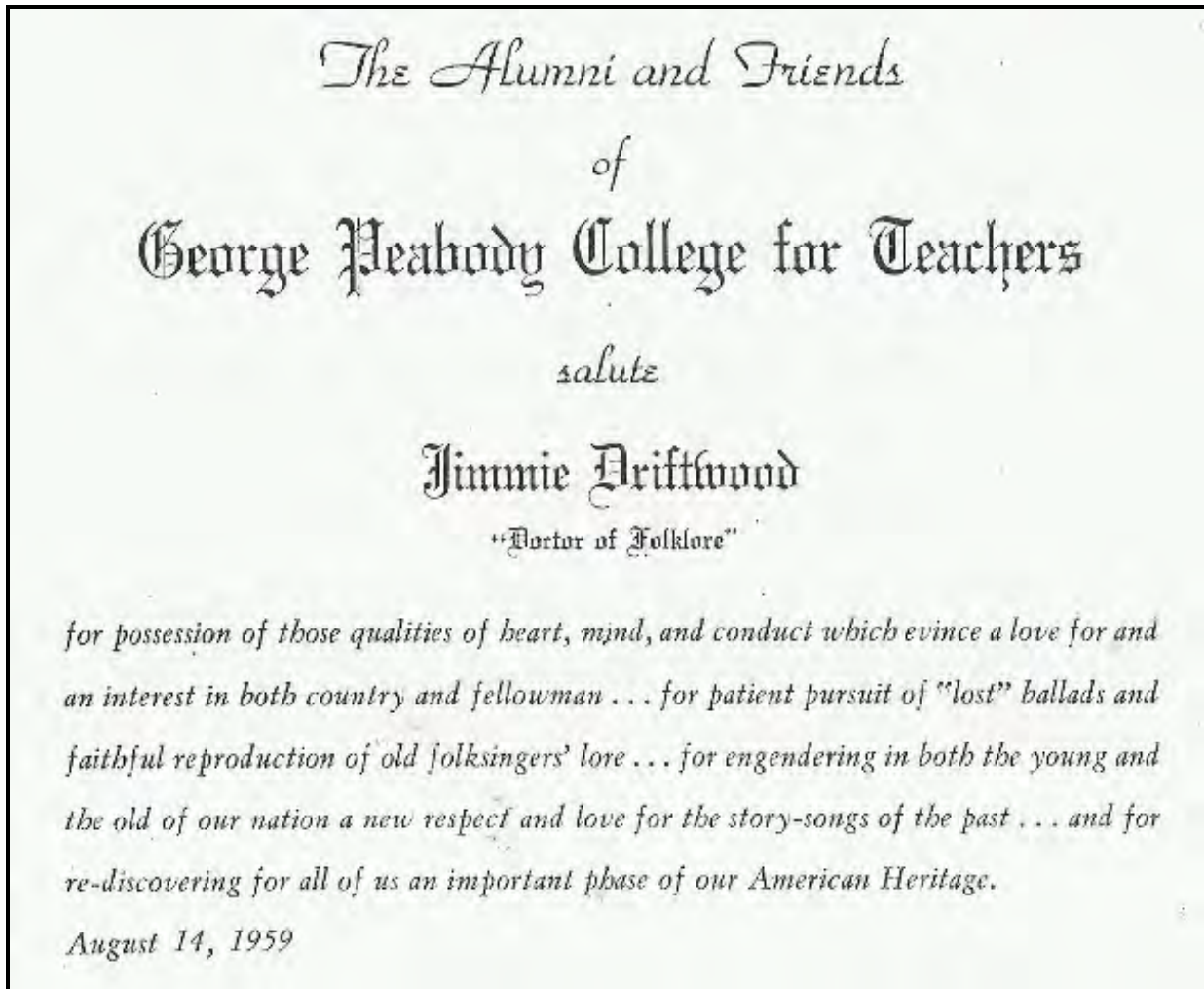
Later in June, he was in Rhode Island for the 1st Newport Folk Festival, appearing there along with

² From program notes: “Folksong: ‘59, A panorama of the contemporary American folk song revival.”

Earl Scruggs, Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, John Lee Hooker, Tom Makem and The New Lost City Ramblers.

In August, he was in Nashville to receive an honorary "Doctor of Folklore" degree from Peabody College for Teachers. The famous institution, noted for training teachers, is now part of Vanderbilt University. The printed program for the occasion honoring Jimmy begins with, "There never was a horse like the Tennessee Stud and there never was a school teacher like Jimmie Driftwood." Citing many ways Jimmy was contributing to preserving and teaching folklore, he was compared to Jesse Stuart, the "mountain poet" of eastern Kentucky, to Harry Kroll of the Louisiana Delta, and Alfred Leland Crabb of Nashville and Middle Tennessee. "By means of his folklore, he is teaching us our heritage. His songs and ballads [are] prodding young and eager minds."

On September 19th, six of Jimmy's songs were in *Cash Box Magazine's* "Top 50 Across the Nation." They were *Tennessee Stud* (Eddy Arnold, #5); *Sal's Got A Sugar Lip* (Johnny Horton, #9), *Soldier's Joy* (Hawkshaw Hawkins, #11); *Sailor Man* (Johnnie & Jack, #21); *Battle of Kookamonga* (Homer & Jethro, #25); *Battle of New Orleans* (Johnny Horton, #32).



JIMMY'S "DOCTOR OF FOLKLORE" DEGREE, AUGUST 14, 1959

From UCA Archives

During Russian Premier Krushchev's September 1959 visit to the United Nations in New York, Jimmy was there and he sang *The Bear Flew Over the Ocean*. In October, he appeared at the St. Louis "Salute To Music" extravaganza.

On November 29th, he took time to attend the 2nd Annual Awards of the Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles where he received the prestigious "Song of the Year" GRAMMY® for *The Battle of New Orleans* from presenter, legendary singer Ella Fitzgerald. The same night, Johnny Horton took the GRAMMY® for "Best Country and Western Performance" for his Columbia recording of

the same song. Homer & Jethro took the GRAMMY® for “Best Comedy Performance – Musical” for their RCA Victor recording of *The Battle of Kookamonga*, a comedic version of Jimmy’s *Battle of New Orleans*. For the same occasion, Eddy Arnold was nominated for “Best Country and Western Performance” for his RCA Victor recording of Jimmy’s *Tennessee Stud*. Eddy was also nominated for “Best Folk Performance” for the same recording and Jimmy was nominated for “Best Folk Performance” for his “The Wilderness Road” album.³

In January of 1960, Jimmy was in Nashville to record “Tall Tales in Song” and in August he was back for “Songs of Billy Yank and Johnny Reb” all for RCA Victor.

The May 1960 issue of *Look, America’s Family Magazine* ran a feature article on Jimmy, complete with huge photographs of him in New York City with his “grandpa guitar.” Stuck in the text of that article, Jimmy gave what I call “a signature quote,” expressing the depths of his soul’s conviction and what characterized him as much as any one thing: “I just want to travel all over this country and collect the old tunes. And I want to write songs about its forgotten people and places. I feel that’s what I was put here to do. That’s my real talent. That’s what I must do.”



JIMMY IN NYC FROM *LOOK MAGAZINE*, MAY 24, 1960

The June 6, 1960 edition of *Newsweek* magazine carried another remark signifying something of how and where the Ozark man’s soul was rooted. “When RCA Victor officials in New York want to reach their folk-singing star Jimmie Driftwood on the telephone, they call Colony 9-3270, the phone at the pool hall in Mountain View, Ark. Not that Jimmie is likely to be there in person, but since he won a Grammy from the Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences for writing 1959’s song of the year, “The Battle of New Orleans,” his neighbors are used to such calls and don’t mind driving 15 miles out to Jimmie’s house at Timbo, on the edge of the Ozark National Forest, to deliver the message.”

In the fall, he went to Atlantic City, New Jersey, where 19,000 educators met for the National School Administrators’ Convention. Jimmy’s version of the occasion:

In 1960, I was called to Atlantic City to sing to some of America’s greatest educators. When I got there, Dr. J.E. Windrow of George Peabody College for Teachers came to my room and said, ‘Jimmy, you are to sing tomorrow at a luncheon, and the theme is CHANGE, AND HOW TO COPE WITH CHANGE, and we shall expect you to sing in harmony with the theme.’ That night ‘The Lonesome Ape’ was born, and the educators loved it. It has been popular with my audiences ever since.⁴

³ There are many reports “out there” that Jimmy received more than one GRAMMY® award but, according to The Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, what we have given above is correct. One more nomination would come for 1960.

⁴ From “Voice of the People, Jimmy Driftwood” album cover.

The Lonesome Ape:

I dreamed one night the bombs came down and no man could escape,
 The smoke rose up and all I saw was one big lonesome ape.
 He walked the earth from pole to pole, he walked from sea to sea,
 He said there's no one left on earth but pore old lonesome me.
 One day he found a valley deep where mountains hid the skies,
 He heard a voice within a cave, and much to his surprise
 A lady ape said, "Come on in and thrill my lonesome soul,
 There's no one left on earth but us and we're both growing old."
 Said he, "I can't make love to you for I'm just skin and bones,
 How came you to be so big and fat when there's nothing left but stones?"
 Said she, "I've found the promised land where we'll have lots of joys,
 We'll eat and drink and sing and dance and raise some girls and boys."
 She led him through that Foggy Cave into that Promised Land,
 She climbed a tree and dropped a big red apple in his hand.
 He looked at her and shook his head, she stood there with a grin,
 He said, "I think you're trying to start that whole damned mess again."⁵

On April 12, 1961, Jimmy appeared at the 3rd Annual GRAMMY® awards program, having been nominated for "Best Folk Performance" for his RCA Victor album "Songs of Billy Yank and Johnny Reb."

It was not until March 31, 1962, that he finally became a "starring member" of the Grand Ole Opry, although he had been a regular guest for four years. The WSM news release said Jimmy is "Often referred to as 'America's best bard' and probably the country's greatest collector of old ballads." When I asked the Opry archivist why he was not made a member earlier, since he had been a guest so frequently, I was told he was not able to commit to being present the required number of Saturday night shows.

In 1962, his sixth and final album for RCA Victor, "Driftwood at Sea," was released. He also taught folklore at the University of Southern California in Idyllwild where he wrote *My Church*. Jimmy said the college students "learned it and taught it to others, and soon it was a very popular song." He said he was once approached by a Catholic priest, a Jewish rabbi and a Baptist minister who told him they liked it, too. He was known to declare, "I believe in this song, and sometime, if I could hear YOU singing "My Church," I would be happy."

The FLOOR of my church is the face of the earth;
 Its ROOF is the sky up above
 Where all men can worship regardless of birth
 At the altar of Brotherly Love.
 The LAND of my church is as wide as the world,
 Bound only by cloud and by sky;
 Its FLAG of true justice is always unfurled
 Where tolerance never shall die.
 The ROLL of my church is all colors and creeds;
 Religion's too broad to confine.
 It's not what you say, but the weight of your deeds
 That makes you a brother of mine.
 The PRAYER of my church is so old that it's new,
 The same as it always has been:
 Let me do to others, as I'd have them do
 If I were the others. Amen.⁶

Meanwhile back in the Rackensack, that is, at home in North Central Arkansas, interest in the "folk movement" was growing among concerned people in the Ozarks, not just around the world where Jimmy Driftwood was traveling and not just among the college-agers and "hippies" who seemed to be making national headlines with their "folk festivals," acoustic music, tie dyed clothes, "love-ins," and all.

⁵⁻⁶ From Deep Water, Book 8 "The Voice of the Hills" series.

INTERLUDE: ILLUSTRATIONS

NOTES ON JIMMIE DRIFTWOOD

Jimmie Driftwood born and raised in the Arkansas Ozark Mountains, walked 19 miles a day to and from high school. Learned all the folk songs for miles around by his early teens. Began composing at about age 12. Taught one room schools in early years (in teens). Received a BS degree from Arkansas State Teachers College in 1949. Been teacher, principal, Superintendent and County Supervisor of Education. Made money for first college work by playing fiddle for square dances. Taught audio visual education and set up reading clinics in many schools and colleges of the Southern States. While acting as principal of Snowball High School, Snowball, Arkansas recorded the first album (Early American Folk Songs) with RCA Victor. 1959 won the GRAMMY award for writing the song of the year, Battle of New Orleans. Grammy Awarded by THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF RECORDING ARTS AND SCIENTISTS.

Also in 1959 received Grammy for Album of The Year in Folk Field (The Wilderness Road and Jimmie Driftwood)

1961 Grammy Award for album Billy Yank & Johnny Reb (Civil War)

Seen on Pat Boone Show, (ABC), GRAMMY SHOW with MacJetheth Wilson (NBC), Ozark Jubilee, Four Star Jubilee, and with Eddie Arnold Intoday On The Farm. Also on show To Tell The Truth. Guest several times on Grand Ole Opry. Concert in Carnegie Hall in 1959.

Jimmie Driftwood albums with RCA Victor are as follows: 1959
 Jimmie Driftwood sings Newly Discovered Early American Folk songs LHM 1635
 The Wilderness Road & Jimmie Driftwood LHM 1994
 The Westward Movement--Jimmie Driftwood
 Tall Tales in Song--Jimmie Driftwood
 Songs of Billy Yank & Johnny Reb,
 Driftwood at Sea (current album)
 Also made How The West Was Won with Bing Crosby, Rosemary Clooney & others
 Also on Folk Song Festival at Carnegie Hall
 Also on two albums of the Newport Folk Festival

Did three movies for schools: Soldiers Joy (The Story Of the American Revolution in Folk Song) The Story of The Early // Westward Movement in Folksong, and number three, Instruments for Folk Songs.

In September 14, 1959 Jimmie Driftwood had 5 songs in the Billboard Hot C&W sides, and 4 in the Hot 100, and we sus ect this might be an all time record for one composer, and the singers were Driftwood, Horton, Eddy Arnold, Johnny & Jack, Hawshaw Jenkins & Porter & Jethro/.

Jimmie has done many concerts in colleges & Universities, and has several to do in the near future.

Notes by,
 Clela Morris "Driftwood"

P.S. Jimmie Driftwood has a wife, Clela, and two sons James 24, and King 19, he lives on a ranch of 500 acres in The Ozarks of Arkansas at Flaba (three stores and a school) has white face cattle, good horses, blackface sheep, pedigreed hogs and too many hound dogs.

Courtesy Grand Ole Opry Museum

PAGE CLEDA TYPED AND GAVE TO THE GRAND OLE OPRY IN 1962 WHEN JIMMY BECAME A CAST MEMBER



Photo by Les Leverett
JIMMY WITH "GRANDPA GUITAR" BACKSTAGE OPRY, FEB. 1962



Photo by Les Leverett
PATSY MONTANA & JIMMY AT FAN FAIR, JUNE 1978



Photo by Les Leverett
JIMMY PROUDLY POSES WITH HIS GRAMMY TROPHY AND
NOMINATIONS CERTIFICATES, MARCH 31, 1962



Photo by Les Leverett
JIMMY IN FAVORITE SETTING WITH CHILDREN, MAY 1959

Chapter Four: Service to Mankind

*Mountain spirits were calling him for work they had to do
Shrines he'd build in the Sylamore Hills and around old Mountain View.
Jimmy and Clea would spend their days back home in the Rackensack
Father Time and Mother Nature had Grandma's piece of "driftwood" back.
—From Grandma's Piece of "Driftwood"*

Meanwhile back home in the "Rackensack," several things were happening almost all at the same time in the early '60s, one not necessarily known to any of the others. In April of '62, the regional Tourist and Recreation Committee sponsored a "Dogwood Drive" through North Central Arkansas. In August, the newly organized Ozark Foothills Handicraft Guild held a craft show. Not resting on any laurels, the Guild meant to make some impact on the personal economy of their members, all talented craftsmen in Ozark traditions. The two groups were planning to hold one big event the next spring at Mountain View.

In harmony with the concern to boost the economy was County Extension Agent Lloyd Westbrook who urged Chairman Glen Hinkle of the Stone County Development Council with his belief that "we can capitalize on the music and crafts that are to be exhibited here by the Handicraft Guild next April."¹ That expressed the sentiment stirring within others in the region, too, including Stone County's representative to the Legislature (and Mountain View jeweler and fiddle player), Eddie A. Walker and folklorist, singer, songwriter and RCA recording star from Timbo, Jimmy Driftwood.

Back to the Rackensack: 1963

Despite an offer from a wealthy widow in Nashville to give him one of her three mansions, Jimmy Driftwood returned to his home in Stone County, Arkansas. His contractual obligations with RCA had been fulfilled and he had decided to leave the Grand Ole Opry. Some years later, Jimmy told a reporter for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, "It wasn't that I didn't like Nashville, but I wasn't going to leave my home. I just couldn't have. Everything I ever was, everything I am, is back here. I had to come back. I wasn't gonna leave my family and friends. And there was work to be done."²

What he meant by "there was work to be done," we would soon discover.

Arkansas Folk Festival & Rackensack Folklore Society

There is little question that the Arkansas Folk Festival has been the single greatest event ever staged in Mountain View. The annual event held the third week of April for the last 40+ years draws tens of thousands of people to the region and provides jobs and inspiration to hundreds of local residents, too.

Each year the mammoth undertaking is dreaded as much as it is anticipated, because there is so much hard work by the local population to provide for the stage shows and exhibits, and for feeding and housing the multitudes visiting the small mountain town. Planning for the next festival begins literally before the last one is over.

There is little question, too, that what most visitors are interested in when they come to the Arkansas Folk Festival are the old-time Ozark folkways. They want to enjoy the music and dance and watch craftsmen demonstrate what people did in order to survive and prosper when opportunities were mostly limited to the land and the elements of nature.

And from the very beginning the Rackensack Folklore Society of Mountain View has been the organization where much of that cultural heritage has been held. The Rackensack Folklore Society is now over 40 years old, first given impetus in the early part of 1963 only months before the first Arkansas Folk Festival was held.

Jimmy Driftwood is often credited with founding the Rackensack Folklore Society and leading all efforts to hold the Arkansas Folk Festival, but let us start with some needed perspective. Truth to tell—and Jimmy would be first to admit it—there wouldn't be much preserving of Ozark heritage anywhere near Mountain View if Colonel Andrew Jackson had not fought and won "The Battle of New Orleans"

¹ From page 8, "History of the Arkansas Folk Festival," *Heritage of Stone*, Volume XXII, Number 2 (1998).

² From *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* "Songwriter Driftwood dies at 91."

that fateful day in January 1815. Jimmy's words, "If Andy Jackson hadn't won that war, I would not have written that song." A brief overview of the course of events that brought wealth and fame to Jimmy has been told on the previous pages. Subsequently, through his and many others generosity and efforts, the course has flowed on to provide for much that is present-day Mountain View, Arkansas.

That said—and taking nothing away from the principal subject of this book—let's look at the bigger picture and the generosity and efforts by considerably more people than the one. Community doings that amount to much of anything take scores of talented people to lead and manage, as well as hundreds more willing workers to get the jobs done.

Glenn D. Morrison, former-high school principal who wrote "The Origin of the Rackensack Folklore Society and The Ozark Folk Culture Center," recounts what led up to the first meeting of the Rackensack Folklore Society in February of 1963.

Behind the idea for this meeting was the vision and drive of at least one man who wanted to do something about the lack of jobs in the county and the loss of its young people because of it. State Representative and Mountain View jeweler Eddie A. Walker had long believed it was necessary to bring in some form of industry, but he soon realized that without better roads and bridges, sufficient water, wastewater and fire protection facilities, his dreams would go unfulfilled.

Returning to Little Rock for the legislative session, Representative Walker convinced John Opitz at the Economic Development Commission, Arkansas Department of Commerce, to come up to Mountain View and make suggestions that could possibly lead to a grant or loan for a water system. Whatever made it all happen is pure genius.

Walker—a fiddle player with a group of musicians that played every Friday night at a doctor's office—got Mr. Opitz up there one Friday night in early February to attend the "musical" at the doctor's office. Delighted with it all, Opitz said that if Walker could get a large number of people together on a weekly basis and maintain the true Ozark Mountain style, that would be sufficient to qualify for a grant for a water system, and eventually for a building for the "musicals." With the word "building," Mr. Morrison suggests this was the first mention of the Ozark Folk Culture Center.

Later that same month, six men joined Representative Walker for a historic "first meeting of the Rackensack Folklore Society." They were Dr. Lloyd Hollister, physician; Lloyd Westbrook, agriculture extension agent; Gerald Cain, pharmacist; William "Willie" P. Morrison, County Treasurer; Glenn D. Morrison, principal/teacher at Mountain View High School, and Otis Johnson, service manager at an automotive dealership. They heard Walker explain that he and Mr. Opitz were making arrangements for Stone County to acquire the water and sewer systems needed for a "Folk Culture Center."

The seven men pledged their support with enthusiasm and suggestions and agreed to meet the same week along with others. "One person we especially wanted to contact was James Morris, just then becoming known as Jimmy Driftwood," Morrison wrote in his history. (Mr. Morrison is to be forgiven, but by 1963 Jimmy Driftwood was one of RCA Victor's brightest stars and was a performing member of the Grand Ole Opry.)

At the next meeting, Dr. Hollister was elected president; Jimmy Driftwood, vice-president; Eddie Walker, secretary, and Glenn Morrison, treasurer. In his history, Morrison recalls,

At this second meeting things began to take shape. We thought we should name our new organization. Jimmy Driftwood suggested we name it Rackensack Folklore Society. This suggestion was voted on and passed and this name exists today. Eddie Walker informed the group that if a plan could be made to have some type of gathering that would draw the public's attention, this would give him some leverage with the state officials. Jimmy Driftwood jumped on this suggestion of Eddie's and suggested we have a Folk Festival. Jimmy informed the group he could help in getting it advertised, and he did; thus the birth of the first annual Folk Festival of the Rackensack Folklore Society was held the third weekend in April in 1963.³

When Jimmy said he would help get the Folk Festival advertised, what he meant was wherever he traveled for his folk music concerts, he would tell people to go to Mountain View the third weekend in April for a genuine old-time gathering of Ozark Mountain musicians, dancers, artists and craftsmen. Between that first organizational meeting and festival time, he appeared on several college campuses and

³ From "The Origin of the Rackensack Folklore Society and The Ozark Folk Culture Center."

told the young people that they could stay at his place, but to bring sleeping bags and tents to be sure they had shelter just in case the barn was full of people. There were an estimated 20,000 people at that first festival, including hundreds of college-agers and “hippie”-types, that introduced never-before-seen-in-person dress and behavior to the remote region between the Blue Mountains and the Sylamore Hills.

Several weeks before that inaugural Folk Festival, a press conference was held that represents the comprehensive thinking of all the community leaders pulling together for the betterment of all. From “History of the Arkansas Folk Festival” published in 1998 by the Stone County Historical Society we have this recounting of it:

Jim Warren represented the crafts people...and Jimmie Driftwood spoke briefly. Glen Hinkle presided and local newspaper editor Eddie Tudor introduced members of the press and handed out the packets. At that time, weekly Friday night musicals were being held in the courtroom of the Stone County courthouse. Members of the press were invited to stay overnight and attend the musical.⁴

The report went on:

In his column, “The Arkansas Traveler,” *Arkansas Gazette* writer Ernie Deane reported on the press conference: What’s developing in a seven-county area in the field of native crafts and folklore is an inspiring thing to see. Yesterday’s gathering of press people was arranged so we could get a brief look into this development and so that we might put a little something into print ahead of next month’s event. This I’m glad to do.

No dogwood is in sight so far, but Bill Rosa and Lloyd Westbrook and Glen Hinkle and the Ozark people promised there would be plenty come April 19. Even if you don’t appreciate the finer things of life..., like Jimmie Driftwood’s rendition of ‘Down in the Arkansas,’ you’ll probably get a thrill out of mountain dogwood in bloom. I certainly recommend your looking this way next month.⁵

After the festival was all over, *The Southwest American* in Fort Smith ran a very complimentary and prophetic editorial opening with: “North Arkansas has scored again with an idea—and the future of the Arkansas Folk Festival probably is assured.”

That was over 40 years ago and the festival has been a huge annual event at Mountain View from its inception. In Mr. Morrison’s history, he correctly placed credit with Jimmy when he wrote,

The media had picked up on the festival, and its success was being reported all over the nation. The local Lions Club was the only city organization at that time, and much of the correspondence was directed through it. The newly formed Rackensack Society also received a large portion of correspondence from different locations, and several of its members were interviewed by different newspapers, T.V. and radio stations. Jimmy Driftwood was performing all over the country and was always promoting the area. His popularity in the folklore arena was quite pronounced and this was a major contribution in gaining national recognition for the area.⁶

And about the Rackensackers, he said,

Enough can’t be said about the dedication and loyalty of the members of the Rackensack. They were always willing to perform when asked, regardless where the location was. They received no compensation for their efforts, except occasionally a small amount of money for their gas. The unification of these people and their ability to perform with the true authentic manner of our Ozark heritage were the criteria that put together all the occurrences that followed.⁷

“All the occurrences that followed” fed upon the momentum gained by all that produced the first Folk Festival. Throughout the city, the county and the region, sparks of hope had been fanned into live coals of possibilities. That in turn ignited fires of purpose within the hearts of hill folks who responded with newness of community spirit. Dulcimers, fiddles, autoharps, banjos and guitars got dragged out from under beds and tuned up. Harmonicas, stove up from decades of disuse, got soaked in kerosene, or else new ones got sent for from the mail order catalog. Everyday britches and aprons got washed and ironed, or else, new ones were made for wearing to the increasingly popular “musicals” and the annual Folk Festival. The newness was like a spring shower and its spirit was spreading to every hill and hollow of the Rackensack region. And because of Jimmy Driftwood, people all over the nation, in fact, wanted to hear Ozark music! Before, nobody seemed to care much about it.

