

Although the Piedmont plateau stretches from New York State into Alabama, the Piedmont blues region remains a subset within this larger area. Realistically, culturally-defined regions are fluid constructions that often defy firm boundary line. However, for the sake of clarity, this document defines the Piedmont blues region as spanning from Danville, Virginia to Atlanta, Georgia, running approximately 325 miles from northeast to southwest and being seventy-five to one hundred miles wide.



Among the rolling hills, small farms, mills, and coal and railroad camps of the rural East Coast Piedmont, between Tidewater coast and the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, black and white economic and cultural patterns have overlapped considerably -- more so than in the nearby areas or the Deep South. Piedmont blues styles reflects this, meshing traces of gospel, fiddle tunes, blues, country, and ragtime into its rolling, exuberant sound.

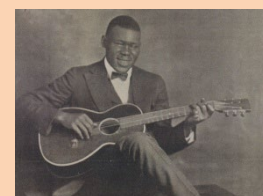
Blues in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley has significant links to the Piedmont blues tradition. Piedmont blues' raggy, finger-picking guitar style is emulated by many Lower Chattahoochee blues artists, and many Piedmont blues tunes have become Lower Chattahoochee standards, including Blind Boy Fuller's *Step it up and Go*.

Etta Baker.... from the Piedmont town of Morganton, North Carolina, embodies a crossover in musical styles similar to John Cephas. Etta's grandfather was a banjo player who loved breakdowns and waltzes. Her father taught her the blues along with parlour music, hymns, and Tin Pan Alley songs of the day. As a teenager, Etta played for house parties and square dances, but after her marriage in 1936 she put down the guitar and the banjo to raise her nine children and to work at the Skyland Textile Mill. In 1973, with her children grown, she quit her job and began to performing in public again, accepting invitations to concerts and folk festivals. In 1991 she received a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.



Her syncopated two-and three-finger guitar styles recalls Elizabeth Cotten, Rev. Gary Davis, and Blind Boy Fuller.

Blind Blake (Born Arthur Blake 1895 in Jacksonville, FL)
Blind Blake was arguably the most talented blues guitarist of his era and is considered by some to be one of the best acoustic blues guitarists of all time. He was an itinerant songster, his repertoire was vast, including blues, ragtime, and novelty songs. His playing is marked by a rapid finger-picking style. He cut eighty-one solo sides on Paramount from 1926 to 1932, and he collaborated with a number of high profile blues artists, including Ma Rainey, Gus Cannon, and Papa Charlie Jackson. Blake literally disappeared after his last Paramount session in 1932.



Elizabeth Cotten,

Libba Cotton (1895-1987) spent her working life in domestic posts, first in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where she was born, and then around Washington, D. C. Her guitar and banjo repertoire was drawn almost entirely from idioms older than the blues: ragtime, floating songs, hymns, children's songs.

**Reverend Gary Davis,**

A virtuoso guitarist, Davis (1896-1972) was capable of improvising in several keys. Growing up in South Carolina, he learned from the blind guitarist Willie Walker. He taught Blind Boy Fuller and at some time in the 1930s was ordained as a Baptist minister. His religious beliefs forbade his singing secular material. He moved to New York in the early 1940s and made a living as a street singer.

Blind Boy Fuller,

Blind Boy Fuller (1908-1941) is arguably the most popular and influential Piedmont blues musician of all time. Like Blind Blake, his repertoire was vast: he played ragtime, blues and the pop music of his day, all on his National steel guitar.



According to Barry Lee Pearson, he was able to reinterpret and cover the hits of other artists. Many of his songs are covered by Lower Chattahoochee artists, including the ragtime classic *Step it Up and Go*

**Brownie McGhee, & Sonny Terry**

Blind since childhood, Saunders Terrell (1911-1986) was born in Greensboro, North Carolina. He met McGhee (1915-1996) in North Carolina in 1939. They had both been attracted into the orbit of Blind Boy Fuller and worked with him before his death in 1941. In the early 1940s, they settled in New York and into a partnership that would become the longest-lasting double act in blues history.

Blind Willie McTell,

McTell (1901-1959) grew up in Statesboro, Georgia, and made his living as a popular street musician. Playing a twelve-string guitar, he was recorded frequently by field-recording units visiting Atlanta between 1927 and 1935. Willie's repertoire spanned everything from blues, black and white folk song, and religious music. His many years of street performing in Atlanta, as well as in the small medicine shows that travelled the countryside, were largely responsible for his extensive and eclectic variety of songs.