It was during this period that Jimmy was in demand by national and state leaders to fill positions on

⁵ From *Arkansas Democrat*, “Reporters Get Preview of Folk Festival and Crafts Show.”

⁶⁻⁷ From “The Origin of the Rackensack Folklore Society and The Ozark Folk Culture Center.”

boards and committees, as well as traveling overseas. A partial list includes appointments to the Board of Advisors of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in New York City, and to the National Advisory Board of the National Endowment for the Arts, Artist in Education Division in Washington, D.C. He was appointed to the Advisory Board of the Arkansas Motion Picture and Entertainment Commission and a member of the Arkansas Arts Council. He was appointed a member and later chosen Chairman of the Arkansas Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission. And, he made two trips to Asia, including Vietnam and the Philippines, for the U.S. Information Service.

In December of 1965, father Neal Morris,⁸ one of his closest musical companions, succumbed to cancer and was buried next to his wife in Fredonia Cemetery in West Richwoods. And in October of 1967, pure tragedy struck the family. It was while Jimmy was on a Goodwill Tour to Europe for the State of Arkansas that he received news his two sons, 27-year old James Risner (“Jimmy Jr.”) and 24-year old Bing Lee, had been found dead in the family home in Timbo. Little was made public about the tragic loss, and their closest friends are guarded in what they will say about what was a murder/suicide—a sibling squabble gone too far. As far as I have been able to learn first hand, true friends respect whatever secrets the aggrieved parents had to live with and I found no one willing to share what they knew beyond the facts such as are in the Sheriff’s report. With the passing of James and Bing Lee, the Morris/Driftwood line was left with no progeny. The young men are buried in the Timbo Cemetery near by Cleda’s parents and grandparents and the memorial stone of Jimmy and Cleda. Jimmy was in Belgium when he was notified of the death of his sons.

Less than a year later, he was sent to the Orient by the State of Arkansas.



LEFT TO RIGHT: JAMES JR., JIMMY, BING LEE AND NEAL MORRIS (C. 1955)

⁸ Neal Morris made considerable contributions to the catalog of Ozark folklore, especially in 1959 when he was “guide and mentor” for important folklife collector Alan Lomax. Neal’s music is on at least three CDs from Rounder Records’ “Southern Journey” series of the Alan Lomax Collection. Lomax credited Neal with “filling me in on local history in between long sessions with the guitar.” Together they located and recorded “old Charley Everidge, who, with his mouth bow, once was the heart and soul of every frolic in the county,” and “called on blind Mr. Gilbert and his gentle wife, Ollie, another prodigious ballad singer. During the recording session in their hospitable house, Carlos ‘Bookmiller’ Shannon with his five-string banjo dropped in.” Lomax also noted “folks from his own neighborhood still maintained that ‘Neil can out-sing that boy any time.’ It was Driftwood’s generous and affectionate attitude about his father’s abilities and reputation that made it a pleasure to record this true gentleman of the Ozarks for the world to know.”

The next several pages will recount only a small amount of what Mr. Morrison knew about when he wrote “all the occurrences that followed”—the best kept secrets of a remote community was beginning to be told.

Ozark Folk Center State Park

Historical accounts correctly honor the origins of the rightly famous and justly appreciated Arkansas Folk Festival, Rackensack Folklore Society and Ozark Folk Center. Some of the accounts I have seen are based on only one person’s recollection and viewpoint, and some reflect a broader understanding of how these important institutions came into being and the mighty roles each have played in the history of Stone County. They all agree on at least one thing: The birth of Ozark Folk Center State Park had its conception in the minds and the efforts of the people who founded the first two. That the child has “run off” and become a state-owned and operated institution has presented grave challenges to the remaining members of the family that gave it birth and nurtured it in the early years.

“The Folk Center,” as the locals call it, is an ever-present reality that stands on a hilltop at the northern edge of the town of Mountain View. The roots of the concept for a cultural center for traditional Ozark folkways go rather deep and are spread out quite far. Let’s go there.

We have already described how money for fresh water and sewage systems for Mountain View could be gotten. Any hope of attracting industry—and more jobs and greater income for families—meant the town of less than 2,000 with every building “on well and septic tank” had to have water facilities beyond its present ability to provide. The key to unlocking the door to any kind of satisfactory future lay in the judgment of the Economic Development man from Little Rock. He allowed “...if [local jeweler and State Legislator Eddie] Walker could get a large number of people together on a weekly basis and maintain the true Ozark Mountain style, that would be sufficient to qualify for a grant for a water system, and eventually for a building for the ‘musicals’.”

There it is—“...a building for the ‘musicals’.” All the pickers, singers, dancers, toe-tappers and listeners in the world could gather on the courthouse lawn or almost anyplace out of doors when the weather cooperated but, in order to keep it going on a consistent basis you needed an indoor place. That’s what the foresighted people knew they had to have. They had more in mind than just music and dancing, too. There were artists and craftsmen of every variety who had folkways to preserve and there was literature and artifacts that would require a safe place to be stored and displayed. The original concept for Jimmy and some of the others was for more than a place to play music, as big as that factor was. Jimmy spoke early and often of “The Folk Cultural Center of America.”

The Trip to Washington, D. C.

The people of the area jumped on the challenge John Opitz had laid out for them. The weekly “musicals” continued in the courthouse—the courtroom was the only room in town large enough—and they had produced the very successful Arkansas Folk Festival.

According to writer Caleb Pirtle III, who conducted an extensive interview with Jimmy in the early 1980s and wrote about it in “The Man Who Wouldn’t Let the Music Die,” Jimmy remembered that Opitz spoke plainly to him. He would be a major player in getting a building large enough to contain all the music, dance, crafts, etc. that needed to be “preserved” from loss as the years rolled by. If the government erected anything near Jimmy’s concept of a cultural center, it would have to bring water and sewerage along with it. All he had to do was sell the United States government on saving another national treasure.

“There’s only one way for you to get that center,” Opitz exhorted the legend-in-the-making: “You’ll have to get organized, quit runnin’ off to the Grand Ole Opry, stay home, and direct it yourself.” Soon after, Jimmy resigned as a member of the Grand Ole Opry. By November of 1964, he had made arrangements to keep a date in Washington, D. C., before the House Ways and Means Committee, headed by longtime friend, Arkansas Congressman Wilbur D. Mills of Kensett.

Jimmy recalls several city officials meeting with him the night before he and fellow-Rackensackers left for the nation’s capital.

“Jimmy,” one said, “we know you’re a big dreamer. But don’t go up there and ask for so much money they’ll laugh at us and think we’re crazy. We’re just a little old bitty place, Jimmy, and nobody’s ever heard of us anyway. We’ve talked to a good carpenter, and he can build the center for \$45,000. So that’s all you

need to ask for, Jimmy. All we need is \$45,000.”⁹

There’s no point in arguing if Jimmy told the story 100% right or not, or if Mr. Pirtle got it down right. It has a great ending; the most important part, any way. Anytime you want to say, “The rest is history!” there are a variety of versions to read and discuss. Mr. Pirtle’s recounting continues:

Driftwood smiled and thanked [the men]. He rounded up 18 members of the Rackensack society and headed for Washington. . . . Jimmy left his 18 Rackensackers picking and singing on the Capitol steps while he walked toward the committee room in Washington, D. C. After all, they were the heritage he sought to save. And he kept remembering the words of those pleading, embarrassed city officials, saying, “All we need is \$45,000. That’s all you need to ask for, \$45,000.”

So Jimmy Driftwood stood before the Ways and Means Committee and asked for \$15 million. He got \$2.1 million.

Shortly after the new Ozark Folk Center was opened in Mountain View in 1973, Driftwood was named its director of music, a title without salary. He moved his 60 Rackensack singers and craftsmen from the courthouse to the grand, stone, air-conditioned, 1,060-seat auditorium, concerned only because the environment seemed a little too formal, the sound a little too sophisticated to reflect the unspoiled soul of mountain music. But the songs were honest. And the crafts were authentic. And Mountain View had water and sewerage.¹⁰

Jimmy’s powerful influence in the Folk Center becoming a reality cannot be disputed. His fame and popularity was widespread and he had hundreds of wealthy and influential men and women among his acquaintances. For the opening day ceremonies, he invited his friend, Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter, to come and make a speech. The future president agreed and said he would bring the Chief Executives of Florida and Mississippi with him. During the course of their visits, the host told his Georgia friend that he wanted him to visit his home in Timbo sometime. It would be 10 years before by-then-former-president would phone to say he was coming. He hadn’t forgotten the invitation, although Jimmy said he figured he had. (We might as well stick in here that the Ozarks bard was on hand to entertain at the inauguration in Washington when the Georgian was sworn in as President of the United States on January 20, 1977.)

I like this part, mostly because I like Jimmy Carter as a person. I like his poetry, too, and the books he has written about his life in Georgia farm country. Dale Vinicur recorded our legend’s words,

“I knew when he was coming and I called the sheriff and I said, ‘When you see his bus come through Mt. View, call me.’ Because I wanted to get all the schoolkids out just across the ditch so they could say they’d seen a president. I was so surprised – this’ll tell you something about him – he didn’t know that was going to happen, but when he got to that line he got out and he hugged every little kid, shook hands with every teacher, shook hands with all the bigger kids. It was an hour before he got up here. To me, that’s as sweet as you could be – I think it’s fantastic that he did that. I let the TV people come but I didn’t let the governor or anybody know because they’d have took over the thing.”¹¹

⁹⁻¹⁰ From “The Man Who Wouldn’t Let the Music Die.”

¹¹ From [Americana – Jimmie Driftwood](#).



Photo provided by the Rackensack Folklore Society

JIMMY, GLEN BRANSCUM, WANDA & ART WEST AND JIMMY CARTER AT DRIFTWOOD RANCH IN 1983

Since this is a handbook on the life and music of Jimmy Driftwood, I will not spend time detailing the long history of controversy surrounding Jimmy's departure as musical director at the Folk Center in 1975, or of its operations being turned out of local control. That can be left to another time and place, although it is generally acknowledged that the majority of Stone Countians would swear that the present Ozark Folk Center does not represent native Ozark music as it did at the beginning. Whether it should or not, I think, ought to be discussed openly.¹²

On the topic of preserving our cultural heritage, which is the purpose of the Folk Center, I believe it is important to admit to a couple of realities. One is that most of the original Rackensackers have passed from the earth; therefore, anyone who plays "old-time music" or does "old-time arts and crafts" today is essentially a re-enactor. Secondly, the Folk Center is charged with providing Ozark arts and crafts to the public on a continuing basis, therefore talented and skilled persons are needed to impersonate the old-timers every time the doors are open to the ticket-buying public.

Is it not true that people today who do music, customs, skills or trades from the long ago do it out of wanting to and not because they are required by their circumstances in life? You might say our pioneer forefathers did it for survival, but we do it as a hobby, or possibly because it has some bit of commercial value for us. Furthermore, it is not a simple task for the Folk Center staff to gather an adequate supply of artists and craftsmen for the continuing public programs without recruiting from far and wide. Not only are "the olden days" passed and gone, so also is the era when the Folk Festival and Folk Center were conceived and founded. It is my studied opinion that today's Ozark Folk Center needs to review its role in preserving and practicing the old-time ways and the old-time days, but I realize, too, that it is nearly impossible to find the needed practitioners; I feel the Folk Center could still play the role it was conceived to play by teaching local musicians to sing, play and dance in the manner of our pioneer forefathers. Sure, they must be as actors on the stage, but that's what we need. Do we not have enough of the glitzy productions of television, movies and "broadway?"

The words of Neal Morris, from an interview with folklorist Alan Lomax in 1959, might be appropriate here.

Well, when I was just a small boy, old Uncle Milt Oldfield,...he and my father were close friends, and they were discussing music. They were music teachers both of them. And they said, Dad did, and Uncle Milt sanctioned what he said, that music had no end, that you could learn all the other guy learned, and after you get that done then something else would crop up. And that's the reason why music advanced. Why, you would get better music in one generation, maybe that is, that would fit the times in which they lived. They said that music grew like the grapevine that is never pruned, that each year it put on a little bit more. That is what they said about it.¹³

"Ozark Culture in Washington" shouted the headline in the July 1970 edition of *Southern Living* magazine when it announced "Arkansas is packing up its grass roots crafts, music, and dance this July 1-5 and heading to Washington, D.C., to take its honored place as featured state of the fourth Festival of American Folklife." The article went on with, "The free celebration, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, drew more than 600,000 persons last summer." And added, "Because of the festival's widespread interest, Senators J. William Fulbright of Arkansas and Ralph Yarborough of Texas are jointly sponsoring a bill now before the Senate to establish at the Smithsonian a foundation for American folklife research and presentations."¹⁴

In October 1969, he appeared in concert in Texas at the Austin Municipal Auditorium along with

¹² The so-called "controversy" has gone on for three decades and the various descriptions of what might have happened have indeed become part of the areas cultural heritage. Although many principal actors from the early days have passed away, still their influence by words and deeds linger in the texture of the emotions of family members. Long before now, in my opinion, the majority of the local population has ceased to care about the institution the generation before them conceived and birthed, and I have not discovered any particular mechanism is in place whereby concerned members of the local population and Folk Center management are addressing in a meaningful manner why things appear as they do. That is very unfortunate when we supposedly live in a land of enlightenment and cultural sophistication.

I might add that with the passing of time and by the efforts of The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project, more of the "controversy" is being documented. Much discovery is yet to be done, but there appears to be little interest in Mountain View at setting the record straight and honoring Jimmy Driftwood's role in the evolution of modern day Mountain View, Arkansas.

¹³ From *Southern Journey*, Volume 7 "Ozark Frontier."

¹⁴ From *Southern Living* magazine, July 1970.

Gordon Lightfoot, Carolyn Hester, Jerry Jeff Walker and others. The article announcing his appearance said, in part,

“He has returned three times to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., for the Festival of American Folklife. Now serving his home state as its director of Parks and Recreation, Driftwood is working to break ground in 1970 on a million dollar folk art center at Mountain View and since his 1968 tour of nine colleges in the Philippines, he has not had much time to perform.”¹⁵

In December 1971, Jimmy was present at the Grand Ole Opry where the U.S. Senate held hearings on Senate Bill 1930 which “would create an American Folklife Foundation within the Library of Congress.”¹⁶ (Please, see note below.)

The next two segments of this chapter—Blanchard Springs Caverns and Buffalo National River—are abbreviated in length and in documenting the roles Jimmy Driftwood played in their achievement. One reason for shortening is the limitation on the length of this book, but the biggest reason is my thinking that Blanchard Springs Caverns and Buffalo National River were substantially political projects, happening less by any direct influence of the people of Stone County than the Folk Festival, Rackensack Society and Folk Center were. Those three institutions are the direct results of the desires and efforts of the corps of regular citizens. The principle of community spirit within the general population has made the biggest difference in what Mountain View is today. Who can say, one way or the other, what would have become of the town, the region, Blanchard Springs, Blanchard Cave, the Buffalo River, or other elements of natural and cultural heritage had it not been for the combined vision and acts of cooperation by the Stone County multitudes?

As to the two federal projects, Jimmy was devoted to both. He loved the Ozarks and every aspect of it that gave him pleasure. Natural beauty and natural order ranked among his favorite topics. He told many stories about his own youth and the lives of his ancestors who had spent many years in their beloved hills. Early Morris forebears from Tennessee settled in the Buffalo River region, and, of course, Jimmy was raised within walking distance of Blanchard Springs.

Blanchard Springs Caverns

Blanchard Cave was discovered by Indians long before the white man arrived in the Sylamore Hills north of Mountain View. White hunters and curious explorers came upon a huge sinkhole at the top of the mountain above a spring on John Blanchard’s wooded land where a continuous flow of water rushed from an underground stream. Professional cavers, with permission from the U. S. Forest Service, invented ways to descend the 70-foot depression where they reportedly found skeletal remains, bats and bat guano, and a huge, beautiful cavern.

Many stories have been told about the cave’s religious significance for Indian tribes, and tales abound of explorations made by early whites, but modern history picks up in mid-20th Century when Ozark National Forest personnel met with local people in order to corroborate information each had knowledge of. Serious explorations began at the spring and on the ridge where the sinkhole was approximately one-half mile from the spring. By 1970 the government had built roads back to where the Blanchard Springs Caverns Visitor Center would soon be built.

On June 20, 1970, Jimmy and Cleda Driftwood appeared for the groundbreaking ceremony where he was to sing his smash hit from a decade prior, *The Battle of New Orleans*. As the couple sat in their van waiting for the torrents of rain to stop, Cleda wrote down words to a new song Jimmy kept repeating to her. The new song was sung at the ceremony; it would be recorded and played as part of the orientation movie for visitors at the new Blanchard Springs Caverns.

Father Time and Mother Nature, when the Universe was young
They made the moon and the glittering stars and they made the shining sun
They made shining sun, Love, they made the shining sun
They made the moon and the glittering stars and they made the shining sun.

¹⁵ From Austin Municipal Auditorium bulletin.

¹⁶ *Congressional Record*, February 1, 1972. From *Folklife Center News*, Winter/Spring 2006. “The American Folklife Center was created in 1976 by the U.S. Congress to ‘preserve and present American folklife’ through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, life performance, exhibition, publication, and training.”

Father Time said to Mother Nature, "Before our labors cease
 Let's make just one more beautiful thing and it will be our Masterpiece
 It will be our Masterpiece, Love, it will be our Masterpiece"
 "We'll make just one more beautiful thing and it will be our Masterpiece."
 As they crossed the Ozark Mountains, their smiles made rippling rills
 And the echoes from their laughter made the lovely Sylamore Hills
 They made the Sylamore Hills, Love, they made the Sylamore Hills
 The echoes from their laughter made the lovely Sylamore Hills.
 Then they built a beautiful castle with pillars tall and round
 Most beautiful castle in all this world and they made it underground
 They made it underground, Love, they made it underground
 Most beautiful castle in all this world and they made it underground.
 Years drifted by the millions, then good men strong and brave
 They found that castle underground and they called it Blanchard Cave.
 They called it Blanchard Cave, Love, they called it Blanchard Cave
 They found that castle underground and they called it Blanchard Cave.¹⁷

Buffalo National River

In 1972, elated over passage of the Buffalo National River Act, Jimmy wrote *Beautiful Buffalo River*.

Beautiful Buffalo River, more precious than silver and gold,
 A PAINTING that hangs on the mountain for all of the world to behold.
 The SMILE of the Almighty Giver impressed on the Ozarks sublime,
 Fashioned by Old Mother Nature and sculptured by Old Father Time.
 CHORUS: Beautiful Buffalo River, glimmering there in the sun.
 Uncle Sam's BLUE RIBBON, to show that the people have won.
 Beautiful Buffalo River, the FLAG OF THE MOUNTAINS unfurled
 Arkansas' gift to the nation, America's gift to the world.
 The MOUNT of the greatest of riders, her saddle a gliding canoe,
 Sometimes she will carry you gently; sometimes she will bid you adieu.
 The DREAM of the lovers of Nature who care for our posterity;
 Who'd love to see beautiful rivers keep flowing through eternity.
 The HOPE of the foes of destruction of mountains and valleys and plains,
 With FAITH that a New Generation will save Mother Nature's remains.
 Now, she's a National River, the PRIDE of all races of men;
 A free flowing BEAUTY forever, forever and ever—Amen!¹⁸

Jimmy was Chairman of the Arkansas Parks, Travel and Recreation Commission at the time and his signature on the documents for the State represent his and many others' tireless influences that contributed to the success of the drive to save the pristine North Arkansas watershed for all time. About this time, he penned and sang *Where Has the River Gone?*, another song about the natural treasure.,

If we could save one untamed river for the millions yet unborn to see,
 We'd be a-kin to the Almighty Giver,
 And when my work on earth was done I could face that setting sun
 Knowing God and all the world was proud of me.¹⁹

The extensive efforts that went into saving the 135-miles of the river and 95,700 acres of real estate along its path have been recounted in several places. Thousands were involved, from politicians and professional people to students and nature-lovers around the world. Here is a brief account.

Dr. Neil Compton was a Bentonville, Arkansas, physician who had a lifelong love of nature and a passion for exploring and photographing the outdoors. He took it more or less as a personal threat when in 1956 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers revealed plans to build dams on the Buffalo River deep in the North Arkansas hills he and others treasured. There were massive protests to "Save the Buffalo River."

In May 1962, none other than U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, a noted conservation-

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ From *Science, Nature, Folklore*, Book 3, "The Voice of the Hills" series.

¹⁹ From *Hillbilly Lore*, Book 4, "The Voice of the Hills" series.

ist, was persuaded by Mr. and Mrs. Harold Hedges of the Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club of Kansas City to float the Buffalo River. Encouraged by Douglas' interest, "The Ozark Society, Inc., To Save the Buffalo River" was formed with Dr. Compton as its president. A campaign to prevent the damming of the river was launched with invitations going out to elected officials, journalists, and others to float the river and to engage in cleanup efforts.²⁰

Congress passed legislation that President Richard Nixon signed into law on March 1, 1972 creating the "Buffalo National River," the first ever "national river" amid myriad parks, monuments, battlefields, cemeteries, seashores, and other historic sites. Jimmy was chairman of Arkansas Parks, Travel and Recreation Commission (sometime lazily referred to as "Parks and Tourism Commission) at the time.

These next few lines are devoted to the sacrifices of the "Inholders," that is, landowners who gave up their property and, as in many cases, their own culture and cultural heritage for the general good. Here is one paragraph from a warm and heartfelt report.

...It is the story of men, women, and families who have lived or owned land along the banks of the Buffalo River in Northern Arkansas. Some of these people still live there today, but under the cloud of an uncertain future on their land. ...It is hoped that the reader will be able to obtain a "feel" for the inholders of the Buffalo region and their plight.²¹

The Jimmy Driftwood Barn: 1976

Persuaded by forces only he can honestly account for, in September of 1975, Arkansas Governor David Pryor moved to cast Jimmy Driftwood out of the Ozark Folk Center he had had such a huge part in establishing. The gist of established reasoning was that the governor did not believe Jimmy knew how to make the musical program at the center progressive; it was not making a profit and wasn't likely to. Two things to take into account: it was Jimmy himself who was convinced the facilities needed to be a State Park in order for it to have adequate funding and the kind of support required for it to grow and continue its mission of preserving Ozark arts and crafts. (Jimmy is on record with his belief that the institution in Mountain View should be only one of many throughout the nation with similar missions.) Secondly, Jimmy acknowledged philosophically that he would eventually have been stifled by the confining daily demands of his job there and probably would not ever have taken trips with the Rackensackers and gone all the places he subsequently did.

The dynamics of Governor Pryor's unilateral act caused members of the Rackensack Folklore Society to reevaluate their concept of preserving Ozark cultural folkways. For sure, were not *they* the heart and soul of the musical programs at the center? Was it not *their* music and dance and various crafts that the center was built for? Still, many of the Rackensackers could see a greater mission for the Ozark Folk Center State Park than the preservation of Stone County and North Arkansas arts and crafts. Many of them were visionaries enough to know it was all much larger than merely providing a nice building for the Friday "musicals" and extending the substance of the Arkansas Folk Festival all year long in a permanent setting. So, whatever it was that motivated the act, Governor Pryor and the new leadership would soon become embroiled in controversy that found voice and feeling beyond the role of the Rackensackers on the mountain at the northern edge of the county seat town.

Most of the Rackensackers stood on the side of their beloved leader. It was certainly a matter of personal loyalty, yes, but as I talked to people who were involved (and when I think about it myself), there seems to have been a mature honesty—almost prophetic—that decided Jimmy had the right idea about "progressive" folk music. It goes like this: first, you honor *your* heritage and save what you can of it for posterity, all the time facing the reality that while music changes with each succeeding generation, you hold onto certain principles and guidelines for keeping it "of the folk."

More than half of the center's compliment of musicians and dancers followed Jimmy out—"out" meant to someplace else, and "someplace else" meant they would build a building, possibly the one originally conceived when John Optiz proposed qualifying for grant money back in 1963. This time they would use their own money and labor to do it.

²⁰ See www.uark.edu for guidance into the Dr. Neil Compton "collection."

²¹ From "The People of the Buffalo: A Socio-Cultural Assessment of Inholders Along the Buffalo National River," The American Land Rights Association online at www.landrights.org.

Jimmy bought three and a half acres of vacant land on the highway north of the road to the Folk Center—a road now designated “Jimmy Driftwood Parkway”. By the fall of 1976, a large, wooden frame, barn-like music hall was completed there in back of a huge parking lot and in front of a big picnic ground.

The Rackensack Folklore Society took up residency and resumed their “musicals” at the “Jimmy Driftwood Barn” on Friday and Sunday nights. It was Jimmy’s pride and joy. The consternation he had felt with the opening of Folk Center’s “grand, stone, air-conditioned, 1,060-seat auditorium” where “the environment seemed a little too formal, the sound a little too sophisticated to reflect the unspoiled soul of mountain music” was immediately swept away. It was the personality of the new digs and the renewed spirit of community fellowship that fulfilled his soul more than any other feature of life on earth. There was a “buzz” about the place that was more natural for everybody. The artists were free to express their heritage and the visitors were free to mix with the Driftwoods and all the Rackensackers and give their donations to a cause they believed was their own.



Photo provided by the Rackensack Folklore Society

‘RACKENSACKERS’ IN FRONT OF JIMMY DRIFTWOOD BARN, C. 1978

“Music of the Ozarks” Tours and “The Voice of the Hills” Books

Jimmy soon hooked up with Bill Fegan of Dallas, Texas, who began to book him for concert and teaching gigs, and they arranged to take tours with select Rackensackers on what was billed as “Music of the Ozarks” shows. As early as November of 1975, the *Chicago Sun-Times* newspaper announced to the world,

He sees his main mission in life as a disseminator of folk culture from his native north Arkansas hills. That’s the reason he was in Chicago this month – along with ‘25 or 30’ other music and craft performers from his home town, Mountain View.

His entourage includes skilled musicians, among them a banjo frailer with the unforgettable name of Bookmiller Shannon.²²

Teaching at “Old Town School of Folk Music” in Chicago that December along with younger “new

²² From “Jimmy Driftwood keeps his folk-culture promise,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 29, 1975.

age” folk musicians, he was quoted by the paper saying, “I’m 68 years old. I’m proud of what I’ve done the last 12 years, whatever happens in the future. The more different kinds of music we have, the better.”²³ The following February, at the beginning of our nation’s Bicentennial year, he and his entourage were in Texas and Oklahoma, and the year was filled with special patriotic appearances. In April, they were at the Arkansas Folk Festival in Mountain View, of course, and at Magnolia, Arkansas’, Bicentennial doings. Over the Fourth of July, he, along with follow-Rackensack showpersons Glen and Nellie Branscum, spent several days performing at the Smithsonian Institution’s American Folklife Festival on the Mall in our nation’s capital. By September they were at universities in Wisconsin. Between times, Jimmy had a date in California at “the old-fashioned Bicentennial Festival of American Music and Super Gala Party” at Stanford University.

Inauguration Day, January 20, 1977, found Jimmy entertaining in Washington, D.C., at ceremonies for his friend Jimmy Carter. In March, “an authentic Ozark Folk Festival, complete with fiddling, singing, dancing, whittling and weaving” was presented on the Ball State University campus at Muncie, Indiana. From there the vans loaded with “hillbillies” struck out for mid-winter weather at Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and Mankato State University in Minnesota, where they would make a reappearance after a decades’ time. Tim Demarce, a writer for the newspaper there, reminisced about the trip he had made from South Dakota to Mountain View for a Folk Festival.

That first Arkansas trip has long been enshrined in memory, one of those youthful, eye-opening adventures that becomes a watershed in life; seed falling on fertile ground. Five of us piled into our philosophy teacher’s sturdy ‘54 Canadian Ford and headed south, excited by his stories of the characters we’d meet, the music we’d hear and the dancing we’d see, and probably more excited by the delicious sin of cutting two days of college classes after the endless south Dakota winter. We left the Dakota ditches still piled with stubborn snow drifts...[by the time we drove into Arkansas] the dogwoods were in bloom on every mountainside. The creeks warbled for miles. We ferried across the pristine White River and bought cokes at a general store where natives spit and whittled on the front porch. We joined the crowd around the Stone County courthouse, watching the performers who took turns on the crude stage. Later we jammed into the high school auditorium for the “formal,” three-hour music program, an endless parade of local people of all ages who played autoharps and dulcimers, banjos and mouth bows, and sang Anglo-Saxon ballads that had been echoing through the mountain valleys for 200 years.²⁴

At the time he was doing all this traveling, he was an advisor to the Smithsonian Institution and the National Geographic Society in Washington, D.C., where he produced “Music of the Ozarks,” the society’s first album of American folk music.

The traveling continued and included appearances at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks in July of 1977 and Hanover College in Madison, Wisconsin, in September of 1979. Between those dates, among other projects, he spent nearly all the month of February 1979 in England. He told that upon at least one occasion, patrons carried blank firing and cap pistols and long guns; when he came to “We fired our guns and the British kept a-comin’” in *The Battle of New Orleans*, they blasted away in ecstasy.

After getting acquainted with John Rice Irwin at the Museum of Appalachia in Norris, Tennessee, Jimmy performed at the annual “Tennessee Homecoming” each October along with Roy Acuff and other popular mountain music and folk music acts. Upon one visit there, Jimmy played the pickin’ bow he had made from a portion of the great wheel of his great-grandmother’s spinning wheel. He gave it to the museum telling Mr. Irwin, “The old spinning wheel came from East Tennessee so this bow belongs back here.” It is on display there to this day along with photographs and a tribute to Jimmy.

While the beloved old-timer was about to end his far-flung traveling, he was becoming more and more concerned that he had paid so little attention to preserving his own heritage. Some of his songs were on recordings, for sure, but hundreds and hundreds more poems and songs were maintained in orderly fashion on shelves, in boxes and file cabinets on “Melody Hill” (the name he gave to his home in Timbo).

Two very capable and caring women, wife Cleda and devoted friend Barbara Sanders, took up the humongous task of compiling and editing it. It was a time of reminiscing, and at times of overwhelming emotions, as the threesome discovered long-forgotten poems and songs and jotted-down, incomplete

²³ From “Jimmy Driftwood keeps his folk-culture promise,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 29, 1975.

²⁴ From “Arkansas travelers,” *Mankato Free Press*, March 21, 1977.

flashes of genius on scraps of paper, napkins and in the margins of newspapers and magazine pages that had never been typed up before. After countless hours, in 1980, they published “The Battle of New Orleans Songbook” by their own Battle Music, Inc. Before the end of ’81, the eight volumes of “The Voice of the Hills” series had been published and our world is better, safer and richer because of the service of these people. The series includes Books 1-8: “Children’s Poems,” “The History Lesson,” “Science, Nature, Folklore,” “Hillbilly Lore,” “Wit, Wisdom and Foolishness,” “Mountain Musings,” “Western Lore,” and “Deep Water.”

He squeezed in a tour of concerts in Alaska during March 1981 while the books were being printed. Then, in October, Jimmy was called by the U.S. to make a goodwill trip to Germany, Switzerland and Holland. By mid-winter, he and Cleda were returning from the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota when they had a car wreck that injured Jimmy worse than Cleda. But, as soon as he could crawl out of bed, he went back to work. His indomitable spirit and love of life was his personal trademark—if preserving folklore and teaching was his profession. In October of 1982, he went to the Norris, Tennessee, doings of his friend John Rice Irwin and to Hannibal, Missouri’s, “Folklife Festival”. He told the folks there,

“I’m really glad you’re doing it. The more places that do it, the better the chance that these parts of our heritage will be preserved. It’s nice that the old folks can come out and see different crafts and say, ‘I remember that, it’s nice to see it again.’ But it’s more important that our children have to see these things because otherwise they’ll never get the chance. If it wasn’t good for the kids, I wouldn’t be for it. They have to realize that our people came here and couldn’t have stayed without an effort. If the people didn’t have something, they had to learn how to make it with what was available. That effort is a big part of our history.”²⁵

The Rest of the 1980s

In 1982, Jimmy and his collegiate *alma mater*, the University of Central Arkansas, struck a deal that seemed to be good for everyone concerned. Upon his death, the school would take all of his original works, all of his resource papers and correspondence (official and personal) to their archives in Conway for cataloging and storage in their climate-controlled, museum-quality rooms at the Torreyson Library.

At the time, Jimmy and history professor Waddy W. Moore had been friends for many years and had shared dozens of hours discussing the topic of Ozarks cultural heritage they were both committed to preserving and passing on to a wider audience. Dr. Moore had established the Ozark Heritage Institute in 1969 with its mission of collecting and preserving source materials about Arkansas. These materials consist of manuscripts, photographs, oral history interviews, Arkansas maps, periodicals, rare books and other artifacts. The operating premise of studying, preserving and perpetuating the states’ unique cultural heritage succeeded and, although the Ozark Heritage Institute was dissolved after 30 years, the results can be found in the Archives and Special Collections.



Photo by Wanda J. West

CLEDA & JIMMY DRIFTWOOD WITH GLEN AND NELLIE BRANSCUM
AT MINNESOTA STATE FAIR, SEPTEMBER 1982

Glen Branscum, who for 30 years was one of Jimmy's closest musical associates, says Jimmy did very little major traveling after 1982, except he always made the October trip to the "Tennessee Homecoming" in Norris.

Beloved first generation Rackensackers, "Aunt Ollie" Gilbert and Bookmiller Shannon, whom Jimmy immortalized in at least two songs, *Rackensack, I Love You* and *Mountain View, I Hear Your People Singing*, passed away in 1980 and 1985, respectively. Other original Rackensackers, all dear to Jimmy and Cleda and important contributors to the job of preserving Ozark cultural heritage, also left the scene. Thankfully, one place you can still hear some of their music is on "The Rackensack—Ozark Folk Center—1972," a reissue on CD of Jimmy's original LPs by The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project.

And although Jimmy was now pushing 80, he did join a cruise and tour to New Orleans and the Yucatan sponsored by Jim Britton's Great American Tours. In April of 1986, "The Traveling Ozark Folk Festival with Jimmy Driftwood" performed at "Arts Gala 1986" in nearby Morrilton, Arkansas.

In May, the University of Central Arkansas honored him with their first-ever "Distinguished Alumnus" award.

The 1986-87 "Performing Arts Touring Program" of the Mid-America Arts Alliance (MAAA) listed Jimmy Driftwood, "folk singer-songwriter...Bard of the Ozarks" whose contract fee was \$1,500 per performance. The program quoted the *Dallas Times Herald*, "...the Pied Piper of the Ozarks. Wherever he led, the mountain folk followed." Oklahoma State University was one organization that took the offer because in March 1988 he appeared in concert at the Seretean Center Concert Hall in Stillwater as "the Pied Piper of the Ozarks." "I was a school teacher forever," he told the *Stillwater NewsPress*, "and the kind of concert that I do I expect people to learn some things at. So, I guess I'm still a teacher."

In May of '88, on a day celebrating the 15th Anniversary of the Ozark Folk Center, Jimmy was present to be told he, Wilbur Mills and Bessie Moore were the "Fathers and Mother of Ozark Folk Center" as each was presented a personalized, handcrafted rocking chair.



Photo by Lori Freeze provided by *The Stone County Leader*

FORMER CONGRESSMAN WILBUR D. MILLS, DR. BESSIE B. MOORE & DR. JIMMY DRIFTWOOD
HONORED AS "THE FATHERS AND MOTHER OF OZARK FOLK CENTER," MAY 4, 1988

In November of 2000, by a "better-late-than-never" noble move, Arkansas Parks placed a memorial to Jimmy in front of the "Jimmy Driftwood Auditorium" at the Folk Center. Although the Arkansas Parks, Travel & Recreation Commission, the agency of the Legislature that directs the Department of Arkansas Parks and Tourism, voted several years earlier to re-name the venue for Jimmy, that action has not ever happened.

²⁵ From "Driftwood to perform sounds of Americana at Folklife Festival," *Hannibal Courier-Post*.

INTERLUDE: ILLUSTRATIONS



Ozark Folk Center General Meeting

Photo by Lori Freeze provided by *The Stone County Leader*

UNVEILING OF MEMORIAL HONORING JIMMY AT OZARK FOLK CENTER, NOVEMBER 2, 2000



Photo by Samm Wooley Coombs

JIMMY & CLEDA AT HOME WITH RCA "NIPPER," 1990



Photo by The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project

AUTHOR STREETER AT "JIMMY DRIFTWOOD PARKWAY" SIGN NEAR FOLK CENTER IN MOUNTAIN VIEW, 2004



JIMMY DRIFTWOOD COMMEMORATIVE LOGO

Created by Alice Chambers provided by The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project



Photo by Wanda J. West
JIMMY SEWING GRASS SEED ON THE RANCH, 1978

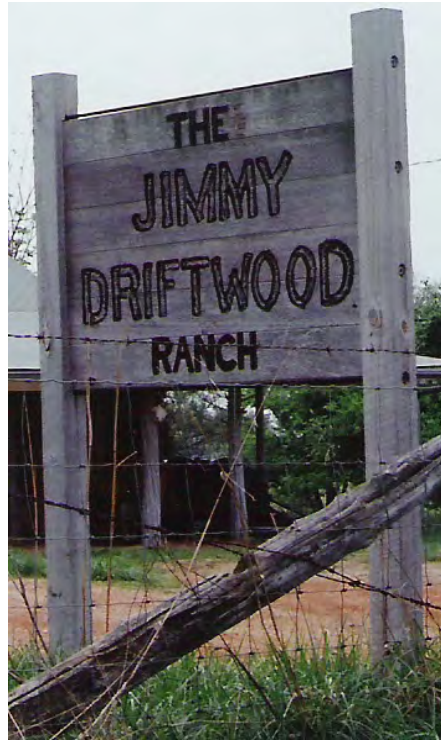


Photo by Wanda J. West
WELCOME TO THE JIMMY DRIFTWOOD RANCH



JIMMY AT THE BACKDOOR OF HIS RANCH HOME, APRIL 1978

Photo by Wanda J. West

Chapter Five: Death and Legacy

*He left us with no epitaph to carve in granite stone
An angel lived here with us for awhile and then went on.
“Just scatter my ashes o’er the mountains so dear
The trees and the flowers my love song will hear.”
—From Grandma’s Piece of “Driftwood”*

Jimmy Driftwood passed away at six o’clock in the morning on Sunday, July 12, 1998, in Fayetteville City Hospital at the age of 91 years and 22 days. His passing made TV and radio newscasts around the nation that same day and was front page, above-the-fold news next day in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in Little Rock.

Writers Michael Leahy and Matthew Waite speculated, “Jimmy Driftwood should be serenely at home on his final journey. The Arkansas legend’s ashes will be scattered this week in his beloved native Ozarks, perhaps to the strains of a song he wrote expressly for the occasion.” These men seemed to understand the sentiment Jimmy put in the nearest thing he ever wrote to an epitaph in *Scatter My Ashes O’er the Mountains*.

The elms and oaks have been my dear companions,
The maples know I’ve always been a friend,
And when my dust has settled down around them,
They’ll open their doors and take me in.
So scatter my ashes o’er the mountains,
Let me sift down among the leaves,
Soon I’ll be blooming on the hillside,
Speaking the language of the trees.¹

In the same paper on July 16th, Jay Meisell reported in “With song, memories, Driftwood gets goodbye”: “The memorial service Wednesday for Jimmy Driftwood, the legendary folk singer and songwriter, was as much a celebration of his music as a recollection of his long life.”²

But Hey! Wasn’t Jimmy always ready for a celebration? He could put a positive spin on anything. He said *My Mammy’s Miss America and My Daddy’s Uncle Sam* and in a song called *Equality* he allowed that “When Andrew Jackson invited me to The White House for a spree, ...I couldn’t resist Equality”; that “When the Queen of England invited me to her palace for a tea, ...I couldn’t resist Equality.”³

President Bill Clinton called Jimmy “a real hero not only to the people of Stone County, but also to Arkansas and the whole world.” And, William Eldridge, Jimmy’s accountant for more than 30 years, said he was “probably the most sincere man I’ve ever met. He could talk with any person at any level.”⁴

How can we ever say “Goodbye” to a man with an attitude toward all of life like this man had? Once he penned *I Belong on a Warm Hillside*, that is a window into his concept of LIFE with capital letters:

I don’t belong in a cold, damp grave away from the sunset’s glow,
But I belong on a warm hillside where the lovely flowers grow.
Throughout my life I’ve tried to help the bird, the beast, the tree,
And may my dust keep helping them throughout eternity.
Let all the elements I took from beast and plant and bird
Go back into the soil again, and let my every word
Float on forever through the air wherever thoughts may go,
And enter someone’s consciousness and help his mind to grow.
I often hear sweet music that I never heard before:
Did it come from some ancient bard or minstrel of yore?
I thank whatever God or man sent me that lovely rhyme,
I send it back upon the breeze along the road of time.⁵

¹ From “Songwriter Driftwood dies at 91,” *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

² From “With song, memories, Driftwood gets goodbye,” *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

³ From *The History Lesson*, Book 2, “The Voice of the Hills” series.

⁴ From “With song, memories, Driftwood gets goodbye,” by Jay Meisel, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, July 16, 1998.

⁵ From *Mountain Musings*, Book 6, “The Voice of the Hills” series. Please, see page 56 below for recording information.

A song he recorded, *Standing On the Left Hand Side of God*, tells me he knew more than our religions dare to teach:

They say there'll be a multitude a-standing on His right,
The biggest crowd a sinner ever saw.
I'd be so far behind the saints I couldn't see the light,
And I couldn't hear Him laying down the law.
I know I've been too bad to stand among the Chosen Few,
So when they open up the book and state the facts
I won't be disappointed when the keeper lets me through
If they point me out a spot across the tracks.

CHORUS: Though the space be deep and wide,
I'll be satisfied standing on the left hand side of God.
I'll be happy as can be through eternity
Standing on the left hand side of God.⁶

His *My Church* is reminiscent to me of "Outwitted," a couplet by American poet Edwin Markham (1852-1940): "He drew a circle that shut me out—Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But Love and I had the wit to win: We drew a circle that took him in!"

The Floor of my church is the face of the earth,
Its Roof is the sky up above;
Where all men can worship regardless of birth
At the altar of Brotherly Love.

CHORUS: My Church is under the trees
My Church is over the seas.
And deep in my mind
May I always find
My Church in the heart of me.

The Land of my church is as wide as the world,
Bound only by cloud and by sky;
Its Flag of true justice is always unfurled
Where tolerance never shall die.

The Roll of my church is all colors and creeds,
Religion's too broad to confine;
It's not what you say but the weight of your deeds
That makes you a brother of mine.

The Prayer of my church is so old that it's new,
The same as it always has been:
Let me do to others as I'd have them do
If I were the others. Amen.⁷

An Admirer's Eulogy

He is through riding the Tennessee Stud, traveling The Wilderness Road, pining for The Widders of Bowling Green, and pretending to be a Damsyankee Lad. He has eaten Razorback Steak and explained the woes of the Unfortunate Man for the last time. The stories about Mooshatanio, Tucumcari, Peter Francisco and the Four Little Girls in Boston he has left for others to tell. And, he waits no longer for The Maid of Argenta.

The Arkansas Traveler is home. The Country Boy has new hillsides to scramble over, and he has a new Shanty in the Holler.

He left us for a better understanding of both sides of The Battle of New Orleans, of Shiloh Hill, Bunker Hill, San Juan Hill and Chickamauga. He is both Billy Yank and Johnny Reb; did what the Giant on the Thunderhead admonished him to do, and more. The Banjer Pickin' Man left The Land Where the Bluegrass Grows and his beloved Mountain View, the Blue Mountain Hills, the Sylamore Hills, and the Beautiful White River Valley to Swim the Golden River in the morning.

⁶⁻⁷ From [Deep Water](#), Book 8, "The Voice of the Hills" series.

He is one with Father Time and Mother Nature now as never before, can hear the original Ozark Symphony and the Voice of the People; can find out for sure whether he is Standing on the Left Hand Side of God and can get the answer to a burning question, What Is the Color of the Soul of Man?



Photo provided by the Rackensack Folklore Society

JIMMY'S FUNERAL CELEBRATION ON STAGE AT OZARK FOLK CENTER, MOUNTAIN VIEW, ARKANSAS

“The Legend of Jimmy Driftwood”

The word *legend* originated in Medieval Latin for “reading a narrative of a saint.” Although the word, in my opinion, has been overused for the past decade or so until it’s meaning is diluted to homeopathic potency, still “The Legend of Jimmy Driftwood” has plenty of genuine legend stuff to it. We learn from wordsmiths that these biographies, or legends, were considered to be important as both historical records and moral examples. Bingo!

I don’t want to sound more solemn than our subject would allow, but let me be among the first to apply the following description to our beloved legendary Ozark mountain man:

He lived among us and we knew him. We’re the people he was born amongst; where he was educated and grew to manhood. We watched him from the humblest of circumstances to being known in the halls of mighty governments, on the stages of renowned concert halls, and in the auditoriums and classrooms of some of our greatest universities.

He never went away for very long at one time, and he was always generous with his time and money. He taught us our history, and he made us laugh at some of our ways. He explained God, Nature and Science in ways we never dreamed of, like it all should be so obvious to everyone. Now that he is gone forever, we can see his imprint everywhere. We want to go where he went, see what he saw, talk to each other about him, look at pictures of him, sing his songs and read his poems.

The legacy he left is wide and deep in truth and reality; wider and deeper still if you add up the varied opinions of people he was associated with. For example, when at the pinnacle of fame as songwriter and folklorist, folk cultural authority and National Director of the National Folk Festival Association in Washington, D.C., Sarah Gertrude Knott, wrote:

In some future day, musical historians will look back to these stirring times, to learn from our song makers—and the songs they write and sing—what made us tick. They will surely say, “That was our golden age of song making!” It is certain that Jimmie Driftwood will lead the long list of song makers and singers who tell the story of our yesterday and today in music that springs from the heart.⁸

Radio, TV and recording personality Sherwin Linton—who wrote *Jimmy Please Play that Ol’ Pickin Bow* and recorded an album with Jimmy and Clede—said to him,

“Jimmy, I just want to tell you that to me you’re the greatest American folk singer that ever lived because you didn’t go out to search and find how to write folk music—you *are* folk music.”⁹

Of course, the dozens and hundreds who grew up with Jimmy, who went to school with him, worked with him, told him stories and sang old songs to him are almost all passed from the earth. Quite a few of those who taught school with him, traveled the states with him and shared his passion for preserving our natural and cultural treasures are still with us, thankfully, although many have gone on. It is my belief that there is power for good in every memory and opinion, that every point of view bears testimony to the long and event-filled life of one whose visions, passions and efforts blazed trails like few Arkansans have. In many ways, he showed us what can be done and he left much undone for us.

The song says, “He left us with no epitaph to carve in granite stone; an angel lived here with us for awhile and then went on.”¹⁰ Being somewhat of a philosopher, I have always believed that when we finish what we came to earth to do, we leave. That helps explain the “untimely” passing of some of our friends and relations.

Humanity observer, photographer and author Samm Wooley Coombs wrote that Jimmy was...

A prime mover in the establishment of the now famous Arkansas Ozark Folk Center and wheeler-dealer par excellence for causes and crusades too numerous to mention. Composer of more than 1,000 songs, including *The Battle of New Orleans* and *Tennessee Stud*. Grand Ole Opry star; world traveler; friend of presidents, congressmen, celebrities, chicken pluckers, hewers of wood and carriers of water. The only man now living who has mastered that ancient instrument, the leafola, and a man who still takes his baths in a metal tub in the middle of the living room floor and doesn’t care who knows it.¹¹

The 1998 edition of *Stone County Visitor’s Guide*, published only a few months before Jimmy’s passing, gave the local grassroots spin to the expressions of praise and devotion thousands of fans would surely laud on the Ozark country boy-become national treasure:

Nashville and Jimmy Driftwood were never a likely match and the long trips away from his native Arkansas became less and less attractive. ... Places like Nashville were totally unlike his beloved Ozarks and gradually the desire to quit the traveling around became too strong to resist and he knew he wanted to get back to Mountain View. It has been estimated that in taking this course of action he was literally giving up the opportunity to make around \$100,000 a year from his personal appearances, but he weighed that as nothing against his personal contentment.¹²

Although it is generally claimed that he wrote around 6,000 poems and songs during his lifetime, approximately 500 have been printed and fewer than 150 recorded. The Archives and Special Collections section of Torreyson Library at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway has all of his original work professionally cataloged and stored in climate-controlled facilities. It is open to the public, and the staff there is ready, willing and able to share the collection with those who care to do research. The goal of the now-dissolved Ozark Heritage Institute at the school, “to publish the definitive Jimmy Driftwood Anthology of songs and poems,” has been set aside. Important work of processing oral history collections and producing programs on Ozark culture for teachers, schools and the general public, of developing television documentaries, publications, musical recordings, and electronic mediums is limited by not having enough capable people and adequate funds.

The meager efforts of The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project™ are privately funded and depend on the cooperation of many who want to see Jimmy’s songs and poems available to a greater public.

⁸ From “Songs of Billy Yank and Johnny Reb” album cover.

⁹ From recording by Sherwin & Pam Linton: “Driftwood on the River.”

¹⁰ From *Grandma’s Piece of “Driftwood”* by Richard Kent Streeter: “Heroes, Outlaws & Kinfolk.”

¹¹ From page 17, *A Pickin’ and A Grinnin’ on the Courthouse Square*.

¹² From “Driftwood/others Planned First Festival, Jimmy Driftwood gave up Grand Ole Opry career to come home to Stone County,” *Stone County Visitor’s Guide*, 1998.

Excerpts from Beckoning Mountains

By James C. Morris, December 16, 1936

Over the hills and under the sky, out where the sun goes down,
There, where the day tells the earth goodbye, as twilight puts on her gown,
On past the reach of my vision, too far for the eye to see,
Standing above, in a land that I love, are beckoning mountains calling to me.

Always out there, wherever I go, beyond the place I stand
Are other hills that I cannot know until I have reached that land.
Then as I stand on their summits, out there, where I cannot be,
Standing alone in the mystic unknown are beckoning mountains calling to me.

Thus as I climb, I never can reach the end of every trail
For on beyond is the ocean beach, the shore and some other vale.
Above the vale in the distance, somewhere in infinity,
Are sure to rise in the land of the skies those beckoning mountains calling to me.

From Hillbilly Lore, Book 4, "The Voice of the Hills" series



SCENES FROM THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF ARKANSAS LEGEND JIMMY DRIFTWOOD

By Karon J. Owens. © Richard Kent Streeter, Calhoun, Georgia. All rights reserved.

THE JIMMY DRIFTWOOD STORY, PART 2

Portions previously published as “The Life, Career & Legacy of Arkansas Folk Music Legend Jimmy Driftwood in the Words of Prestigious and Respected Persons and Publications.”

Introduction

By Richard Kent Streeter

There can be little argument that the late Jimmy Driftwood is the most famous folklore personality to come from Stone County; probably from Arkansas; possibly the United States. His talent, fame and generosity are documented in many ways and evidence of his achievements and influence can be found in homes, schools and radio stations, as well as in museums, libraries and archives of Americana. By his sincerity, humor and obvious devotion to people as expressed in his recorded songs, thousands who never met him have been attracted to him and remain devoted to his memory. An increasing number to this day are devoted to keeping his legacy alive.

He was born James Corbett Morris in 1907, the firstborn of Neal and Allena “Allie” Risner Morris in rural Stone County, Arkansas. The valley where he was born is known today as West Richwoods, reached from Mountain View by Arkansas Highway 9 after it passes over Dodd Mountain of the Blue Mountain range south of town. In 1936, Jimmy and new wife, Clela Johnson Morris, built the Driftwood family residence — The Jimmy Driftwood Ranch on “Melody Hill” — on Arkansas Highway 263 in Timbo. Now, still privately owned and still in the Morris family, it can be reached by turning north off Arkansas Highway 66 approximately 13 miles west of Mountain View.

We have put on the next several pages a representative selection of acknowledgments for the man, his life and his work; words written or voiced by people who knew his music and the contribution he made to the goodness of Arkansas and America. One writer offered, “...[he] can so infectiously communicate the down-home friendliness of rural America.”¹

We can vouch for fact that nearly 100 percent of all books and articles ever written about Jimmy Driftwood are long out of print and unavailable to the general public. The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project has written about Jimmy and published two books of his songs and one book of his poems. We have also published two long articles by Caleb Pirtle III.

We believe even more important than reading about Jimmy, you have to listen to him sing. He put into music and song what he called “The Voice of the People.” His songs are about people and their lives devoted to their families, their communities, their state and their nation; people who lived, loved, laughed and tried to be happy as they met the vicissitudes of the life they found before them, mostly out in the rural countryside, sometimes at war, sometimes in conflict with themselves, in politics or social issues. He wrote on many themes; history, nature and the lifestyle of the hill people were among his favorites. “I want to write songs about [this country’s] forgotten people and places,” Jimmy told a magazine writer.²

Part 1 of this present book is a revision and enlargement of previously published *The Jimmy Driftwood Primer, A Biography* where you will find a list (incomplete, but still considerably long) of the recordings Jimmy made for RCA Victor, Monument, National Geographic Society, Rackensack and other labels. There is also a list of more than 60 recordings other artists have made of Jimmy’s songs. Bear Family Records has put out all of Jimmy’s RCA Victor recordings in a wonderful box set of three CDs and a nice book titled *Americana—Jimmie Driftwood*. Bear Family Records has recently acquired the rights to re-issue all of Jimmy’s recordings, but it will be some months before they are available for purchase.

¹ Art Coats, “Jimmy Driftwood—Featured at Winfield,” *The Great Plains Gazette*, week of Sept. 5, 1975.

² Richard Schickel, “Jimmie Driftwood, the New Arkansas Traveler,” *Look, America’s Family Magazine*, May 24, 1960.

The Life, Career & Legacy of Jimmy Driftwood *in the Words of Prestigious and Respected Persons and Publications.*

Grammy winner Jimmy Driftwood was one of Arkansas's true folk heroes. Born in 1907 in Richwood, Arkansas, James Corbett Morris became a teacher, writing songs to help his students remember history. Driftwood wrote over 6,000 songs and had more than 300 published. In 1959 he won a Grammy Award for song of the year, "The Battle of New Orleans," and was nominated twice more.

Jimmy Driftwood was a regular on the Grand Ole Opry from 1959 through 1963. He played at the Newport Folk Festival, in Carnegie Hall, toured Europe and Asia and was a board member of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. In the early 1960's, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Folklore from Peabody University in Nashville, Tennessee.

After achieving fame as a songwriter and performer, he returned to his beloved Stone County, Arkansas, and used his influence to help America discover the wonders and beauty of Arkansas folk culture, particularly folk music and folk storytelling. Driftwood founded The Rackensack Folklore Society and organized the Arkansas Folk Festival in Mountain View. From March 1969 to February 1976, he served on the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission. He was influential in establishing the Ozark Folk Center; as Commission Chairman he presided over the groundbreaking ceremony and was a frequent performer at the Center in its early years.

PLAQUE OUTSIDE THE MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE "JIMMY DRIFTWOOD AUDITORIUM," A.K.A., THE FOLK CENTER
THEATER, AT OZARK FOLK CENTER STATE PARK IN MOUNTAIN VIEW, ARKANSAS.

A preservationist of traditional American Folk Music. He diligently collected, performed and thus kept alive many of the folk songs he heard growing up in rural Arkansas—some of which date back to Elizabethan England.

—from Comprehensive Country Music Encyclopedia on plaque outside the main entrance to the
"Jimmy Driftwood Auditorium" at the Ozark Folk Center State Park in Mountain View, Arkansas.

Editor's Note: The subject matter in this section of "The Jimmy Driftwood Story" is arranged in chronological order from the earliest date to the present. Any remark that is not a direct quotation of the person or publication credited is followed with the initials *RKS* or other appropriate identification. All sources are identified at the end of each entry. When *** appears within the text it indicates the text immediately following is not from the same paragraph but (usually) a later one.

1958. Jimmy records for RCA Victor in Nashville. Here in the groves of one longplaying record is a sizable segment of American history—a wealth of flavor and song giving us a better picture of our forebears. Here, one might say, is evidence of the unbroken line of history taking us back to Elizabethan England, to the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and finally on up to the present day. For these songs, lovingly collected by [Jimmie] Driftwood and carefully recorded by him and Chet Atkins—RCA Victor's recording executive in Nashville—show that the past is with us.

—from *Jimmie Driftwood Sings Newly Discovered Early American Folk Songs* liner notes by Paul Ackerman,
Music Editor, *The Billboard*, Radio Corporation of America, New York, 1958.

1959. Jimmy headlines Alan Lomax show at Carnegie Hall. Jimmie Driftwood, born deep in the heart of the Ozark Mountains in Arkansas, learned to sing ballads from his grandfather and to play the mouthbow, a primitive instrument never before found in America, from the old people of the district. Grew up in a log cabin, did farm chores, walked seven miles to high school, finally took a degree at Arkansas State Teachers college, and became a teacher and school principal; but Jimmie never stopped collecting the old songs, playing guitar and mouthbow and composing his own folksy ballads. He is a representative of the folk bards who created our native American ballads. Discovered by Chet Atkins, he has made two albums—*The Wilderness Road* and *Early American Songs* for RCA Victor.

—from *Folksong: '59* (Carnegie Hall Program—Season 1958-1959—) New York, April 1959.

1959. Jimmy made "Doctor of American Folklore" by Peabody College. "There never was a horse like the Tennessee Stud" and there never was a school teacher like Jimmie Driftwood, "Doctor of American Folklore" and writer of this summer's two big hits, "Battle of New Orleans," and "Tennessee Stud."

For the man with the homemade guitar, the almost inexhaustible store of authentic folksongs, and the great folksinger's voice IS a school teacher. He is as much at home in the school room as he is on the concert stage or before the mike in a radio or TV station. ***

Last year Jimmie had to give up his school at Snowball, Arkansas, and start touring the country to sing his Early American Folk Songs. Since then, he has been out of the school room, but he has been *in* teaching; for what Jesse Stuart, the "mountain poet," has done to preserve the folkways of Eastern Kentucky . . . what Harry Kroll has done so vividly for Louisiana legends and for the Delta and its ways . . . what Alfred Leland Crabb has done to keep alive the heroic past of Nashville and Middle Tennessee, Jimmie Driftwood, folksinger of the Ozarks has done for the Arkansas mountains and for Americans everywhere. By means of his folklore, he is teaching us our heritage. His songs and ballads, which have set three and a half million records spinning on turntables throughout the land, are also prodding young and eager minds. Teenagers write radio stations and disc jockeys to ask questions about American history. And Jimmie says he has had letters from teachers in most of the 50 states since his musical version of Pakenham's defeat started playing throughout the land.

—from "He Teaches Us Our Heritage" (doctoral breakfast program), Peabody College, Nashville, August 14, 1959.

1960. Jimmy featured in *Look* magazine. "I just want to travel all over this country and collect the old tunes," he says. "And I want to write songs about its forgotten people and places. I feel that's what I was put here to do. That's my real talent. That's what I must do." ***

...Jimmie Driftwood is no primitive. Instead, he is a scholar of folk singing and American history. Alan Lomax, perhaps the leading student of folk music, considers him "America's greatest bard," and thinks he knows more ancient English ballads (from which American folk songs are directly descended) than any other man in the country.

—from "Jimmie Driftwood, the New Arkansas Traveler," by Richard Schickel, *Look, America's Family Magazine*, New York, May 24, 1960.

1960. Jimmy featured in *Newsweek* magazine. When RCA Victor officials in New York want to reach their folk-singing star Jimmie Driftwood on the telephone, they call Colony 9-3270, the phone at the pool hall in Mountain View, Ark. Not that Jimmie is likely to be there in person, but since he won a Grammy from the Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences for writing 1959's song of the year, "The Battle of New Orleans," his neighbors are used to such calls and don't mind driving 15 miles out to Jimmie's house at Timbo, on the edge of the Ozark National Forest, to deliver the message. ***

It would have to be the time and not the money which stands between the 42-year-old Driftwood and the modernization of the Ozark home he and his wife built themselves five years ago. For between royalties from his songs...and records like his new album "The Westward Movement," his income has jumped from the \$3,000 he used to get...to around \$100,000 a year.

—from "It's Folksy...It's Delightful, It's a Craze," *Newsweek* magazine, New York, June 6, 1960.

1960. Jimmy records for RCA Victor in Nashville. [Jimmie Driftwood] is gifted; ...has the drive to create and to write; ...has spent a large portion of his life in the schoolroom teaching. If genius is innate, as some psychologists think, certainly a major conditioning factor in the life of Jimmie Driftwood was his preparation for and experience in teaching. As a teacher, he learned about history and great literature; as a teacher, he mastered the tools and techniques of research; as a teacher, he developed orderly processes of mind; and as a teacher, he kept the common touch. With this background of historical flesh and blood, and his inner urge to create, Jimmie Driftwood's promise for future production seems unlimited. Composing, singing and playing—this uninhibited genius of the Ozarks will go on and on helping his fellow Americans relive the exciting heritage of the past.

—from RCA Victor *Tall Tales in Song* liner notes by Dr. J.E. Windrow, Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee, 1960.

1961. Jimmy records for RCA Victor in Nashville. In some future day, musical historians will look back to these stirring times, to learn from our song makers—and the songs they write and sing—what made us tick. They will surely say, "That was our golden age of song making!" It is certain that Jimmie Driftwood will lead the long list of song makers and singers who tell the story of our yesterday and today in music that springs from the heart.

—from RCA Victor *Songs of Billy Yank and Johnny Reb* liner notes by Sarah Gertrude Knott, National Director, National Folk Festival Association, Radio Corporation of America, New York, 1961.

1961. Jimmy's *The Battle of New Orleans* gets industry attention. Perhaps the name of Warden Music Company doesn't ring a bell. But "The Battle of New Orleans" did . . . it rang cash drawers all over . . .
—from *The Music Reporter*, June 12, 1961.

1961. Jimmy featured on Newport Folk Festival album. Jimmy Driftwood, the Ozark bard, is here in two of his best numbers from the first Newport Folk Festival, on some tapes happily saved from 1959.
—from Vanguard *The Newport Folk Festival, Vol. 1* liner notes by Stacey Williams, New York, 1961.

1962. Jimmy featured on folk music album. Jimmy Driftwood appears through the courtesy of RCA Victor, for whom he records exclusively. He is a high school principal in the town of Snowball, Arkansas. And has been a collector of the folk songs of the Ozark region since his early youth.
—from Vanguard *Folk Songs and Minstrelsy* liner notes by Mary A. Meehan, New York, 1962.

1964. Jimmy honored guest of NY World's Fair. Jimmie Driftwood was an "honored guest" of the New York World's Fair in September.
—from "Country and Folk Music," *BMI, The Many Worlds of Music*, Nashville, November 1964.

1966. Jimmy featured in *Sing Out!* magazine. We invite you to come to The Arkansas Folk Festival any third weekend in April. And we'd be proud to have you any Friday night of the year, be it moonlight, darkness, warm rain or snow. Do bring your git-fiddle and join us in a song. Music is the International Language. Music makers are friendly, they are peaceful. So come on, join the Rackensack, make America the most musical nation in the world, that she may be the world leader in Peace and in Love.
—from "Revival at the Grass Roots: The Arkansas Folk Festival" by Jimmie Driftwood, *Sing Out! The Folk Song Magazine*, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, April/May, 1966.

1966. Jimmy featured in country music history book. From an old square-dance tune, "The Eighth of January," an Arkansas schoolteacher and song writer, Jimmie Driftwood, fashioned a song called "The Battle of New Orleans." The Johnny Horton recording of the song was to be a national hit and helped spur the revival of historical ballads or "saga songs."
—from *The Country Music Story, A Picture History of Country and Western Music* by Robert Shelton and Burt Goldblatt, Castle Books, Secaucus, New Jersey, 1966.

1967. Jimmy noted in *TV-Radio Mirror*. Jimmy Driftwood, who could make a fortune in the recording industry (and has in the past) is content to while away his time in the hills of Arkansas, putting on a once-a-year genuine hillbilly show...
—from "The Swinging Sound of '67" by William Frederic, Jr., *TV-Radio Mirror* magazine, July 1967.

1968. Jimmy featured in *The New York Times Magazine*. "He is sure a fine fellow," says [Mountain View] Mayor [Tommy] Simmons of his friend Bobby [Blair]. "He'll do to ride the river with. He's loyal." And that is the estimate of Jimmie Driftwood of nearby Timbo, who is recorded on some 5 million folk records and who is the force behind the county's burgeoning "folk industry."
—from "The Ballads of Bobby Lynn Blair" by Tom Dearnmore, *The New York Times Magazine*, New York, June 30, 1968.

1968. Jimmy Driftwood is from Mountain View, Arkansas. He became nationally known in 1959 when his song *Battle of New Orleans* became a hit record. In his own area, he has worked with his neighbors, through the Rackensack Folklore Society which he helped to found, to preserve the music and lore of the locality. He writes many of his songs, and accompanies himself on the guitar and on the mouthbow.

Jimmy Driftwood remains for American audiences one of the most delightful and fresh performers to be heard in the field of folk music. The style, both vocal in instrumental, which he brings to his performances has been assimilated from a long tradition of music making. As the leader of the Rackensack Folk Society, Jimmy has played a vital role in the founding of the Ozark (should be Arkansas *RKS*) Folk Festival which remains one of the most enjoyable and distinctive events in the United States.
—from press release from Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., 1968.

1970. Jimmy is "Presenter" at Grammy Awards show in Nashville. We are pleased that you have accepted our invitation to appear as a Presenter at the 12th annual Grammy Awards Show to be held on Wednesday, March 11, 1970. You will receive a Presenter's Ribbon and instructions at the door.

We are looking forward to a real fun-filled evening.

—from letter from Cecil Scaife, Chairman, Presenter's Committee National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, Nashville, Tenn., February 24, 1970.

c. 1970. Jimmy noted in Stone County history book. In this [1927 Mountain View High School] class, we note James C. Morris, better known to many of us as Jimmy Driftwood. He has become world famous as a song writer, folk singer, and preserver of folk music of this area.

—from *Heritage of Stone* “Stone County Academy,” Stone County Historical Society, Mountain View, Arkansas (undated).

1970. Jimmy noted in *Sing Out!* magazine. “Tennessee Stud,” created by the famed Arkansas folk singer Jimmie Driftwood, became a standard in citybilly repertoire after [Ramblin’] Jack [Elliott] sang it around.

—from “Tennessee Stud,” *Sing Out! The Folk Song Magazine*, Bethlehem, Pa., March/April, 1970.

1970. Jimmy commended by Smithsonian Institution. Now that the tents are folded, the lawns swept clean and the people and their crafts and songs are committed to the memories of the many thousands who came, saw and learned, we have an opportunity to tell you how very much it meant to have you with us at this year’s Festival of American Folklife.

Many have written to us speaking of you as new found friends, and others simply thank us and you for making the event possible so that they and their children could gain a fresh insight into the true meaning of our country’s riches...its creative people.

What you, as a participant, brought to this festival, could not have been contributed in the same way by any other American. James Morris and his staff at the Division of Performing Arts join me in thanking you for bringing your own special talents to the Smithsonian Institution this summer. We, and the more than half million people who attended the event, are the richer for being with you and knowing you.

—from a letter from Ralph Rinzler, Festival Director and Director of the American Folklife Center, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., August 10, 1970.

1970. Jimmy featured in *Southern Living* magazine. Until seven years ago nobody in the Ozarks had ever thought of a folklore society, much less heard of the Rackensackers. Then one day the community decided to sponsor a little arts and crafts fair. They needed some music.

And Jimmy Driftwood, who had once blown into Nashville as a \$2,700-a-year schoolteacher to record his “Battle of New Orleans,” said so long to the Grand Ole Opry and came home. It was the beginning of a new day in Mountain View.

Jimmy Driftwood discovered what he had always known, that the Arkansas hills were alive with music. The land was farmed by men who could pick cotton and banjos with equal dexterity. And even if they couldn’t read a note, nobody cared, because they liked the notes they were playing.

The Rackensack Folklore Society wasn’t born that day in 1963. It had always been there. It was merely given a name.

—from “The Mountaineers Who Make Rackensack Music” by Caleb Pirtle III, *Southern Living* magazine, Birmingham, Alabama, October 1970.

1971. Jimmy featured in *The Ozarks Mountaineer* magazine. He has registered some notable achievements—becoming chairman of the Arkansas Parks and Tourism Commission, and winning approval of a \$2.1 million Folk Cultural Center to be built in Mountain View.

—from “A Chunk of Driftwood” by Clay Anderson, *The Ozarks Mountaineer* magazine, April 1971.



1971. Jimmy testifies at Senate hearing on stage of Ryman Auditorium.

Right now we’ve got with us Jimmy Driftwood, who has a name that’s awfully well known through this country. He’s an old-time musician himself from over in Timbo, Arkansas. In Mountain View, Arkansas, he’s been responsible for one of the great developments in country music, trying to preserve and promote country music by presenting country people the way they really are and by presenting what they have to say.

—Remarks by Senator Harris from *Congressional Record*, February 1, 1972.

1972. Jimmy records music of the Rackensack Folklore Society. Thirty-six songs and tunes were recorded at the Ozark Folk Center by 58 members of the Rackensack Folklore Society and issued on two long-playing records. Long out of print and unavailable, in 2005 The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project reissued all the music and liner notes on a single compact disc. *RKS*

1972. Jimmy featured on National Geographic Society album. In 1963 some people here in Stone County, Arkansas, got together to try to save a part of our American musical heritage. We called ourselves the Rackensack Folklore Society, after an old name for the Arkansas River and the state, and started meeting Friday nights at the County Courthouse. We wanted to encourage the preservation of the folk music that had survived so long in our hills, and our dances and legends, not only for ourselves and our children but also for our city cousins as well. Much of our folk heritage had been forgotten, drowned out by the jukebox and television. But there were a few people who remembered. ***

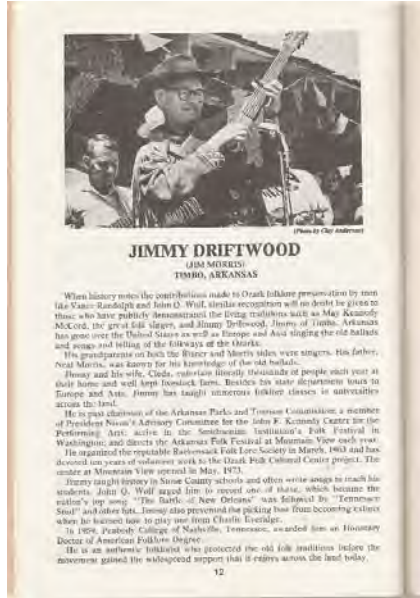
Last year, backed by state and federal funds, we began work on our new Ozark Folk Cultural Center, a \$4,000,000 complex set into 600 forested acres above the unspoiled White River, just outside Mountain View. We'll have a new auditorium with a folk-music library attached and soundproof practice rooms for visiting students. In 17 craft shops, set around the main hall, the Arkansas Department of Education will teach classes in woodcarving, pottery, weaving, and traditional Ozark crafts.

—from National Geographic Society *Music of the Ozarks* liner notes by Jimmy Driftwood, NY, 1972.

1972. Jimmy featured in *Ozark Highways* magazine. He is one of the nicest, busiest, most modest, and most interesting men in town, and one knows by the quality and quantity of the books shelved and stacked all over that he is also one of the most interested: in anything from antiques to zithers; everything from ecology to extra-sensory perception, float fishing to folklore. In the latter case, “A” may stand for Arkansas, but it also denotes Ambassador-at-Large, and he certainly gets an “A” for effort! Not only has he scoured the Ozarks collecting folksongs, but he has traveled around the world singing them, and wherever he sings people listen, laugh, cheer, and sometimes join in gustily as he revives a rousing tune.

—from “An Interview with Jimmy Driftwood, The Arkansas Minstrel” by Carol McKowen, *Ozark Highways*, Winter 1972.

1972. Jimmy featured in collection of Ozark folk songs. When history notes the contributions made to Ozark folklore preservation by men like Vance Randolph and John Q. Wolf, similar recognition will no



doubt be given to those who have publicly demonstrated the living traditions such as May Kennedy McCord, the great folk singer, and Jimmy Driftwood. Jimmy of Timbo, Arkansas has gone over the United States as well as Europe and Asia singing the old ballads and songs and telling of the folkways of the Ozarks.

His grandparents on both the Risner and Morris sides were singers. His father, Neal Morris, was known for his knowledge of the old ballads.

Jimmy and his wife, Cleda, entertain literally thousands of people each year at their home and well kept livestock farm. Besides his state department tours to Europe and Asia, Jimmy has taught numerous folklore classes in universities across the land.

He is chairman of the Arkansas Parks and Tourism Commission; a member of President Nixon's Advisory Committee for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; active in the Smithsonian Institution's Folk Festival in Washington; and directs the Arkansas Folk Festival at Mountain View each year.

He organized the reputable Rackensack Folk Lore Society in March, 1963 and has devoted ten years of volunteer work to the Ozark Folk Cultural Center project. The center at Mountain View is scheduled to open in April, 1973.

Jimmy taught history in Stone County schools and often wrote songs to teach his students. John Q. Wolf urged him to record one of these, which became the nation's top song. “The Battle of New Orleans” was followed by “Tennessee Stud” and other hits. Jimmy also prevented the picking bow from becoming extinct when he learned from Charlie Everidge to play one.

In 1959, Peabody College of Nashville, Tennessee, awarded him an Honorary Doctor of American Folklore Degree.

He is an authentic folklorist who protected the old folk traditions before the movement gained the widespread support that it enjoys across the land today.

—from *Songs of the Ozark Folk* by Leo Rainey, *The Ozarks Mountaineer*, Kirbyville, Missouri, 1972.

1972. Jimmy featured in *Life* magazine. Mountain View, Ark. (pop. 1,568) lies in the foothills of the Ozarks and has a reputation as a sanctuary of real old-time country music, the fast-disappearing kind, played by amateurs. ***

Though the Friday night hootenanny continued to thrive, Jimmy Driftwood, its guiding spirit, grew ever more anxious over the future of the old-time sound. In the end, the ex-Grand Ole Opry star got on a plane to Washington to look for government money to help “save a little bit of America’s heritage in music”—his kind of music. Driftwood’s pitch worked, and a \$5 million folk culture center . . . will open this December.

Will it save the Friday-nighters’ sort of music? Some old-timers are having second thoughts, worried about the impact of a multimillion-dollar operation on their frail curio. But Driftwood is optimistic, “We’re still neighborly here,” he says. “Plenty of room for everyone.”

—from “The Living Roots of Country Music” by Joan Downs in *Life* magazine, June 30, 1972

1973. Jimmy featured in *Southern Living* magazine. So Driftwood and a band of Rackensacker singers flew off to Washington. City fathers had told him, “Don’t ask for so much money they’ll laugh at us. We figure we can get a nice, new building for \$45,000. That’s all you need to ask for.”

He stood up before Congress and asked for \$15 million. Don’t laugh. Congress didn’t. The city, thanks to the persistent efforts of Mayor Tommy Simmons, would eventually get \$4 million.

—from “The Ballad of the Ozarks,” *Southern Living* magazine, Birmingham, Ala., (month unknown) 1973.

1973. Jimmy featured in *National Geographic Society* book. “Appalachia haw what America must regain — a closeness with the earth,” says a contributor to the magazine *Mountain Life and Work*. James Morris — Jimmy Driftwood — would agree. At his farm he puts up 200 people at a time who come to attend the Mountain View, Arkansas, folk music festivals for which he is responsible. He conducted me proudly around the new festival auditorium being constructed of dark native sandstone, along with harmonizing buildings in which a score of crafts will be demonstrated and the products sold. (p. 31)

To be their headliner [that is, for a folk festival in 1963 staged by the Ozark Foothills Handicraft Guild], guild leaders turned to a Stone County native and former country schoolteacher: James Morris. As Jimmy Driftwood — a name his grandmother gave him when he was a baby — he had become a popular performer with the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee, with scores of published and recorded songs to his credit, including “The Battle of New Orleans.”

Jimmy advised against assembling a country music show with professional stars, and proposed instead an “Arkansas Folk Festival” with local people singing the songs and playing the instruments of their forefathers. The initial enthusiasm for this idea could be gauged by the fact that exactly six persons turned out for the first planning session. But the committee persisted, and soon formed the Rackensack Folklore Society. Rehearsals took place in the Stone County Courthouse — starting something that hasn’t stopped yet. (pp. 118-119)

—from Chapter 3, “The Ozarks: ‘I been on this place 84 year’” by Clay Anderson in *American Mountain People*, National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C., 1973

1973. Jimmy acknowledged at dedication of Ozark Folk Center. This is a wonderful day and I am sure there are those of us in the audience who thought it would never happen, but it has—the Folk Culture Center is a reality—And *what* a reality! Today we will recite to you a very brief history of it and mention some of the people who have made it possible. ***

Another fellow who made that trip to Washington is also the man who headed up the musical part of the first Arkansas Folk Festival. He is now the President of the Rackensack Folklore Society, which will provide the music here. Jimmy is a member of the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission, an internationally-known recording star, and a member of the board of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington —*Jimmy Driftwood*.

—from *Bessie Moore, A Biography* by George and Mildred Fersh, August House Publishers, Little Rock, Arkansas 1986.

1973. Jimmy’s role in establishing the Ozark Folk Center is put in perspective in book and local newspaper. While Bessie’s remarks [see above] were credible and diplomatic for the occasion, comments from others who were involved reveal the anxieties experienced during the ten-year period and the role she played. One thread that was part of what led to the Ozark Folk center is tied to a school

superintendent in Stone Country, Jim Morris, who is far better known in as the legendary folk singer, Jimmy Driftwood. This account in the publication, *The Mountain View Historical Logue*, April 1973, reports how the opening of the Center was “a dream come true for this country boy of Mountain View.”

The idea for the Folk Center actually began as a means to an end much more mundane than that of the preservation of Ozark Mountain heritage: the acquisition of water and sewers for the Town of Mountain View.

Over ten years ago, according to Driftwood, John Opitz, then Regional Director of the Area Redevelopment Administration [ARA], now the EDA, came to the Morris's home at Timbo and stated, “If you will help me, we can help Mountain View. We've been trying for a long time to get water and sewers for the town.” He then revealed his plan: to obtain a grant from ARA to build an auditorium for old-time music. “Then we'll bring water from White River to the Auditorium and the town can hook on to the water.”

“Just a room for us to play in doesn't seem right,” Driftwood objected. “There are a lot of crafts people around here too.” Opitz agreed, and so it was decided that facilities to house the craftsmen should also be included.

“But how long will all this take?” Jimmy Driftwood inquired, for he was at that time employed by Grand Old (sic) Opry. His “Battle of New Orleans” and “Tennessee Stud” had already become national hits.

“You'll just have to lay out of the Opry for about six months,” Opitz said. “Somebody's got to organize the local people.”

Indeed, “somebody” had to do that. Fiddles, banjos, guitars and mandolins had been “hung of the wall” both literally and figuratively; words to old songs were fading from memories. Some folks thought Jim Morris was a little out of his head to suggest that people would come out of their way to hear their old country music. Most were rusty. Many were nearly “rusted out.” But Jimmy “Driftwood” Morris is not a man to be easily dissuaded. Persist he did and with the support of a few like-minded citizens, the nucleus of an organization began to form. The first gathering was in the office of Dr. Lloyd Hollister, Monroe Clinic. There were six persons there. At the second meeting with fifteen present, the name “Rackensack Folklore Society” came into being. (‘Rackensack’ is an old Indian word for this part of the country and the Arkansas River.)

By the third meeting “word had got around” and the doctor's office could no longer accommodate all the performers and spectators. That is when the new organization, with “Doc” Hollister as president, approached the City Council and obtained permission to use the Court House for the weekly “musical.”

Thus the local residents organized for their common goal: the construction of a building to house their rustic commodity—folk traditions (and incidentally, water and sewers). April, dogwood blossom time, was set for the first Folk Festival. In the meantime Driftwood was making appearances on his own at universities and other folklore gatherings around the nation. At each, he would issue a blanket invitation to the audience to come to the Ozarks in April [“You can sleep in my barn,” he promised] and attend the Arkansas Folk Festival!

So in April 1963, what was to become the Folk Culture Center took its first public step. Since then, much has happened. Jimmy Driftwood and other Rackensackers have played before Congress in Washington, D.C. More problems and complications have arisen that anyone could possibly have foreseen. The effort died “flat dead” twice, Driftwood contends, but was revived largely through the efforts of Congressman Wilbur Mills. Driftwood wanted to call the final accomplishment the Folk Cultural Center of America, but he concedes that Ozark Folk Center is not a bad compromise. “That's like going out expecting to get a twenty-point buck and getting a fifteen,” he laughs.

—from *Bessie Moore, A Biography* by George and Mildred Fersh, August House Publishers, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1986.

1975. Jimmy featured at folk festival in Kansas. Jimmy Driftwood is internationally known as a folk singer and is considered to be one of the country's foremost authorities of American folklore. He has performed in Europe and throughout Southeast Asia, the Philippines and Borneo. His Asian travels were arranged and promoted by the U.S. Department of Information—a way to let people abroad meet an American who can so infectiously communicate the down-home friendliness of rural America.

A great many people know Jimmy Driftwood as a composer. His music has a versatile appeal that has made it acceptable to a wide cross-section of music fans. Driftwood songs have been recorded by such notables as Eddy Arnold, Johnny Horton, Peter, Paul and Mary, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Doc Watson and Grandpa Jones.”

—from “Jimmy Driftwood—Featured at Winfield” by Art Coats, *The Great Plains Gazette*, Lawrence, Kansas, week of Sept. 5, 1975.



Photo by Marv Cartwright
JIMMY DRIFTWOOD ON STAGE AT GRAND
OLE OPRY, MARCH 20, 1976



Photo from *Country Music Magazine*, July 1976
JIMMY DRIFTWOOD AT HIS HOME IN TIMBO,
ARKANSAS



Photo from *Life* magazine, June 20, 1972
JIMMY DRIFTWOOD & CHARLIE EVERIDGE
WHO TAUGHT HIM THE PICKIN' BOW

1978. Jimmy featured in *Bluegrass Unlimited* magazine. Back in 1963, [Jimmy] Driftwood launched plans to fulfill a dream to acquaint the outside world with the music and culture of the Ozarks. He helped organize the Arkansas Folk Festival and acquire federal funds for the Ozark Folk Center in the tiny town of Mountain View near the even tinier Timbo where he lives. Yet, differences of opinion between Driftwood and those with whom he worked cost him his job as music director at the Center. Still, he wouldn't give up.

"After I was fired, I thought for a while and decided that, just as I had been trying to get the rest of the world to come to Mountain View to learn about our culture, I'd start taking our culture to the rest of the world. That's when we decided to go on the road." The "we" Driftwood referred to is a group of authentic Ozark folk musicians known as the Rackensack Folklore Society. ***

Working with the Rackensack group through an agency like Ozark Attractions is probably a much different life than Driftwood would have been leading had he not left the Nashville music scene several years ago where he was a member of the Grand Ole Opry cast and an RCA recording artist.

Unlike other performers who left Nashville, Driftwood has no complaints about Music City. In spite of the fact that his simple style hit the airwaves when modern country was making rapid popularity gains, Driftwood made money for some of the Nashville executives. At one time, Driftwood even toured with Johnny Horton, whose cover of "Battle of New Orleans" outsold his.

Yet, Driftwood feels he's done more good by centering his career near his home than if he'd stayed in Nashville. He's dedicated to keeping his heritage alive, and that's why he works with the Rackensack performers.

"We wanted the Rackensack Folk Society not only to preserve our heritage but to keep it alive," Driftwood said while sitting in the den of his Arkansas ranch house. "There is a difference. You can preserve peaches in a jar and set 'em up, and they'll last forever. But, that's not like going out and planting a tree so you'll keep on having peaches."

As an indication that he practices his preaching, the Rackensack group Driftwood has assembled included an eight-year-old as well as some even older than the 70-year-old picker himself.

The group represents an almost total composite of Ozark culture. There are ballad singers, fiddlers, banjo frailers, buck-and-wing dancers and dulcimer players. True to mountain music tradition, the troupe contains several family acts.

"We set up the craft exhibits and demonstrations in the lobby of wherever we play," Driftwood said. "Spectators can watch the members of the group work during the day, and then we give a concert at night."

—from "Jimmy Driftwood and The Rackensack Players: Proof That Ozark Culture Still Lives"
by Larry Rhodes, *Bluegrass Unlimited* magazine, Broad Run, Virginia November, 1978.

1981. Jimmy recommended for Presidential Medal of Freedom. WHEREAS, Mr. Jimmy Driftwood, has worked to preserve a vital part of America's cultural heritage by his actions as a folk singer, composer, poet, and teacher; and WHEREAS, Mr. Jimmy Driftwood, has worked to improve the economic and educational resources in the Arkansas Ozark Region by his work as a teacher and member of the Arkansas Parks, Recreation, and Travel Commission; and WHEREAS, Mr. Jimmy Driftwood, has ably represented his State and Country as a member of the Arts Advisory Committee for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and as a musicologist with the National Geographic Society; and WHEREAS, Mr. Jimmy Driftwood, has contributed significantly to the quality of American life. NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS: I, Winston Bryant, Secretary of State of the Great State of Arkansas, do hereby recommend and endorse the same Mr. Jimmy Driftwood for the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

—from Letter from Winston Bryant, Secretary of State of Arkansas, Little Rock, (dated obscured on copy) 1981.

1981. Jimmy featured in *Atlanta Weekly* magazine. Jimmy Driftwood was a Grand Ole Opry star, but he quit to lead a fight to preserve a heritage. ***

...Jimmy Driftwood was singing. But Jimmy Driftwood was gone, snatched out of Mountain View in 1958 by RCA records and the Grand Ole Opry. The music he sang from coast to coast was dying back at its roots. Driftwood was the last to find out that his heritage was withering away; he was riding the highway to fame and good fortune, the only man from Mountain View who would have been recognized outside Stone County. ***

In 1963, Mountain View was struggling to pump some life into its economy and decided to hold a folk festival to show off its Stone County crafts. A committee promptly called Driftwood. "We'd like to have a little music," the spokesman said, "and we thought you might talk Chet Atkins or Eddy Arnold into comin' down and performin' for us."

"Folks can see Chet Atkins and Eddy Arnold everywhere they go," Driftwood replied. "You don't want them."

"Then who can we get to play?"

"Bookmiller Shannon and Seth Mize."

"What makes you think people are gonna drive a thousand miles to see Bookmiller and Seth?"

"Cause they can't see 'em anywhere else."

"They might not want to see 'em at all."

"Why not?"

"Neither one of 'em's played in years."

Jimmy Driftwood decided to come back to Mountain View and look around for the music that had once throbbled so loudly throughout the Ozarks. ***

On the Wednesday after the [first Arkansas Folk] festival ended, Lonnie Avey stopped Driftwood on a street corner and asked, "Are you comin' to the musical this Friday?"

"Where?"

"The courthouse."

"Why?"

"To practice." Lonnie Avey said and grinned. "We got it now, Jimmy. We ain't never gonna let it die." ***

Jimmy Driftwood had walked the high road, paved with big royalty checks, but he understood the need for dignity among his neighbors, and he and Cleda still lived in the small rock house they had built with their own hands. ... And Driftwood made sure his car was at least four years old so no one would ever have the audacity to think he was showing off.

"Being a Rackensacker," he said, "gave these old mountain folks a chance to be recognized and appreciated. They heard applause. It was for them. And they had never heard applause before." (This is a wonderful article. Only a small fraction has been included here. RKS)

—from "The Man Who Wouldn't Let the Music Die" by Caleb Pirtle III in *Atlanta Weekly*, Atlanta, Georgia, October 11, 1981.

1981. Jimmy recognized by UCA professor. Jimmy Driftwood's rendition of American history begins in the age of exploration and carries us along the course of our past with ballads that imitate Clio as beautifully as an Arkansas mocking bird delights us with the melodies of our songbirds. They are charming and captivating, but they are also informative. The lessons appear in verse form, but somehow one is loathe to call them poems; they are the songs of America. Some are unashamedly patriotic, others are touchingly sensitive to the great issues of the past and present. ***

While Jimmy Driftwood, the artist, occasionally overrules Jimmy Driftwood, the teacher, the general accuracy of the stories he tells will stand up quite well. What is more important is that these songs help the listener or reader feel the era he is celebrating. And, as any historian can tell you, that is a monumental achievement under any circumstances.

—from "The History Lesson" by Dr. Waddy W. Moore, Professor of History, University of Central Arkansas, in *Book 2: The Voice of the Hills*, Battle Music, Inc., Timbo, Arkansas, 1981.

1983. Jimmy honored as BMI "Million-Air." Among first of performing rights organization (PRO) BMI members to have recordings played on radio at least one million times. *RKS*

—from *BMI, The Many Worlds of Music*, Nashville, 1983.

1983. Jimmy visited at Ranch by former-president Jimmy Carter. One of the reasons I wanted to come here to these mountains—such a beautiful place to be—[was to] let him know, that as a country music fan, a Georgian and a neighbor and as a former president, how we appreciate how much you meant to our country.

And Jimmy, and the historians who've written about him, estimated he has written five thousand songs or so and still retains about thirty-five hundred of them. And they're written from the heart with extraordinary talent and I think they have a peculiar ability or characteristic of reaching to the heart of people who are listening to 'em. I know when I've heard his songs I've always felt he was a friend.

—from sound tract of *Arkansas Portraits: Jimmy Driftwood*, Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN), Little Rock, 1983.



Photo provided by the Rackensack Folklore Society

JIMMY DRIFTWOOD, GLEN BRANSCUM, WANDA WEST, ART WEST AND JIMMY CARTER
AT DRIFTWOOD RANCH IN 1983

1983. Jimmy has Arkansas Educational Television Network show devoted to him. AETN produced *Arkansas Portraits: Jimmy Driftwood* for airing throughout the state on public TV stations. Script not available for reprinting. *RKS*

—*Arkansas Portraits: Jimmy Driftwood*, Arkansas Educational Television Network (AETN), Little Rock, 1983.

1986. Jimmy featured in country music encyclopedia. Driftwood ceased recording [for RCA and Monument] in 1966 but still managed to devote much of his time to the cause of folk music, helping to run the Rackensack Folklore Society and assisting with some folk festivals. ***

As well as being heavily involved in American folklore since he was brought up amongst a wealth of old American traditions in the Ozark Mountains, Driftwood has gained a great deal of inspiration from the American Civil War.

—from “Jimmie Driftwood” in *The Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia of Country Music*, Harmony Books, New York, 1986.

1986. Jimmy receives “Distinguished Alumni Award” from University of Central Arkansas. Sheffield Nelson, a Little Rock lawyer and former president of Arkansas Louisiana Gas Company, and Jimmy Driftwood of Timbo (Stone County), a songwriter and folklorist, have been named to receive the first Distinguished Alumni Awards from the University of Central Arkansas at Conway.

—from “UCA to honor two alumni with awards,” *Arkansas Gazette*, Sept. 12, 1986.

1988. Jimmy honored at Ozark Folk Center. “The people of Stone County are lucky that Jimmy Driftwood wrote “The Battle of New Orleans” because it was Jimmy and that song that got the national attention needed to get the Folk Center built in Mountain View,” stated [former Arkansas Governor Orval E.] Faubus. Along with the...song and Driftwood, he said Stone County was so fortunate to have been located in Wilbur D. Mills’ Congressional District.

Dr. Bessie Moore who has worked for many years to get the money from State and Federal officials to open the Center and keep it open reminded those that were on hand that the first meeting to plan the Ozark Folk Center was held in Jimmy Driftwood’s home at Timbo, Arkansas, shortly after the first Arkansas Folk Festival in 1963. ***

[Congressman] Mills, [Jimmy] Driftwood and Dr. Bessie Moore were all given a rocking chair and were honored as the “Fathers and Mother” of the Ozark Folk Center. ***

[Mills] also reminded the people that he told them at the opening ceremony in 1973, that if they ever played Rock ‘N Roll music at the Folk Center, he would come back and take it away from them because it was built to preserve our heritage and folk music.

—from “Center Celebrates 15th Year,” *Stone County Leader*, Mountain View, Arkansas, May 4, 1988.



Photo by Lori Freeze provided by *The Stone County Leader*

CONGRESSMAN WILBUR MILLS, DR. BESSIE MOORE & DR. JIMMY DRIFTWOOD
HONORED AS “FATHERS AND MOTHER OF OZARK FOLK CENTER,” MAY 4, 1988

1988. Jimmy featured in UCA brochure.

“He teaches us our heritage in music and song. Those words sum up the remarkable career of the Ozark mountain musician who has been called this country’s finest folk balladeer. ***

At one time six of his songs were on the charts. He soon became a familiar figure on the concert circuit, at Newport festivals, Carnegie Hall, the Smithsonian Institution and as a member of the Grand Ole Opry.

Back home in Mountain View, Driftwood is credited with starting the hugely successful Arkansas Folk

Festival. . .an outgrowth of the informal “Friday night musicals” that Driftwood organized to showcase local talent.

This led to the formation of the Rackensack Folklore Society, a loose-knit group of 75 local farmers, business and professional people, housewives and timbercutters, who dedicated themselves to preserving the “folk music that had survived so long in our hills, and our dances and legends, not only for ourselves and our children, but also for our city cousins as well.”

It was only a matter of time before he had a vision of a place to play the music of our forefathers and preserve our folklore. His vision became a reality. What we now know as the Ozark Folk Center, a place where craftsmen and musicians work three seasons out of the year, was built. ***

We are all richer for his search—and for the way he shares his folk-riches with us. Many experts believe he knows more old ballads than anyone in America. He is in the process of taping every one of the more than 1,000 songs he has written and they will be housed at UCA [University of Central Arkansas] so future generations will have them to enjoy and study.

He has sung these songs in Carnegie Hall—and charmed sophisticated New Yorkers. He has sung them on Red Foley’s Ozark Jubilee, on the Louisiana Hayride, on the Grand Ole Opry, at the Berkeley Folk Festival (University of California), the Newport [Rhode Island] [Folk] Festival, Denver’s Lakeside Park, the New Orleans Auditorium, and in concert on the campus of his alma mater. ***

The joining of Jimmy Driftwood and the University of Central Arkansas (his alma mater) in the “barn project” and the Ozark Heritage Institute was a natural one. For Driftwood IS a teacher, as much at home in the class room as on the concert stage. He has been an 8th grade teacher, principal of a consolidated school, superintendent of an independent system, county supervisor, and remedial reading expert who set up reading clinics in four states. He even married a school teacher, a former pupil of his, Clede Johnson.

The Ozark Heritage Institute studies, promotes, and perpetuates the history and culture of the people of the Arkansas mountains. ***

Driftwood has reaped many special honors. He toured Europe in 1967 and Asia in 1968, giving performances for the State Department. President Nixon named Driftwood to the Advisory Committee on the Arts for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. He played at President Carter’s inauguration. He was chairman of the Arkansas Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission when the Buffalo River was signed over to the National Park Service to be preserved in its natural state forever. Driftwood did the signing for Arkansas.

—from “The Jimmy Driftwood Barn, Teaching our heritage in music and song,”
(a brochure) University of Central Arkansas, Conway, Arkansas 1988.

1990. Jimmy has chapter in book devoted to him. A prime mover in the establishment of the now famous Arkansas Ozark Folk Center and wheeler-dealer par excellence of causes and crusades too numerous to mention. Composer of more than 1,000 songs, including *The Battle of New Orleans* and *Tennessee Stud*. Grand Ole Opry star; world traveler; friend of presidents, congressmen, celebrities, chicken pluckers, hewers of wood and carriers of water. The only man now living who has mastered that ancient instrument, the leafola, and a man who still takes his baths in a metal tub in the middle of the living room floor and doesn’t care who knows it.

—from *A Pickin’ and A Grinnin’ on the Courthouse Square* by Samm Woolley
Coombs, Decisive Moments Press, Mountain View, Arkansas, 1990.

1991. Jimmy has book devoted to him. Author’s note: I have found that it is almost impossible to decide ahead of time what approach would work best when writing about an individual artist and his or her work. The personality and background of the artist, the work itself, plus the documented facts, combine uniquely and differently in every instance to shape the most appropriate presentation. Most often the strategy is quickly obvious but sometimes, as in the case of Jimmie Driftwood, an unexpected surprise changes everything.

I had already interviewed Driftwood’s publisher, Don Warden, experienced the charm of the music, and researched the fascinating story of Jimmie’s life which had been told over and over again in print. Therefore, it seemed to me that all the information necessary to write this piece had been collected. That was until my husband and I traveled to Mt. View and spent three days with Jimmie and Clede at their Ozark Mt. Home.

They are an extraordinary pair. They are wise in the simple, country way, but also in a more worldly, intellectual way. They are exceptionally loving, not only to each other, but also to their neighbors and the endless stream of admirers that come from all over the world to seek them out. Their home, a small stone

structure that they built themselves, is open to all visitors; after every show Jimmie invites everyone to come across the mountain to Timbo and knock on their door. Jimmie, an extremely alert and energetic 84-year-old man, is full of humor and pathos; Cleda, ten years younger, is his business manager, social secretary, caretaker, and handy reference encyclopedia. They are an endless source of historical, cultural, and spiritual information. They are incredibly beautiful people and it is clear to this writer that Jimmie's own words – from our interviews and also from his poems and songs – are the most appropriate way to have his story told.

—from introduction of book by Dale Vinicur included with Bear Family Records 3-cd box set of Jimmy's RCA Victor recordings, *Americana—Jimmie Driftwood*, Vollersode, Germany, 1991.

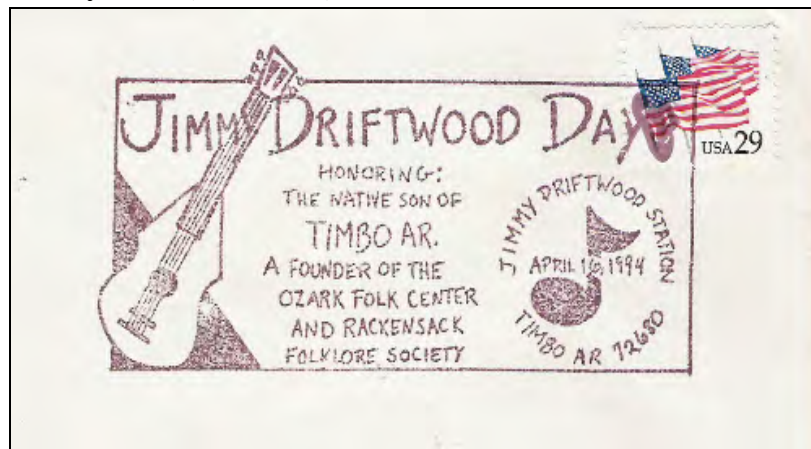
1992. Jimmy's *The Battle of New Orleans* said to be biggest in Ozarks. The first two big country hits to be recorded in the Ozarks—[Porter Wagoner's "Company's Comin'" and "A Satisfied Mind"—would be the last. An even bigger song would come out of the Ozarks of northern Arkansas in 1959, but how that was published by Don Warden and Porter and how it became a monster hit is another story.

—from *A Satisfied Mind* (p.108) by Steve Eng, Rutledge Hill Press, Nashville, 1992.

1994. Jimmy featured on Mike Seeger recording. Jimmie Driftwood comes from a musical family in the Arkansas Ozarks. For a while he was a teacher as well as a musician/singer and a songwriter. He has also been one of the prime movers in the revival of interest in the folk arts around Mountain View, Arkansas. We first met and made music together at a concert at Carnegie Hall in New York in 1959, and our paths have crossed at many other such events since.

—from *Third Annual Farewell Reunion* liner notes by Mike Seeger, Rounder Records, Cambridge, Mass. 1994.

1994. Jimmy honored by Timbo, Arkansas, Post Office.



Artwork by Stacy Brewer provided by the Rackensack Folklore Society
"JIMMY DRIFTWOOD STATION" POST MARK, APRIL 16, 1994

1995. Jimmy featured in *The Arkansas News*. Out east [actually north RKS] on Highway 9 Jimmy and Cleda Driftwood have built a permanent home, the "barn," for the Rackensack Society. Regular Friday and Sunday night concerts will soon feature Jimmy and Cleda as well as a host of fine traditional musicians, dancers, and story-tellers from the Rackensack Society.

In 1963 Jimmy Driftwood and a few other people who shared a love of the ballads and old-time string band music of the Ozark hills, formed the Rackensack Folklore Society.

Of course Jimmy was already famous at this time. "The Battle of New Orleans," which he wrote in 1937 while teaching a history lesson in Snowball, Arkansas, reached No. 1 on Billboard's country charts in 1959.

Later in the same year, five more of his songs hit the Top 50: "Tennessee Stud" (#5); "Sal's Got A Sugar Lip" (#9); "Soldier's Joy" (#11); "Sailor Man" (#21) and "Battle of Kookamonga" (#25).

Jimmy and Cleda toured the world promoting Ozark culture but they knew they had to come home to their roots, to help make sure the folks at home didn't forget the songs and ways of life of their forebears.

The Rackensack's informal Friday and Saturday night musicals were a success. They soon became so popular that meetings were moved outside to the courthouse square.

Jimmy found himself in other leadership roles as well: developing the annual folk festival which

brings up to 100,000 visitors to Mountain View each April, working with Congress to obtain funding for the Ozark Folk Center, and helping to preserve the Buffalo River as a national scenic river.

Jimmy's love for history, geography, Ozark culture, and traditional music is evident in any of his songs. For instance, the first verse of "The Battle of New Orleans" goes:

In eighteen and fourteen we took a little trip
Along with colonel Jackson down the mighty Mississipp.
We took a little bacon and we took a little beans
And we met the bloody British near the town of New Orleans.
We fired our guns and the British kept a comin'
But there wasn't nigh as many as there was a while ago,
We fired once more and they began to runnin'
On down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico.

—from Department of Arkansas Heritage, www.oldstatehouse.com as of 11/4/03

1995. Jimmy featured in Old State House Museum exhibit. A rich portrait of the community that is Arkansas, manifested in song, *Our Own Sweet Sounds* celebrates the diversity of musical forms and music makers that have graced the state since territorial times. ***

Our Own Sweet Sounds becomes a loving tribute not just to the luminaries of folk, country, western, blues, jazz, gospel, and rock, but also to the common music that has filled local airwaves, lifted community gatherings to the level of joyous festivities, and enlivened the spirit of music lovers everywhere. (See book notes below. RKS)

—from *Our Own Sweet Sounds* [the book] by [guest curator of the exhibit] Robert Cochran, Director of the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies at University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 1996.

1996. Jimmy featured in book on Arkansas music. *Our Own Sweet Sounds: A Celebration of Popular Music in Arkansas* is the culmination of a 1995 Old State House Museum exhibition of photographs, artifacts, music, and video. It is a comprehensive history of our state's vernacular music since 1820. ***

James Corbett Morris was born in 1907 near Mountain View. After graduating from Marshall High School and Arkansas State Teachers' College in Conway, he taught in Arkansas and Louisiana schools. His most famous song, "The Battle of New Orleans," written as a teaching aid for history classes, became a number-one hit for country singer Johnny Horton in 1959, though in 1958 Driftwood had recorded his own much longer version on his first album. The Horton version sold over five million copies and was voted best song of the year. Another Driftwood composition, "The Tennessee Stud," was a hit for Eddy Arnold in 1959, and Driftwood himself was soon appearing regularly on the *Grand Old (sic) Opry*.

In 1962, back home in Arkansas, he founded the Rackensack Folklore Society to encourage the musical traditions of the Ozarks and soon thereafter devoted himself to the establishment of the Ozark Folk Center in Mountain View, serving for a time as music coordinator after the facility opened in 1973. Driftwood also made several international tours for the U.S. Department of State and served on the Arkansas State Parks Commission. He produced an album of Ozark folk music for the National Geographic Society in 1972, and was also active in the campaign to establish a national park along the Buffalo River. Now eighty-eight, Driftwood has in recent years continued to perform with his wife, Cleda, at the Jimmy Driftwood Barn in Mountain View. ***

Jimmy Driftwood's songs would be huge hits for mainstream country singers, but Driftwood himself would always be devoted to the traditional ballads of the Ozarks.

—from pp. ix, 72, 57, *Our Own Sweet Sounds, a Celebration of Popular Music in Arkansas* by Robert Cochran, Director of the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies at University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 1996.

1996. Jimmy featured in Ozarks book. Jimmy Driftwood, born James Morris in 1907, has two passions in life: music and teaching. He learned the music from his father and his grandfather, a Civil War veteran. He began teaching without formal education beyond high school. ***

After college, Jimmy's life as a country school teacher progressed as routinely as could be expected, with a few exceptions. He met the woman he eventually married, Cleda Azelia Johnson, when she was his sixth-grade student. When she turned nineteen and he twenty-nine, they married. Cleda shared his love for teaching and music. Jimmy first combined folk music and teaching to interest his students in his favorite subject: history. ... In 1958, he was fifty-one years old and superintendent of schools at Snowball, Arkansas, when an oral historian who collected folk music invited him to Nashville to audition some of his songs. A few months later, his "Battle of New Orleans" was a national bestseller. Jimmy retired from teaching and went on tour to sing his mountain music to audiences in the United States, Europe, and Asia.

He was the first folk singer to perform in Carnegie Hall.

Jimmy's singing career stopped in 1962 as abruptly as it began. He came to realize that despite the popularity of his songs—six songs he had written were once in the top 40 at the same time—the music so dear to his heart was dying out at its roots. He returned home determined to rejuvenate the fading tradition.

His chance came when the Ozark Foothills Handicraft Guild planned a festival and asked him to invite some of his famous friends from the Nashville music scene. Jimmy refused. He wanted to use local talent. Jimmy recalls the confrontation. "A lot of folks said, 'Hell, why would anybody come to Mountain View to hear our boys playing?' 'Because they can't hear them anywhere else!' I said." The guild finally agreed, but disappointed merchants placed bets that it would be a stretch if fifty people showed up.

Jimmy put out the word for anybody who could play to meet at the town square in Mountain View on Friday nights to get ready for the festival. The first meeting attracted six players, the next fifteen, but Jimmy had faith in his neighbors and his music. Banjos, fiddles, mandolins, and guitars that had not been tuned in years soon echoed across the town square late into the night. ***

"I'll never forget that first festival," Jimmy says. "I got an old man from back here towards Leslie that played a bagpipe to come. That night we had three shows in the school gymnasium. When it came time for him to play, he just got up and started playing as he marched to the stage, and some people got scared! Most people had never heard a bagpipe. I tell you that thing sounded like a thousand jackasses."

Within a decade, the festival grew to one hundred thousand people. Yet, Mountain View was still too impoverished to afford a water and sewage system. So, Jimmy asked Arkansas Congressman Wilbur Mills for help, and in a typically Ozarkian way, Jimmy and his friends went to Washington and played on the Capitol steps and for the Senate. They wanted federal funds to build a folk center to preserve the disappearing cultural heritage of the Ozarks. The town fathers instructed Jimmy to ask for no more than \$45,000, lest he ruin their chances of getting anything. But Jimmy had a grander vision. He met with the House Ways and Means Committee and asked for \$15 million.

With the help of Congressman Mills, who scratched all the political backs in Washington, Mountain View got its folk center. Of course, building a folk center that met federal standards required a municipal water and sewage system. The Economic Development Administration coughed up \$2.1 million, and the Arkansas state government supplied another \$1.9 million. Thanks to Jimmy Driftwood, Mountain View could finally flush its toilets.

In 1973, just ten years after Jimmy Driftwood told his friends to "go rouse the talent out of the hills," the Ozark Folk Center opened. Now, more than two decades later, the Folk Center sponsors daily programs of folk music and demonstrations of artisans making crafts in the style and with the tools of the 1920s. With the help of the Center, local artists are thriving and producing exquisite traditional crafts once threatened with extinction. Mountain View has a fine-art gallery, and roadside shops sell artisan-made products, not just tourist novelties. ... Before the Folk Center opened, Stone County was the second poorest county in Arkansas, with 54 percent of the population on welfare. Now, less than 5 percent need public assistance.

On Friday and Saturday nights, musicians, many in dusty overalls, still gather on the Mountain View town square and at Jimmy Driftwood's Barn, a theater on the edge of town. Music lovers come from hundreds of miles to pick and grin and enjoy the magic of authentic, porch-style mountain music. The celebration of folk music and traditional crafts is in Mountain View to stay.

—from *The Ozarks: The People, The Mountains, The Magic* by George Oxford Miller, Voyageur Press, Stillwater, Minnesota, 1996.

1996. Jimmy featured on Sherwin Linton recording. Love manifests itself. When it is given, it comes back. Jimmy Driftwood is a man who has given love unselfishly to so many. When I heard his first RCA recordings in the late 50's I knew I had to get to know this man. ***

One time when my band and I were playing a county fair nearby we drove our bus into his yard and he and Cleda made us a big breakfast and he treated us to some of his fascinating stories.***

My wife Pam encouraged me to do a tribute album to this man who has written over 6,000 songs, had international success, lived for most of the 20th century, and helped generate a great audience for the musical culture of the Arkansas Ozarks. To me he is the greatest of all American Folk Singers. His songs,

which touch all of our emotions, have taught us so much and will last forever.

—from “Driftwood on the River” album liner notes by Sherwin Linton, Black Gold Records, Minneapolis, 1996.

1996. Jimmy featured in *Country Weekly* magazine. The venerable singer-songwriter-folklorist, who has written more than 5,000 tunes, can’t stop singing and playing his music. Despite the infirmities of age and injuries from a bad car wreck five years ago, Jimmy still hosts free shows Friday and Sunday nights at his Music Barn & Folk Hall of Fame, two miles north of his birthplace.***

Jimmy inherited his gentle sense of humor and his love of music from his grandfather, a singing peddler who traveled the Ozarks selling his wares from a horse-drawn wagon.

“He could sing like a lark,” Jimmy said. “I’d go with him sometimes and sit up on a spring seat on the wagon. I remember going to Oklahoma with him when I was about 6.” ***

Although his grandpa was a traveling man, Jimmy has never strayed too far from his roots. He’s done his share of touring: Red Foley’s Ozark Jubilee in Springfield, Mo.; the Louisiana Hayride in Shreveport, La.; other festivals, colleges, even Carnegie Hall; and as a regular on the Grand Ole Opry from 1959-63. But Jimmy keeps returning to his beloved hill country home in Timbo, Ark. ***

Because so many of his songs deal with the history and geography of his mountain country surroundings, Jimmy has been invited to appear at prestigious events, including the Newport Folk Festival and President Jimmy Carter’s inauguration. The State Department sent him on a tour of Europe in 1967 and Asia in 1968. ***

[Jimmy and Cleda have] had to slow their pace considerably in the past five years because of injuries suffered in an auto accident in Iowa—ironic-ally, as they were returning from a checkup at the famed Mayo clinic in Minnesota. ***

She and Jimmy have already made plans for their final journey. They want their ashes to be scattered over the hills they love so much. Jimmy has already written a song, “Scatter My Ashes,” for the occasion:

The elms and oaks have been my dear companions
 The maples know I’ve always been a friend
 And when my dust has settled down around them
 They’ll open their doors and take me in.
 So scatter my ashes o’er the mountains
 Let me sift down among the leaves
 Soon I’ll be blooming on the hillside
 Speaking the language of the trees.

—from “Balladeer still going strong after 89 years and 5,000 songs” by Jack W. Hill in *Country Weekly* magazine, Lantana, Florida, August 20, 1996.

1997. Jimmy featured in *Sing Out!* magazine. Jimmy Driftwood – “The Balladeer of the Ozarks,” folklorist, historian, teacher, performer, songwriter and three-time Grammy winner [actually one Grammy and two more nominations *RKS*]: You’d be hard-pressed to find a country music aficionado who’s never heard his “Battle Of New Orleans” or “Tennessee Stud.” At 89, Jimmy is still singing at the Jimmy Driftwood Barn every Sunday night, carrying on his proud Ozark tradition. ***

Jimmy realized that, while he was traveling around the world to spread Ozark music, it was almost dying out back home. So he began, with [wife] Cleda, a campaign to revitalize the old music. They “beat the bushes” for all the old musicians they could find, and formed a club for the preservation of Ozark heritage called “The Rackensack Society.” ***

In 1963, town merchants asked Jimmy to help run a local craft show, and Jimmy came up with the idea of expanding the craft fair into a folk festival. He called on local performers for the entertainment, and was soon promoting the show at his college lectures, inviting everyone to come to Mountain View. That spring, more than 20,000 people took him up on the offer and came to the first Arkansas Folk Festival.

With the success of the folk festival, Jimmy’s dream of getting a proper building for his Ozark folk music and culture came into focus. Jimmy became so involved with the creation of an Ozark Heritage Center that he realized he would have to stop touring to get the job done right. He retired from touring with the *Grand Ole Opry*, and then rolled up his sleeves and went to work. ***

In 1979, not far from the Heritage Center, Jimmy and Cleda built a cozier venue to showcase the

Rackensack Society. Here in “The Jimmy Driftwood Barn,” Jimmy and his friends welcome everyone to free concerts of down-home music.

—from “Swapping “Songs & Tales” by Rik Palieri, *Sing Out! The Folk Song Magazine*, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, February/March/April 1997.

1997. Jimmy featured in Alan Lomax work. In the fall of 1959 Alan Lomax’s Southern journey took him to Arkansas, where, following leads given to him by folklorist John Quincy Wolf and popular folk singer Jimmy Driftwood, he recorded six outstanding Ozarks folk artists. Working within a 50-mile radius of Mountain View with a network of previously unrecorded singers, as well as commercially recorded old-timey performers known to Driftwood and his father, Neil Morris, Lomax completed his survey within a few days.

At the time of their original release on Prestige these Ozarks recordings constituted the earliest musical impressions of the region on long-playing records. As noted by Lomax himself, they cover a limited piece of country, and a small, albeit important, circle of performers. Even so, according to Ozarks folk music authority W.K. McNeil, the unaccompanied ballad singers and solo instrumentalists, and the repertoire that Lomax recorded between October 2 and October 9, 1959 were, and still are, quite representative of the Anglo-American tradition of the entire region. Jimmy Driftwood figures in this collection not as a musician but as an organizer. Alan Lomax admired him as a regional performing star who was able to project the folk idiom into the center of commercial popular culture, in Lomax’s view a role of key importance to the folk song revival then peaking. Driftwood actively circulated among the cluster of singers and musicians that lived in and around Mountain View. The Mountain View/Timbo area has been as musically significant in its way, as was Driftwood as a regional folk music star, for it has long attracted and nurtured fine fiddlers, banjo-pickers, singers and musical innovators.

—from book by Anna L. Chairetakis included with Rounder Records *Volume 7, Ballads and old-timey music from Arkansas*, “The Alan Lomax Collection, Southern Journey: Ozark Frontier,” Cambridge, Mass., 1997.

1997. Jimmy commended in Alan Lomax work. Neil Morris, Jimmy Driftwood’s father, was a great story teller and traditional ballad singer. His performances show where Jimmy got at least part of his style. Even after Jimmy became nationally famous, folks from his own neighborhood still maintained that “Neil can out-sing that boy any time.” It was Driftwood’s generous and affectionate attitude about his father’s abilities and reputation that made it a pleasure to record this true gentleman of the Ozarks for the world to know.

—original notes by Alan Lomax from book included with Rounder Records *Volume 7, Ballads and old-timey music from Arkansas*, “The Alan Lomax Collection, Southern Journey: Ozark Frontier,” Cambridge, Mass., 1997.

2001. Jimmy featured in AAA *Traveler* magazine. In 1973, when construction of the [Ozark Folk] center was almost complete, the private resort management firm pulled out of the project—which turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Native son Jimmy Driftwood, a musician and songwriter, approached the Arkansas Parks Recreation and Travel Commission about operating the center as a state park.

—from “A town in Arkansas, Music is the tie that binds Mountain View folks together” by Barbara Gibbs Ostmann, *AAA Traveler Magazine*, St. Louis, Missouri, January/February 2001.

2002. Jimmy has entry in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Driftwood, Jimmy (1907-98). U.S. singer, songwriter, and folklorist. Although he made a name for himself in show business with the song “Battle of New Orleans”, Jimmy Driftwood spent most of his life in rural Arkansas working to preserve the music and heritage of the Ozark region.

—*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Chicago, 2002.

2002. Jimmy featured in Dr. Blevins’ *Hill Folk*. On a folk song-gathering trip to the 1941 folk festival in Stone County, Southwestern (now Rhodes) College English professor John Quincy Wolf Jr. “discovered” [Jimmy] Driftwood. In succeeding years Jimmy Driftwood became something of a “professional hillbilly” and an unofficial Ozark spokesman. Wolf directed folklorists to Timbo, where they would meet Driftwood and through him locate sources of folk songs. But underneath the façade of the country teacher-farmer-troubadour with the squatting black hat, and in later years the black-rimmed glasses, was a shrewd, college-educated man whose world was not circumscribed by the Boston Mountains. Driftwood’s experiences with folklorists and other visitors to the region taught him their images of the Ozarks and revealed to him the hills’ most sought-after commodity, its dying folk culture.

Consequently, by the late 1950s Driftwood was a conscious Ozarker. Unlike most of his neighbors, he had viewed himself and his people through the eyes of his visitors and by so doing had developed an even greater appreciation for the Ozarks' heritage and folk culture. His efforts to revive folk music through the Arkansas Folk Festival and Ozark Folk Center grew from a conscious understanding of Ozark folk tradition and both an academic and nostalgic desire to preserve a piece of his own heritage. ***

From the moment Driftwood entered the picture, the project took an unexpected and monumental turn that would alter the destiny of Mountain View and Stone County. Although it is likely that music would have been considered part of the Arkansas Folk Festival even without Driftwood's input, it is almost certain that the outcome would have been different. ***

Driftwood was not wholly without a foundation on which to build. For more than a decade John Quincy Wolf Jr. had been scouring the eastern Ozarks for folk singers and their songs. ... Among his most notable "discoveries" were Aunt Ollie Gilbert, a Stone County grandmother whose phenomenal repertoire of British ballads was eventually displayed at the Smithsonian Folk Festival in Washington, D.C., and other festivals around the country, and Almeda Riddle of Cleburne County, whose endearing stage presence and artistic capabilities made her the region's most prominent folk singer and, next to Driftwood, the chief celebrity of the Ozark folk revival. ... By the early 1960s both women had gained national publicity; Gilbert would become a founding member of the Rackensack Folklore Society.

Nevertheless, the Arkansas Ozarks continued to lack a concerted focus around preserving and passing on its musical heritage.

In early 1963 Driftwood, who had maintained his Stone County residence even during the heyday of his national fame, contacted a few old musicians whose instruments had rarely been played in the postwar years. ... As was Driftwood's style, he quickly assumed leadership of the [Rackensack Folklore] society and began planning a spring musical. ... Through word of mouth and promotion by Driftwood and the craft guild, the Arkansas Folk Festival expanded into the state's biggest annual tourist event. By the late 1960s, every inch of Mountain View was devoted to the April festival... By the early 1970s, crowds regularly exceeded 100,000 people. ***

The Arkansas Folk Festival, still conducted each April in conjunction with the Ozark Folk Center, was perhaps the purest and most earnest example, at least in its early years, of Ozark heritage tourism. The driving force was economic revitalization for a poor town and county, and most of the original craftspeople and musicians were native Ozarkers if not residents of Stone County. ***

[John] Optiz's offer came as a welcome project, one whose direction [Jimmy] Driftwood happily assumed and often selfishly maintained. In the dozen years after 1963, Driftwood would adopt the center as his personal project. Already recognized around the nation as a leading practitioner of traditional mountain music and a self-taught expert on Ozark culture, he served as a go-between, though certainly not a universally popular or uncontroversial one, in the drawn-out negotiations between Washington and bureaucrats and local officials. ***

The original folk center concept called for a center for both preservation and training. The center's leaders soon discovered, as had Driftwood five years earlier, that the traditional crafts and music to be preserved had not been bequeathed to recent generations of Stone Countians. Ozarkers would have to be taught the folk skills and activities that visitors to the Arkansas Folk Festival assumed they already possessed. ***

...The Department of Parks and Tourism originally relied on Driftwood's Rackensack Folklore Society to provide musicians. By doing so the Department of Parks and Tourism... placed the Ozark Folk Center in the middle of a fierce local political and personal conflict.

Driftwood and a core group of his original Rackensackers had long demanded that the society's song selection and musical presentations be free of any modernizing influence. Much of Driftwood's obstinacy in this regard can be attributed to his friendship and professional relationship with John Quincy Wolf Jr., a self-taught, accomplished academic folklorist who in June 1969 conducted Arkansas College's first summer Ozark Folklore Workshop. The Arkansas Folk Festival in 1963 had made only one concession to modernity; a sound system and microphones were utilized because of the unexpectedly large crowd. Driftwood and Wolf relied on musicologists' definition of southern mountain folk music as premodern country music, which prevented the group from performing any song composed later than 1940 and from using electric or electrically amplified instruments.

—from *Hill Folks, A History of Arkansas Ozarkers and Their Image* by Brooks Blevins, Director of Regional Studies, Lyon College, Batesville, Ark., University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2002.

2003. Jimmy featured in *Columns, Newsletter of the Old State House Museum*. Visitors to the exhibit will see custom-designed stage suits, musical instruments, photographs, award albums, sheet music, signed posters and more. The Old State House Museum exhibit, *Send You Back to Arkansas: Our Own Sweet Sounds II*, will be on view March 28, 2003, through October 10, 2004. The exhibit is the second time the museum has featured the accomplishments of Arkansas musicians. The first such exhibit, *Our Own Sweet Sounds*, opened in September 1995. In the years since, the museum has devoted itself to the serious collecting of Arkansas's music heritage — the fruits of the museum's labor are on exhibit in *Send You Back to Arkansas: Our Own Sweet Sounds II*. ***

The exhibit offers a sweeping range of aural and visual riches, music of the famous and the obscure. *Send You Back to Arkansas* will feature memorabilia from Arkansas music artists including gospel 'soulful Sister Rosetta' guitar, Jazz King Louis Jordan's saxophone, hard rocking Black Oak Arkansas' instruments, country legend Johnny Cash's guitar, folk legend Jimmy Driftwood's fiddle, and blues master Albert King's flying V guitar and Howlin' Wolf's microphone.

—from www.oldstatehouse.com as of 11/4/03.

2003. Jimmy is credited in letter from Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism. When [Jimmy] finally came back [to the Folk Center] after repeated invitations from us, we named the auditorium after him, and, at least in his final years, I had the feeling we'd all buried the hatchet. . . . I don't know of anyone...that doubts Jimmy's influence on the music up there, or on the establishment of the Folk Center.

—from a letter to RKS from Richard W. Davies, Executive Director, Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism, Little Rock, July 24, 2003.



Photo by The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project

EXHIBIT AT OLD STATE HOUSE MUSEUM, LITTLE ROCK, 2003-04

2003. Jimmy featured in Old State House Museum exhibit. *Send You Back to Arkansas: Our Own Sweet Sounds II* — complete with a life-size standup of Jimmy Driftwood, an original painting, musical instruments, photographs and tribute to Jimmy and the Rackensack Folklore Society and the contributions Stone Co. has made to Arkansas cultural heritage — was staged as a major exhibit at the Old State House Museum in Little Rock through 2004. (Visit www.oldstatehouse.com on the Internet.) RKS

Jimmy Driftwood. "Jimmy Driftwood" was born James Corbett Morris in 1907 at Timbo, Arkansas. His most famous song, "The Battle of New Orleans," was written while Driftwood was a teaching aid for a history class. The song became a Number One hit for country singer Johnny Horton in 1959. In 1962, Driftwood founded the Rackensack Folklore Society, dedicated to the preservation of old-time music. He

later devoted himself to the establishment of the Ozark Folk Center at Mountain View. Driftwood died in 1998 at the age of 91.

—from www.oldstatehouse.com, as of 11/4/04

**2003. Jimmy has entry in Wikipedia, *The Free Encyclopedia*. Jimmy Driftwood (1907-1998) was a prolific United States folk-songwriter and musician, most famous for his song *The Battle of New Orleans*.

Driftwood left Arkansas for Nashville and became popular through his appearances at major country music venues such as the Grand Ole Opry, the Ozark Jubilee, the Louisiana Hayride. He was invited to sing for Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev as an example of traditional American music during that leader's visit to the United States.

The popular peak of Driftwood's career came in 1959 when he had no less than six songs somewhere on the pop or country charts for 6 weeks, in 1959. The song won the 1960 (actually 1959 RKS) Grammy Award for Song of the Year. *The Battle of New Orleans* has since become an American classic country/folk song. ...Driftwood became very popular and performed at Carnegie Hall and at major American folk festivals before returning home to Timbo, Arkansas in 1962. ...Driftwood also won Grammy Awards (actually Grammy nominations RKS) for *Wilderness Road*, *Songs of Billy Yank and Johnny Reb* and *Tennessee Stud*. Driftwood songs were recorded by Eddy Arnold, Johnny Cash, Hawkshaw Hawkins, Homer and Jethro and others.

Back home, Driftwood formed the *Rackensack Folklore Society*, an association of local folk singers and musicians, and began performing...in Mountain View. Driftwood became interested in promoting Arkansas folk music and the local folk performers he knew in the area. Driftwood invited members of the Mountain View community to perform at...the annual Arkansas Folk Festival which would attract over 100,000 people. Driftwood was also a guiding light in establishing the Ozark Folk Center to preserve Ozark Mountain culture. The Folk Center was later absorbed into the Arkansas State Park system and remains a popular tourist destination.

Driftwood also became involved in environmental issues when the United States Army Corps of Engineers planned to dam the Buffalo River. Driftwood worked to defeat the plan which ultimately led to the establishment of the Buffalo National River. Driftwood played a major role in preserving Blanchard Springs Caverns...under management of the United States Forest Service.

Driftwood was appointed to head the Arkansas Parks and Tourism Commission for his environmental efforts. He was also named to the Advisory Committee of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in New York City. Due to his extensive knowledge of folk music he was appointed as a musicologist for the National Geographic Society.

...Driftwood wrote over 6,000 folk songs, of which over 300 were recorded by various musicians. ...Driftwood enjoyed performing free concerts for high school and college students. Jimmy Driftwood died of a heart attack on 12 July 1998 in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

—from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmie_Driftwood as of 11/17/03.

2005. Jimmy's life and career sketched in booklet of 1963 Arkansas Folk Festival recordings. Driftwood's story is an oft-told one and quite familiar to fans of Ozark music. A middle-aged teacher and rural school administrator who raised cattle on his little farm in Timbo, a small town about 10 miles west of Mountain View, Driftwood followed the advice of John Quincy Wolf, Jr., and made his way to Nashville in the summer of 1957. Jimmy didn't knock 'em dead in the country music capital, but his songwriting and his musician partner, Chet Atkins. The result was his first album, *Newly Discovered Early American Folk Songs*, released in the spring of 1958. But it was only the following year, when country singer Johnny Horton recorded a gussied up version of Driftwood's "The Battle of New Orleans," that Jimmy became a celebrity. The song became a Grammy-winning runaway hit on both the country and pop charts, and catapulted the song's writer into the country music world's limelight. The success of "The Battle of New Orleans" led other country singer to record Driftwood's songs but it was in the world of folk music that Jimmy Driftwood would make his most lasting mark. Driftwood never passed up a chance to display his talents as a guitar picker, which he does here on his signature, oddly shaped guitar. Years before "The Battle of New Orleans" brought him a measure of fame, Driftwood began relating the story of this guitar, which, he claimed, his grandfather had made for him out of an ox yoke, a fence post, and an old bedstead.

—From notes by Dr. Brooks Blevins in booklet accompanying "Sounds of the Ozark Folk—The 1963 Arkansas Folk Festival," a 2-CD release by Lyon College, Batesville, Arkansas, 2005.

Who Was Jimmy Driftwood?

We found two versions of this piece, one obviously an earlier draft, another a more or less final version in his own hand. Undated but obviously late in his life.

Ah, He was a bird came off the nest in June
When the whole world was in tune.

Conceived in Heaven as Satan frowned. Born in Earth's Paradise.
The color of snow was in his baby hair with twinkling stars in his bright blue eyes.

The Goddess of All Music tuned his heartstrings at the start.

The song of every bird was recorded in his heart.

Every breeze that whispered or rustled in the pine
Was poetry and music in his soul and to his mind.

Five thousand songs came from his pencil or his pen,
He never stopped to ponder about things that might have been.

The Dreams he had that others thought could never be,
He took those dreams and molded them into reality.

He took the rugged streams of life and gave them pleasant bends.
Lord, how he worked to make this life more joyful for his friends.



JIMMY DRIFTWOOD IN OZARK MOUNTAINS DURING PHOTO SHOOT FOR "JIMMIE DRIFTWOOD AND THE WILDERNESS ROAD" ALBUM, C. 1962

THE JIMMY DRIFTWOOD STORY, PART 3

(Editor's Note: Chapter numbers are continued from Part 1 that ended on page 56.)

Chapter Six: Awards, Appointments, Memberships, Concerts, Etc.

Awards are something given to us because we have done something of use and value to our community, at least in the eyes of the award givers. However, when asked to serve our community, state or nation by an official that is somewhat different. Jimmy Driftwood was given many awards for his musical accomplishments and what he did for his fellow man. He served his community, state and nation on boards and committees, and as Ambassador of Goodwill to foreign countries, as well. We have not found all the information we wanted about his many awards and appointments, but the following will give you an idea of how capable and popular this legendary Ozark mountain man was.

Awards

Arkansas Entertainers Hall of Fame, Pine Bluff. Inductee with exhibit.

Country Legends Hall of Fame, Fort Worth, Texas. Inductee.

Kentucky. Made "Honorary Kentucky Colonel."

Louisiana. Made "Honorary Louisiana Colonel," 1980.

Medal of Freedom. Nominated for by U.S. Senator John McClellan

The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. Awarded "Song of the Year" GRAMMY® for *The Battle of New Orleans*, 1959.

Nominated for "Best Folk Performance" GRAMMY® for RCA Victor album *The Wilderness Road*, 1959.

Nominated for "Best Folk Performance" GRAMMY® for RCA album *Songs of Billy Yank and Johnny Reb*, 1960.

Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. Given honorary Doctor of Folklore Degree, August 14, 1959.

Tennessee. Made "Honorary Tennessee Colonel."

University of Central Arkansas, Conway, Arkansas. Received earned Bachelor of Science in Education Degree, May 29, 1949.

Received "Distinguished Alumnus" award, May 1986.

Appointments

Arkansas. Goodwill Ambassador to Europe and Asia. Appointed by five successive governors, 1967-1981.

Arkansas. Voting Delegate, Multi-state Transportation Corridor Advisory Board.

Arkansas. State Representative to Europe to promote Southern tourism.

Arkansas. State Representative to the Great River Road Conferences.

Arkansas. State Representative to HemisFair (World's Fair), San Antonio.

Arkansas Arts Council, Little Rock. Member.

Arkansas College, (now Lyon College), Batesville. Teacher of American Folklore.

Arkansas Motion Pictures and Entertainment Commission, Little Rock. Advisory Board Member.

Arkansas Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission, Little Rock. Member and Chairman.

Association for Educational Communications and Technology, Bloomington, Indiana. Mid-America Representative to Nassau [Bahamas] Conference.

East Texas State University (now UT at Tyler), Tyler, Texas. Faculty.

John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, New York. Board of Advisors Member. Appointed by President Richard Nixon.

National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C. National Advisory Board, Artist in Education Division Member.

National Folklife Festival, Washington, D.C. Program Director.

National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C. Musicologist, writer and recording producer.
National Park Service, Washington, D.C. Member, Bicentennial Committee.
Ozark Folk Cultural Center State Park, Mountain View, Arkansas. Musical Director.
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Associate of the Smithsonian.
University of Texas, Austin, Texas. Advisor to Dr. O.T. Baker, Founder of the Institute of Texan Cultures.
U. S. Information Service, Washington, D.C. Two Asian tours, including Vietnam and the Philippines..

Concerts & Workshops – Radio, TV, Recordings – Venues

Colleges and Universities. Over 200 concerts and folklife workshops during six year span in 1960s.
Radio and TV Appearances. National Public Radio (U.S.), French National Television. The Voice of America (Europe). Educational TV (U.S.). Radio Luxemburg. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, London).
Arkansas Folk Festival, Mountain View, Arkansas. Musical leader.
Battle Music, Inc., Timbo, Arkansas. President.
Berkeley Folk Festival, Berkeley, California. Performing artist.
Carnegie Hall, New York City. First “folk artist” to perform at renowned performance hall, April 3, 1959.
Jimmy Driftwood Barn, Mountain View, Arkansas. Owner/operator.
Jimmy Driftwood Ranch, Timbo, Arkansas. Owner/operator.
Grand Ole Opry, Nashville, Tennessee. Regular guest, 1959-62. Performing member, 1962-63.
Kentucky Lake Folk Festival, sponsored by Gov. Ford. Advisor and performing artist, 1973, 1974.
Kerrville Folk Festival, Kerrville, Texas. Performing artist.
March of Dimes. Chose *How Much Do You Love Me* fund-raiser theme, 1953.
Monument Records, Hendersonville, Tenn. Recording artist.
Mountain View Herald, Mountain View, Arkansas. Columnist.
National Folklife Festival, Washington, D.C. Performing artist.
Newport Folk Festival, Newport, R.I. Performing artist, July 1959, 1964.
Old Town School of Folk Music, Chicago, Illinois. Teacher and performer.
Ozark Folk Festival, Eureka Springs, Arkansas. Director.
The Ozarks Mountaineer, Kirbyville, Missouri. Folklore writer.
Rackensack Records, Timbo, Arkansas. Owner and recording artist.
Radio Corporation of America (RCA), New York. Recording artist.
Texas Folk Festival, San Antonio, Texas. One of four National Advisors.
USS Arkansas Commissioning. Assisted with commissioning program.

Memberships and Organizations

American Folklore Society. Member.
Arkansas Audubon Society. Member.
Arkansas Authors and Composers Society. Member.
Arkansas Folklore Society. Member and Director.
Arkansas Historical Society. Member.
Arkansas Writers Conference, Inc. Member.
Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI). Works registered for performance rights.
Country Music Association (CMA), Nashville, Tennessee. Member.
Folk Hall of Fame, Mountain View, Arkansas. Founder.
Kappa Delta Pi Fraternity. Member.
National Audubon Society. Member.
National Folklore Society. Member.
Ozark Society, Inc. Member.
Ozark Writers and Artists Guild. Member.
Rackensack Folklore Society. Founder and office holder, including President.
Sierra Club. Member.

Chapter Seven: Related Chronology

Following is just a small portion of the people and events that touched the life and times of Jimmy Driftwood.

- 1815, January 8.** “The Battle of New Orleans” is fought in Louisiana.
- 1877.** Thomas A. Edison successfully tests first phonograph.
- 1907, June 20.** Jimmy Driftwood is born in Stone Co., Arkansas.
- 1923.** First-ever country music recording is released by Okeh Co., NY.
- 1924.** Country music’s first million-selling phonograph record: Vernon Dalhart’s Victor recording, *The Wreck of the Old 97* and *The Prisoner’s Song*.
- 1925, October 24.** Live radio show—would be known as the “Grand Ole Opry”—is broadcast over WSM under the direction of announcer and radio director George D. Hay.
- 1927, July 25-August 5.** Victor Records’ Ralph Peer records The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers, along with 17 other acts at Bristol, Tennessee. Is often considered as the beginning of the commercial country music industry.
- 1928.** First Hillbilly Singers’ Songbook: My Favorite Mountain Ballads and Old-Time Songs, priced at 50 cents is published by Bradley Kincaid. Eventually sold over 100,000 copies.
- 1943, June 5.** The Grand Ole Opry begins performances at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville.
- 1947, April 3.** The “Louisiana Hayride” goes on KWKH in Shreveport.
- 1947, September 1.** Carnegie Hall in New York City holds its first Grand Ole Opry show hosted by Ernest Tubb. Also starred Minnie Pearl and the “Solemn Old Judge,” George D. Hay.
- 1947.** Ernest Tubb opens record shop on Broadway in Nashville and begins live “Midnite Jamboree” on WSM each Saturday immediately following the Grand Ole Opry broadcast.
- 1954, July.** The Ozark Jubilee debuts as a radio “barn dance” on KWTO in Springfield, Missouri, with Red Foley as host.
- 1960, November 5.** Johnny Horton, Columbia recording star who made Jimmy’s “The Battle of New Orleans” a smash hit and GRAMMY® winner is killed in automobile accident.
- 1963, January.** *Ballad of Jed Clampett* by Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs is first Bluegrass single to hit #1 on country music charts.
- 1963, February.** Rackensack Folklore Society founded in Mountain View, Arkansas.
- 1963, April.** First Arkansas Folk Festival held in Mountain View. Jimmy Driftwood heads musical programs.
- 1972, March 1.** President Richard M. Nixon signs legislation establishing Buffalo National River. Jimmy, as Chairman of Arkansas Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission, signed documents for the State.
- 1972, March.** Noted folklorist and Jimmy’s close friend, John Quincy Wolf, Jr., dies in Memphis, Tenn. John Quincy Wolf Collection now at Lyon College, Batesville, Arkansas. (See www.LYON.edu/wolfcollection.)
- 1973.** Ozark Folk Center State Park opens in Mountain View, Arkansas. Program Consultant Jimmy Driftwood soon becomes Musical Director.
- 1974, March 1.** First performance of the Grand Ole Opry is staged in the new “Grand Ole Opry House” at Opryland in Nashville.
- 1976, Fall.** The Jimmy Driftwood Barn opens for Friday and Sunday night Rackensack “musicals.”
- 1980, November 1.** Renowned collector of Ozark stories and songs, Vance Randolph, dies in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Vance Randolph Collection now at University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.
- 1998, February 19.** Fellow folk music legend and Jimmy’s close friend “Grandpa” Jones dies.
- 1998, July 12.** Jimmy Driftwood dies of heart attack at Fayetteville City Hospital in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Jimmy Driftwood Collection now at University of Central Arkansas Archives, Conway, Arkansas. (See http://archives.uca.edu/special_collection/m98-02.htm.)
- 1998, July 15.** Funeral for Jimmy is held at the Ozark Folk Center in Mountain View, Arkansas.
- 2002.** Encyclopedia Britannica includes entry for Jimmy: “U.S. singer, song-writer, and folklorist. Although he made a name for himself in show business with the song ‘Battle of New Orleans’, Jimmy Driftwood spent

most of his life in rural Arkansas working to preserve the music and heritage of the Ozark region.”

2002, July 19. Renowned folklore collector Alan Lomax dies. Alan Lomax Collection now at Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Recordings released by Rounder Records, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

2004, April 25. Cleda Driftwood dies at Washington Regional Medical Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

2004, May 3. Funeral for Cleda is held at Timbo Valley Assembly of God Church in Timbo, Arkansas.

2006. Index to Jimmy Driftwood Collection is posted on the Internet by University of Central Arkansas Archives. (See http://archives.uca.edu/special_collection/m98-02.htm.)



Photograph provided by the Rackensack Folklore Society
CLEDA AND JIMMY POSE AT THE BARN WITH CAKE ON HIS 90TH BIRTHDAY, JUNE 20, 1997

Chapter Eight: Discography

Abbreviated Discography

Jimmy's Solo Recordings

<u>Release</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Label</u>
2006	Voice of the People (CD reissue of Monument recordings)	Omni (Australia)
1991	Americana (3-CD boxed set reissue of RCA Victor recordings)	Bear Family
1978	Beautiful Buffalo River	Rackensack
	A Lesson in Folk Music	Rackensack
	I Hear Your People Singing!	Rackensack
1966	The Best of Jimmie Driftwood	Monument
1965	Down in the Arkansas	Monument
1964	Chants de la Guerre de secession (45 rpm) (French ep)	France RCA Victor
1963	Voice of the People	Monument
1962	Driftwood at Sea	RCA Victor
1961	Billy Yank and Johnny Reb	RCA Victor
1961	Tall Tales—Jimmie Driftwood (45 rpm) (UK ep)	RCA Victor
196--	Western Jubilee V (45 rpm) (German ep)	UK RCA
1960	Tall Tales in Song	RCA Victor
1959	Wilderness Road	RCA Victor
1959	The Western Movement	RCA Victor
1959	The Battle of New Orleans (reissue Newly Discovered . . .etc.)	RCA Victor
1958	Newly Discovered Early American Folk Songs	RCA Victor
1952	45rpm Single: Grapevine News/Precious Peace of Mind	Cardinal
1952	78rpm Single: Grapevine News/Precious Peace of Mind	Cardinal

(Note: Foreign releases of RCA Victor originals are too numerous for us to account for.)

Jimmy Appears as Artist on

2007	Various Artists: Ozark Symphony (UK)	Music Makers Magnet
2006	Various Artists: The Rackensack—Ozark Folk Center—1972 (re-issue CD)	JD Legacy Project
2005	Various Artists: Sounds of the Ozark Folk—The 1963 Ark. Folk Festival	Lyon College
2004	Various Artists: Send You Back to Arkansas: Our Own Sweet Sounds II (Interactive DVD and Audio CD)	Dept. Ark. Heritage Vanguard
2002	Various Artists: Vanguard Roots of Folk	Vanguard
1998	Various Artists: Kerrville Folk Festival: Early Years 1972-1981	
1997	Various Artists: Billy in the Low Ground (Video from 1966 Newport Folk Festival)	Vestapol
1997	Various Artists: Vanguard Collector's Edition	Vanguard
1996	Sherwin & Pam Linton: Driftwood on the River	Black Gold
1995	Various Artists: Nashville at Newport	Vanguard
1994	Various Artists: Mike Seeger: Third Annual Farewell Reunion	Rounder
1992	Various Artists: Michelle Shocked: Arkansas Traveler	Polygram
1979	Various Artists: Rod Kennedy Presents Kerrville Folk Festival 1979	Kerrville Music Foun.
1978	Various Artists: Country Music's Greatest Songs	New York Times
1978?	Various Artists: Rackensack Concert at Jimmy Driftwood Barn	Rackensack
1972	Various Artists: The Rackensack, Vol. II	Jimmy Driftwood
1976	Various Artists: Cowboy Songs (Consultant only)	National Geographic
1972	Various Artists: The Rackensack, Vol. I	Jimmy Driftwood
1968	Various Artists: Stars of the Grand Ole Opry, Vol. 2	UK RCA Victor
196--	Various Artists: All-Star Tribute to Eddy Arnold	RCA Camden
1964	Various Artists: All-Star Folk Festival	RCA Camden
1964	Various Artists: Hootenanny	RCA Victor
	Various Artists: "Folk"—the music that belongs completely to the people	RCA Camden

196--	Various Artists: Guns and Cowboys	Germany RCA
196--	Various Artists: Stereo by the Worlds Greatest Artists	RCA Victor
1960	Various Artists: How the West Was Won (Japan)	RCA Victor
1960	Various Artists: How the West Was Won	RCA Victor
1959	Jimmy Driftwood/Jim Reeves (45 rpm)	Japan RCA Victor
1959	Various Artists: Folk Song Festival at Carnegie Hall	United Artists

(Note: Foreign releases of RCA Victor originals are too numerous for us to account for.)

One or More of Jimmy's Songs Appear on

2007	Bryan Chalker & Legacy: Legacy (UK)	Music Maker Magnet
2006	Norah Jones: The Little Willies	Milking Bull
2005	Various Artists: The Jimmy Driftwood Songs Sampler #2	JD Legacy Project
2005	Bryan Chalker & Dan Merry III: Jimmy Driftwood's Great American Songs	JD Legacy Project
2004	Riders in the Sky: Riders in the Sky Presents: Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier	Rounder
2003	Various Artists: The Jimmy Driftwood Songs Sampler	JD Legacy Project
2003	Richard Kent Streater: Heroes, Outlaws & Kinfolk	Fun & Freedom
2003	Annie & Mac: Fresh from the Cave/Old-Time Music	Annie & Mac
2003	The Chieftains: Further Down the Old Plank Road	UK Victor
2002	Eddy Arnold: RCA Country Legends	RCA Victor
2002	Bedlam Bards: Furious Fancies	Soundwright
2002	The Chieftains: Down the Old Plank Road: The Nashville Sessions	RCA Victor
2002	Guerry Jameson-McConnell: Unexpected Heroes	Daisy Chain
2002	Sherwin & Pam Linton: The Last American Frontier Centennial	Black Gold
2002	Nitty Gritty Dirt Band: Will the Circle Be Unbroken (Bonus Tracks)	Capitol
2002	Rancho Deluxe: Joyride to the Urban Westworld	Crazy Love
2002	Ralph Stanley: Live at the Smithsonian	King
2002	Doc Watson: Legacy	High Windy
2002	Various Artists: Great Songs About Horses	Warner Western
2002	Various Artists: Country USA: 1959	
2002	Various Artists: Howdy Neighbor Howdy	Serenity Mtn
2002	Various Artists: Roots of Folk	Vanguard
2002	Lonnie Donegan: Rock Island Line—The Singles anthology, 1955-1967	CMETD
2001	Leroy Troy: Old Grey Mare	Rounder
2001	Various Artists: Radio Gold, Vol. 4	Ace
2001	Wolfe Brothers: 2001: An Old Time Odyssey	Copper Creek
200--	Glen & Nellie Branscum: Homespun Harmony	
2000	Eddy Arnold: RCA Country Legends	RCA Victor
2000	Glen Branscum "Sings"	
2000	Rancho Deluxe: Joyride to the Urban Westworld	Rio Cover
1999	Doc Watson: The Best of Doc Watson: 1964-1968	Vanguard
1998	Eddy Arnold: Best of the Best	King
1998	Eddy Arnold: Best of Eddy Arnold	RCA Victor
1998	Chet Atkins & Jerry Reed: Me & Chet/Me & Jerry	RCA Victor
1998	Hoyt Axton: Rusty Old Halo/Where Did the Money Go	Edsel
1998	Paul & Margie: 40 Most Popular American Folk Songs	Arc
1998	Art Thieme: The Older I Get, The Better I Was	
1997	Jackie Brown: Music from the Motion Pictures	
1997	Michael Martin Murphey: Horse Legends	Warner Western
1995	Ramblin' Jack Elliott: Me & Bobby Mcgee	Rounder
1995	Osborne Brothers: 1968-1974	Pinycastle
1995	Doc Watson: Vanguard Years	Vanguard
1994	Johnny Cash: American Recordings	American
1994	Claude King: More Than Climbing That Mountain	
1994	Osborne Bros: When The Roses Bloom In Dixieland	Pinycastle

1993	Lonnie Donegan: More Than "Pye in the Sky"	
1993	Tim O'Brien: Oh Boy! O' Boy!	Sugar Hill
1992	Various Artists: The Chiswick Story	Chiswick
1990	Various Artists: Classic Country Music	Smithsonian
1990	Eddy Arnold: Cattle Call/Thereby Hangs A Tale (re-issue)	Bear Family
1989	Eddy Arnold: Country U.S.A.: 1959	RCA Victor
1983	Ramona Jones Family & Friends Live	History
1983	Chris LeDoux: Old Cowboy Classics	
1982	Various Artists: All Around Cowboys	RCA International
1981	Hank Williams, Jr.: The Pressure Is On	
1980	Hoyt Axton: Where Did the Money Go	Jeremiah
1979	Bob Bovee: The Roundup	Train on the Island
1978	Arlo Guthrie: One Night	Warner Bros.
1975	Nitty Gritty Dirt Band: Dream	United Artists
1975	Bryan Chalker: Songs & Ballads	Sweet Folk & Country
1974	Mike Auldridge: Dobro/Blues & Bluegrass	Takoma
1973	Bryan Chalker: Daddy Sing Me A Song	Decca/Chapter One
1972	Mike Auldridge: Dobro	Takoma
1972	Various Artists: Nitty Gritty Dirt Band: Will the Circle Be Unbroken	EMI/Capitol
1972	The Spotnicks: Something Like Country	Polydor
1971	Porter Wagoner: Blue Moon of Kentucky	RCA Camden
1971	The Osborne Brothers	Decca
1971	Jerry Reed & Chet Atkins: Me & Chet	RCA Victor
1970	Eddy Arnold: Best of Eddy Arnold, Vol. 2	RCA Victor
1970	Chet Atkins & Jerry Reed: Me & Jerry	RCA Victor
1970	Porter Wagoner: Howdy Neighbor, Howdy	RCA Camden
1970	Ramblin' Jack Elliott: The Essential Ramblin' Jack Elliott	
197--	Eddy Arnold: Legendary Performer	RCA Victor
	Doc Watson: Sings Songs for Little Pickers	
1969	Porter Wagoner: Me and My Boys	RCA Victor
1969:	Porter Wagoner: Country Feeling	RCA Camden
1969	Porter Wagoner: Tennessee Stud (45 rpm single)	RCA Victor
1969	Porter Wagoner: The Carroll County Accident	RCA Victor
1969	Country Joe McDonald: Tonight I'm Singing Just for You	
1969	Porter Wagoner: Country Feeling	RCA Camden
1968	Ramblin' Jack Elliott: Young Brigham	Reprise
1968	Bryan Chalker: Four Little Girls in Boston (45 rpm)	Orange Studio:
1968	Bryan Chalker: "Live at Biggin Hill, England"	Radio RAF
1976	Ernie Dunlap: Two Sax Man	Cin-Kay
1967	Norma Jean: Sings Porter Wagoner	RCA Victor
1967	Jack Lynch (45 rpm)	Jalyn
1966	Doc Watson: Southbound	Vanguard
1966	Porter Wagoner: On the Road—The Porter Wagoner Show	RCA Victor
1965	Porter Wagoner: The Bluegrass Story	RCA Victor
1965	Porter Wagoner: The Bluegrass Story (45 rpm EP)	RCA Victor
1964	Porter Wagoner: Porter Wagoner in Person	RCA Victor
1964	Porter Wagoner: Country Music Has Gone to Town (45 rpm single)	RCA Victor
1963	Porter Wagoner: Howdy, Neighbor, Howdy (45 rpm single)	RCA Victor
1962	Ramblin' Jack Elliott: Country Style/Live	Fantasy
1961	Eddy Arnold: Cattle Call/Thereby Hangs A Tale	RCA Victor
1960	Homer and Jethro at the Country Club	RCA Victor
1960	Johnny Horton Makes History	Columbia
1960	Jimmy Maynard	
1960	Buddy Starcher: Battle of New Orleans (45 rpm)	Starday

1959	Eddy Arnold: Thereby Hangs A Tale	RCA Victor
1959	Johnny & Jack: Sailor Man (45 rpm)	RCA Victor
1959	Johnny & Jack: Sailor Man (45 rpm)	RCA Victor (UK)
1958	Don Reno & Red Smiley (45 rpm)	Dot
1958	Homer & Jethro: The Monkey & the Big Baboon (45 rpm)	RCA Victor
1957	Bill Carlisle: Uncle Bud/Who's Gonna Stop (45 rpm)	RCA Victor
1956	--rpm single: Sondra Steele: The Rich folks of Texas	Foremost
195--	--rpm single: Bobby Lord: I'm the Devil Who Made Her That Way	Columbia
1953	Karl King: The Rosary My Mother Gave to Me (78 rpm)	Cardinal
1952	Roland Williams: Honky Tonk Angel (78 rpm)	Cardinal
1952	Sondra & Jon Steele: Hold My Love/How Much Do You Love Me? (78)	Cardinal
----	Roy Drusky: Best of Roy Drusky	Vocalion
----	Royal Guardsmen: The Best of the Royal Guardsmen	
----	Lea Coryell: Cornbread & Rum	
----	Jim Southern/Bill Blaylock: Country Road: The Modern Sounds of Bluegrass	Doppler

Tennessee Stud and *The Battle of New Orleans* are the most recorded of Jimmy's songs. Others chosen by artists include *The Wilderness Road*, *Razorback Steak*, *Damyankee Lad*, *He Had A Long Chain On*, *Rattlesnake Song*, *When I Swim the Golden River*, *Sailor Man*, *Peter Francisco*, *St. Brendan's Faire Isle*, *Sal's Got A Sugar Lip*, *Baby-O*, *Git Along Little Doggies*, *Jordan Is A Hard Road to Travel*, *Song of the Pioneers* and *My Church*. As far as I know, Jimmy never recorded *Scatter My Ashes O'er the Mountains*, although its lyrics are often referred to and quoted.

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Chapter Ten: Driving Tour of the “Driftwood District”

There is no official “Driftwood District”; that’s just our name for the area around Mountain View and Timbo where many years of Jimmy’s life were concentrated. His and Cleda’s families go away back in time in northern Arkansas. Their graves can be found in dozens of cemeteries in more than half-a-dozen counties.

For this tour, we are starting at the Mountain View courthouse square, going to Richwoods then back to Mountain View, west to Timbo and Big Flat, continuing around to Fifty Six, the Sylamore Hills/Blanchard Springs Caverns/Blanchard Springs and White River, then back toward Mountain View, catching the Jimmy Driftwood Barn, Ozark Folk Center on the way.

START ON ARK HWY 9 AT SOUTHEAST CORNER OF MOUNTAIN VIEW COURTHOUSE SQUARE: Take Ark Hwy 9 south 2.0 miles to the summit of Dodd Mountain and

TURN LEFT ON LUBER ROAD: Go on Luber Road east 2.4 miles to East Richwoods Cemetery where Jimmy’s paternal grandfather, John S. Morris, is buried with a flat stone in the center of the cemetery. (At some yet-undetermined spot on this road John and wife [#3] Lena Broyles Johnson Morris ran a store/post office.)

GO BACK TO HWY 9 AND TURN LEFT: Take Hwy 9 south 1.8 miles to Fredonia Cemetery Road on left. Look for cemetery sign.

TURN LEFT ON FREDONIA CEMETERY ROAD: Go uphill 0.3 mile on rough gravel road to cemetery. Buried with grave stones in back right section are Carroll R. and Mary Jane Rollins Chambers, James M. “Jim” Risner, Neal and Allie Morris, May Morris, “A. J.” and Rubey Morris. (Carroll R. Chambers’ first name is misspelled, and Jim Risner’s stone is white marble and hard to read.)

GO BACK TO HWY 9 AND TURN LEFT: Take Hwy 9 south 2.0 miles to Richwoods Church on right. Jimmy went to elementary school in the building that is now used as a church. Stop and look back toward Fredonia Hill (Fredonia Cemetery), at the foot of which Jimmy’s parents, Neal and Allie Risner Morris, lived in a “saddle-bag” log house when Jimmy was born. Along a stream at the foot of Fredonia Hill also lived Jimmy’s “Uncle Grandpa” Levi and Grandma Fannie Chambers Risner Morris. Fannie’s folks, Carroll and Mary Jane Chambers, lived north of the highway about a mile in Squirrel Hollow. This is Richwoods Valley where Jimmy was born and raised; where he attended grade school, and from which he walked to Mountain View to attend high school, and from which he walked south over more mountains to his first teaching job.

GO BACK ON HWY 9 TO MOUNTAIN VIEW AND COURTHOUSE SQUARE WHERE YOU STARTED FROM AND TURN RIGHT: Go east 2 blocks to School Street and turn right to a cluster of old flagstone buildings. These are the original buildings of Mountain View High School built in the late 1920s on the site of (and to replace) Stone Co. Academy where Jimmy went three years to high school.

GO BACK TO HWY 9 AND TURN LEFT: Take Hwy 9 westward back to the square (where it becomes Ark Hwy 66) and go on through town on Ark Hwy 66. Go west 13 miles to Timbo with the Blue Mountain range on your left.

IN DOWNTOWN TIMBO, DRIVE STRAIGHT AHEAD PASSED THE JUNCTION OF HWYS 66 AND 263: After a block or so, Timbo Cemetery is on your right. Turn in and stop to visit Jimmy’s and Cleda’s memorial stone along with many other family gravestones located in the back right section. Buried there with stones are Jesse and Letsey Atkins Goodman, Charles and Dulcena “Cena” Goodman Johnson, James Risner Morris and Bing Lee Morris. Also buried there, but no grave marker found, are William and Martha Caroline “Patsy” Merriman Goodman. Rackensacker “Aunt Ollie” Gilbert and army veteran-Timbo store/Mountain View motel man Thurmond George are buried in Timbo Cemetery, too.

GO BACK ON TO JUNCTION OF HWY 66 AND 263 AND TURN LEFT: Go on Hwy 263 north 0.3 mile, passing Timbo School on left to Jimmy Driftwood Ranch on right. Not a safe place to stop, but it is possible. This is privately owned property, even though we regard it as sacred. Looking eastward across the Driftwood place, Panther Mountain rises in the background. The stone house, minus the newly-installed metal roof, is the one Jimmy and Cleda built in 1947.

BACK ON HWY 263 TO BIG FLAT: Go on Hwy 263 north 14 miles through the mountains into Baxter

County to Big Flat. Go straight ahead at the junction where Ark Hwy 14 comes in from the west. (Eventually Hwy 14 goes to Mountain View and eastward from there.) In downtown Big Flat, drive to the sharp right-hand curve, but turn left on Spring St.

TURN LEFT ON SPRING STREET: Take Spring St. westward 0.3 mile to Big Flat Cemetery on left. Buried there with a flat white marble government stone is Jimmy's gr-grandfather John Elijah "Lige" Morris, found by walking from the entrance gate to your right front at a 45° angle. Also, at about the same angle from the entrance gate, but to your left front and farther back is a large upright slab of white marble clearly marked "The Stephen Treat Family".

GO BACK TO HWY 14 IN DOWNTOWN BIG FLAT AND TURN LEFT: Go on Hwy 14 east 10 miles to Fifty Six and 3 more watching for Blanchard Springs Caverns signs. Turn left and go to Visitor Center. Take cave tour if you wish, and/or get directions for driving down to Blanchard Springs and North Sylamore Creek.

GO BACK TO HWY 14 AND TURN LEFT: Take Hwy 14 east 6.5 miles through the Sylamore Hills to Sylamore Creek in Allison, and intersection of Ark Hwys 5-9-14. White River straight ahead.

GO THROUGH THE INTERSECTION AND GET ON HWY 9: Go east 0.1 mile and look for stopping places at the White River.

GO BACK TO JUNCTION OF HWYS 5-9-14 AND TURN LEFT TO JIMMY DRIFTWOOD BARN: Go south 3.3 miles to the Jimmy Driftwood Barn on right. There is lots of parking space in front and space to walk around the building. The grounds are open all the time but the building is open only by appointment except for Rackensack shows every Friday and Sunday night at 7 p.m. Gospel shows are held each 2nd Saturday night.

GET BACK ON HWYS 5-9-14 TURN RIGHT TO JIMMY DRIFTWOOD PARKWAY: Go south 1 mile to Jimmy Driftwood Pkwy (Ark Hwy 382 Spur) on right that takes you to the Ozark Folk Center.

TURN RIGHT ON JIMMY DRIFTWOOD PARKWAY TO OZARK FOLK CENTER: Follow signs for Ozark Folk Center State Park. Huge parking lot, The Skillet Restaurant, Gift Shop, Music Shows, Craft demonstrations and more. Also, locate Ozark Cultural Resource Center for archives and research. Consider making an all-day visit here.

GO BACK TO HWYS 5-9-14 VIA JIMMY DRIFTWOOD PARKWAY AND TURN RIGHT TO MOUNTAIN VIEW: Go to huge "traffic light" intersection. Turn right to go back to Courthouse Square where the "Driftwood District" tour started. **OR**, turn left on Hwys 5 and 14 and go east to discover Riggsville and Rocky Bayou. Oil Trough and Batesville are "out there," too.

Many other subjects of Jimmy's songs and poetry can be found within the "district." Our tour did not take you farther outside of it, like west of Timbo to Marshall, Snowball or Siloam Springs, or south to Conway. To find the Buffalo National River that flows into the White River, you have to go north on US Hwy 65 or Ark Hwy 5.



Photo by The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project
88-YEAR OLD JIMMY AT THE BARN, SEPTEMBER 1995

ADDENDUM

The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project

2002. A cultural history organization devoted to Jimmy’s legacy is launched. The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project™ is a privately owned organization dedicated to collecting information by and about the extraordinary Ozark mountain man whose name the project bears. We believe the community of mankind ought to see how one common American did what he could with his time on earth, with his energy and talents, and with what wealth he acquired beyond his basic needs. Support from devotees and fans of Jimmy is invited.

Mission: To publish books, recordings, and other media to provide comprehensive subject matter and commentary on the life and times, poetry and music, of Jimmy Driftwood.

Purpose: To inform “whole new generations” of readers, listeners and viewers what Jimmy Driftwood did during his time on earth in order to inspire them to (A) listen to his music, to read his poetry and song lyrics, and (B) to do whatever they can to develop their own talents—and to be generous with their means, their time and their talents.

We believe Jimmy’s literary and musical works will help people to live better lives, raise better children and have better communities. Whatever we can find that represents the life and career of Jimmy Driftwood, we want to collect it and prepare it for publication and distribution to “whole new generations” of people.

—*Mission and Purpose Statement of The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project, Calhoun, Ga, 2002.*

2003. A handbook/biography on Jimmy’s life and music is published. Here is the story of his family history, his recordings, awards and official appointments. And, at last in one place, the story of the historic Rackensack Folklore Society, Arkansas Folk Festival, Ozark Folk Center, Blanchard Springs Caverns, Buffalo National River and the Jimmy Driftwood Barn.

—from back cover of *The Jimmy Driftwood Primer, A Biography* by Richard Kent Streeter, The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project, Calhoun, Georgia, 2003.

I approach this man...with a two-phase attitude. One: I have loved him and his music for over 40 years, ever since I first heard his recordings during my college years; therefore, I am humbled and awed now that I am motivated to write about him. Two: I believe he approached living and learning as a scientist, a heaven-sent soul-in-the-raw, so to speak, who took on any subject that came into his mind or that came before him as he walked the earth. I think he believed he could know everything, that there was an answer for any question his inner-self conceived. And like any soul so disposed, he learned as an introvert, no matter how apparent it is that he expressed himself as an extrovert. Therefore, I have tried to be careful to not misread him anytime I attempt to interpret and explain his words or actions.

I believe we can know Jimmy Driftwood now, not by reading this book or anything written about him but by reading his poetry and song lyrics and by listening to his recordings and to others when they sing his songs. If, indeed, he did approach life and learning as if every day were a laboratory, and he could discover everything and answer every question, then he put whatever were the results of his discoveries into his written words. I, therefore, have a personal challenge to handle his works with studious humility and awe.

His propensity to teach as well as to learn is betrayed by simply counting the nouns he used. Only a person with a tremendous curiosity and drive to discover could be affected by so many diverse topics—to find treasures in things others would regard as dull, or unworthy of their attention. He spared few subjects: Nature, silent and terrible; Mythology, clever and mysterious; Humanity, struggling and dreaming; Deity, silent and still, everywhere and in everything. The teacher used his talents and unique interpretations of the world to make it easy for others to find treasures, too.

—from Author’s Foreword of *The Jimmy Driftwood Primer, A Biography* by Richard Kent Streeter, The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project, Calhoun, Georgia, 2003.

2003. Two Jimmy Driftwood songbooks are published. Lyrics and chord changes to his great RCA Victor recordings and great songs he wrote and sang about his beloved native state, with optional CD available. Within minutes you can be singing just like Jimmy Driftwood! In this book are all the words and chord changes you need.

—from covers of *The Jimmy Driftwood Songbook and The “Down in the Arkansas” Jimmy Driftwood Songbook*, The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project, Calhoun, Georgia, 2003.

2003 & 2005. Two compact discs of Jimmy’s songs are released: *The Jimmy Driftwood Songs Sampler* and *The Jimmy Driftwood Songs Sampler #2*. Each contain 12 songs by and about Jimmy—performed by artists

other than Jimmy. (Sampler #1:) *Battle of New Orleans, Tennessee Stud, Razorback Steak, He Had A Long Chain On, The Baby-O, Peter Francisco, The Rosary My Mother Gave to Me, Hero of the Ozarks, Grandma's Piece of "Driftwood", Jimmy Please Play That Ol' Pickin' Bow*, [instrumentals] *Eighth of January and Soldiers Joy*. (Sampler #2:) *Mountain View, I Hear Your Music Ringing, Jordan Am A Hard Road to Travel, The Wilderness Road, St. Brendan's Fair Isle, Ring A Bell 100 Times, Scatter My Ashes O'er the Mountains, Beautiful White River Valley, Slack Your Rope Hangman, When I Swim the Golden River, Song of the Pioneers, The Favorite Singing Son of Arkansas and My Church*. RKS

2003. An Internet web site devoted to Jimmy's legacy is launched. Internet web site www.JimmyDriftwoodLegacyProject.com is launched to help fulfill the mission and purpose of The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project. Visit the Retail Store and purchase products either by land mail or online with bank or credit card set up with PayPal®. Leave messages on hello@JimmyDriftwoodLegacyProject.com. RKS

2004. A book of Jimmy's poems is released. Admittedly, his poetry is more obscure than his songs, but some of his most profound thoughts and cleverest humor is found in the hundreds of poems he wrote. Some of his best are in this book...

—from cover of *Great Poems* by Jimmy Driftwood, The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project, Calhoun, Georgia, 2004.

2004. "Legacy Project" releases a CD of Rackensack harmonica player. Percy Copeland and His Harmonica showcases 32 genuine old-time songs and tunes from Percy's storehouse of music. The original Rackensacker traveled with Jimmy's "Music of the Ozark" tours and has played at the Jimmy Driftwood Barn and Ozark Folk Center since their beginnings. RKS

2005. A third compact disc of Jimmy's songs is released. Jimmy Driftwood's Great American Songs features vocals and instrumentation by British country music legend Bryan Chalker and Arkansas old-time folksinger Dan "The Tire Man" Merry III. *Four Little Girls in Boston, Slack Your Rope Hangman, Tennessee Stud, The Wilderness Road, I'm Leaving on the Wagon Train, Mooshatanio, Song of Creation, (On the Road to) Chalamette, The Battle of New Orleans, Soldier's Joy, The Widders of Bowling Green, When I Swim the Golden River, The Baby-O, I'm Too Young to Marry, Sailor Man, He had A Long Chain On, Oh, Florie, Big John Davy and Along the Road of Time*. RKS

2005. "Legacy Project" re-issues Rackensack recordings on CD. In 1972, 58 members of Jimmy's "Rackensack Folklore Society" recorded 36 songs and tunes on two long-playing records. The complete project is now available on one CD and 8-page booklet as *The Rackensack—Ozark Folk Center—1972*. RKS

2005. A book of quotations honoring Jimmy is released. Dozens of quotations from individuals, media publications and books plus photos and illustrations from as long ago as 1958 are in *The Life, Career & Legacy of Arkansas Folk Music Legend Jimmy Driftwood in the Words of Prestigious and Respected Persons and Publications*. Every quotation is in context and every source is documented.

—from back cover of *The Life, Career & Legacy of Arkansas Folk Music Legend Jimmy Driftwood, etc.*, The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project, 2005.

2006. A book documenting Jimmy's rightful place in Ozark history is released. *Who Was Jimmy Driftwood?* puts in one place a goodly share of the documented story of Jimmy Driftwood's role in how Mountain View, Arkansas, became the "Folk Music Capital of the World," home to the Arkansas Folk Festival, Ozark Folk Center, the Jimmy Driftwood Barn and much more.

—from back cover *Who Was Jimmy Driftwood?*, The Jimmy Driftwood Legacy Project, 2006.

Biographical Sketch of Richard Kent Streeter

Author Richard Kent Streeter was born into a history-wise family in historic St. Joseph, Missouri. His mother's ancestors witnessed the Pony Express originate there in 1860, and saw the body of Jesse James, killed there in 1882. His mother could trace her heritage back to the Revolutionary War and to "The Battle of New Orleans," in which ancestors fought, and to the first settlements in Ohio soon after the Northwest Ordinance was passed in 1787.

On his father's side, the Streeters are descendants of Henry Adams, great-great-grandfather of John Adams, our nation's second president and signer of the Declaration of Independence. One of the author's paternal great-grand-mothers was a cousin of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, mother of our sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln. His relatives have often served their communities on boards and committees. In the early 1900s, his grandfather Streeter represented Sullivan County in the Missouri House of Representatives.

Richard Kent is the third of six Streeter children. His father was an outstanding college athlete, a well-known coach, community leader and high school principal. His mother was an artist and librarian. He grew up in Sullivan County, Missouri, amidst the favors of rural life and the values of traditional American patriotism—on the same farm his father and grandmother grew up on. He attended a one-room country school before high school and college; graduated from Northeast Missouri State Teachers College (now Truman State University) in Kirksville and—after a hitch in the Army, including duty in Berlin and Augsburg, Germany—graduated from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

He taught briefly in Missouri high schools, but spent most of his adult years in business. While raising a family of five children, he lived on a communal organic farm in Arkansas and he sold yachts and managed convenience stores in Florida before returning to the Midwest as consultant for an herb and vitamin manufacturer and owner of a natural food store.

Besides his 2½ years in Germany, he has visited several foreign countries and many states in America, including Alaska and Hawaii. He has lived in at least eight states and currently lives in Georgia where he is a historical researcher and writer, plays acoustic bluegrass and folk music, writes and records original and traditional songs and performs at local oprys, schools and historical functions. His other works include books and recordings and historical workbooks that are published by The Fun and Freedom Place, 145 Brittney Dr. SE, Calhoun, Georgia 30701. Many are in the "American Folklife Center" at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The Library's Bicentennial *Local Legacies Project* there documents America's grassroots heritage, being a "snapshot of the nation's unique traditions as we begin a new century."



Books & Recordings by Richard Kent Streeter

- Stone Depot on the State Road — Reminiscences of Old Stone Church
- North Missouri Civil War Confederates — The Frontier Adventures of Peter Wagnon
- Lifetime Poems, Songs & Other Writings — Old Farmer's Poems, Songs & Other Writings
- Understanding Our Roots in Primitive Democracy
- The Boyles Family Keepsake Album & Researcher's Workbook
- The Official Prater's Mill & Farm History Researcher's Workbook
- The Prater's Mill Collection — Laugh Yourself Sane
- They Said What About America? — America, Americans, Freedom & War
- The Jimmy Driftwood Primer, A Biography
- The Life, Career & Legacy of Arkansas Folk Music Legend Jimmy Driftwood
in the Words of Prestigious and Respected Persons and Publications
- Who Was Jimmy Driftwood? — Great Poems by Jimmy Driftwood
- The Jimmy Driftwood Songbook
- The "Down in the Arkansas" Jimmy Driftwood Songbook
- The Jimmy Driftwood Songs Sampler (a recording on CD)
- The Jimmy Driftwood Songs Sampler #2 (a recording on CD)
- The Prater's Mill Songs and Other Area Favorites (a recording on tape and CD)
- Heroes, Outlaws & Kinfolk (a recording on CD) — Rust & the John Deere Green (a recording on CD)

For more information please contact

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or

www.JimmyDriftwoodLegacyProject.com



The Memory burns bright

By Bryan Chalker

It was close on a year ago that Bryan Chalker visited Arkansas and Jimmy Driftwood's old state made a huge and lasting impression on him.

Mountain View, Arkansas, home of an annual and highly prestigious folk festival, the celebrated Ozark Folk Centre and, of course, the Jimmy Driftwood Barn. Many months have passed since I made guest appearances at the Arkansas Folk Festival but the memories remain as fresh as a daisy and I am in constant weekly contact with the likes of Richard Kent Streeter, Dan Merry III and new-found internet friend, Tom Hunnicutt, who also goes by the name of 'Captain T Others, like Will Cantrell and Glen & Nellie Branscum have remained in touch and introduced me to other artists who have succumbed to the influence of Jimmy Driftwood, or simply take pleasure in making regular appearances at the Barn. If it wasn't for Richard Streeter, however, Jimmy's name would be barely remembered in this era of country popstar and country rock. A place like Mountain View, nestled in the splendid Ozarks, is seen by many as a last bastion of real old-time country and folk music, where auto-harpists, fiddlers, clawhammer banjo pickers and harmonica players are ten a penny - but these particular pennies are minted from gold, because there ain't no such thing as an average musician in Arkansas. Some of them may be as raw and hillbilly as Ma & Pa Kettle but their musical prowess is somethin' else. Since returning to Britain, Rich Streeter has continued to supply me with recordings of artists who fell under Jimmy Driftwood's spell and all, without exception, have donated tracks for a future CD compilation honouring the scholarly but down-to-earth Arkansas son who gave the world 'The Battle Of New Orleans', 'Tennessee Stud' and a host of other great folk-country ballads during his long life.

Ozark Symphony

I have been toying with the idea of a Jimmy

Driftwood tribute album for more than a year and it seemed likely that a 'lost' tape of commercially unrecorded songs might emerge from a source in Liverpool but it was not to be and the whole concept was put on hold indefinitely. When I was in Arkansas with Rich Streeter and Dan Merry, we talked about putting together another form of tribute using cover versions of Jimmy's songs by artists appearing at the Barn in Mountain View. Word quickly travelled in that small community and soon I



was being offered donations of songs by the likes of Glen & Nellie Branscum, George Bryan, Percy Copeland, Annie & Mac, Roy Harper and others. At no time did we ever discuss a financial aspect to such a CD project, because we all wanted to do this thing as a genuine tribute to a man who gave his whole life to music, the betterment of others and the preservation of his beloved Ozarks. I never met Jimmy Driftwood but we did correspond and his songs have formed a part of my own musical repertoire since the mid-1960s, when I first began performing as a professional. Songs by Rich Streeter and Dan Merry also formed an integral part of the early stages of the Driftwood concept and once I had been introduced to Tom Hunnicutt's style of old-time music, through Rich, I had what I was looking for - texture, variety and songs written about Jimmy, as opposed to just a selection of interpretations.

Rich, Dan and Tom have all written good songs about Jimmy, or the music he represented in Arkansas and across the world, for that matter, and, in retrospect, it now seemed sensible to include Jimmy himself with at least two songs largely unknown to audiences outside of his native Arkansas and, whilst produced by Monument's Fred Foster, were extremely low-key affairs. The first of those is the Cajun-flavoured 'Ozark Symphony', which has been

kicked around for a while as the title track. A second Driftwood song is the railroad ballad, 'Tragedy On The M&NA', featuring some delightfully authentic steam locomotive sound effects, a gimmick that Jimmy was not noted for but it proves highly effective and counters the driving 12-string guitar of the unknown session man. Authentic sound-effects are also a key feature of 'Ozark Symphony' and, according to Rich Streeter, Fred Foster went out into the field to capture whippoorwills, cicadas and the wood-burning vintage steam engine on a portable tape-recorder to embellish these two atmospheric songs written by a master story-teller. I can think of no finer title than 'Ozark Symphony' to encapsulate the music of Jimmy Driftwood. Thanks to the untiring efforts of Richard Kent Streeter and his Legacy Project, Jimmy's memory will live on but, it's been hugely demanding work and Rich literally burned himself out earlier last year, to such a degree that we actually didn't expect him to live. Several months ago Rich was rushed into a Georgia hospital and Dan Merry e-mailed to say that he wasn't expected to make it - but Rich pulled through and is back in harness.

Slow Down

Death is usually nature's way of saying 'slow down' and passion for music doesn't always make allowances for stress and over-work. Once we're past the half-century mark in our lives, it's usually downhill all the way. Trouble is, most of us involved in this unique project are way over the hill and I check the obits everyday to scold my name is in there. It ain't yet and I know that Rich, Dan and Tom have that real mountain fightin' spirit in them and we'll all live to see this project through to completion, however long it takes.

"Death is usually nature's way of saying 'slow down'"

I have to say that this is the most complex album compilation I have ever attempted in more than thirty years of compiling collections for RCA, Liberty, Ember, Capitol, EMI and our own Music Maker series. Every time I think I've got it just right, an artist like Tom Hunnicutt comes out of the Arkansas woodwork to prove me wrong. But, I like it that way, because we all want the very best when it comes to enshrining Jimmy's splendid legacy in CD format and ensuring that what Richard Kent Streeter started all those years ago, finally bears fruition in a new Millennium. Nashville might not care about its traditions but the folks of Arkansas do and if we can make the world a little brighter by furthering the cause of Jimmy Driftwood's raw-boned music, then so much the better. Jimmy made it into his early nineties, ploughed all of his substantial royalties back into Mountain View and died a contented man. If the corporate Americans can't honour this great man's legacy, then we surely will and it will all be down to the generosity of artists contributing to 'Ozark Symphony The Jimmy Driftwood Tribute Project', coming to you eventually on a Music Maker CD compilation.

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The life story of American folk music legend and national treasure from Arkansas.

THE JIMMY DRIFTWOOD STORY

A Biography with Songs, Photos and Tributes

At last, the most complete book ever written on the life and career of America's No.1 folk music legend.

Born in an Ozarks Mountain cabin, Jimmy walked fourteen miles a day to attend high school. He later became a schoolteacher, an RCA Victor recording star, performed at Carnegie Hall and was a member of the Grand Ole Opry. He wrote such notable hit songs as *The Battle of New Orleans*, *Tennessee Stud*, *The Wilderness Road*, *He Had A Long Chain On*, *Damyankee Lad* and dozens more.

This “**100th Birthday Edition**” tells the story of Jimmy’s family history, his recordings, awards, official appointments and more. And, at last in one place is the story of the historic Rackensack Folklore Society, Arkansas Folk Festival, Ozark Folk Center, Blanchard Springs Caverns, Buffalo National River and the Jimmy Driftwood Barn.

This is the most comprehensive book ever written on Jimmy’s life and times, his career, music and poetry, and includes the greatest collection ever of historic and exclusive photographs and illustrations—over 40 in all—thanks to the Archives at the University of Central Arkansas, the Grand Ole Opry Museum, Department of Arkansas Heritage, Stone County Historical Society, the Rackensack Folklore Society and many others.



The 20-plus pages of “The Life, Career & Legacy of Jimmy Driftwood” is a compilation of dozens of quotations from individuals, media publications and books from as long ago as 1958. You will not find them anyplace else. We even included a “Driving Tour of the ‘Driftwood District’” so you can locate landmarks of his life in the Ozarks.

Portions of “The Jimmy Driftwood Story” were originally published in two smaller books, “The Jimmy Driftwood Primer, A Biography” (2003) and “The Life, Career & Legacy of Arkansas Folk Music Legend Jimmy Driftwood in the Words of Prestigious and Respected Persons and Publications” (2004).

From the publishers of “Great Poems by Jimmy Driftwood,” “The Jimmy Driftwood Songbook,” “The ‘Down in the Arkansas’ Jimmy Driftwood Songbook” and “Who Was Jimmy Driftwood?” Also CDs: “The Jimmy Driftwood Songs Sampler,” “The Jimmy Driftwood Songs Sampler #2,” “Jimmy Driftwood’s Great American Songs” and “The Rackensack—Ozark Folk Center—1972.”

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