Appalachian blues ... comes in a variety of styles, from vaudeville, piano blues and boogie, string-band dance blues, guitar and harmonica-based down-home blues, ragtime blues, East Coast rhythm and blues, and so-called White Mountain blues. Artists include people such as Bessie Smith, Cripple Clarence Lofton, Cow Cow Davenport, Pinetop Smith, Josh White, Reverend Gary Davis, Jaybird Coleman, Luke Jordan, Dinah Washington, and James Brown.

The Appalachian Mountains cut diagonally across the Eastern United States from New York to Mississippi, with Appalachian counties in thirteen states. The general consensus, why the 'Blues' have never, or took so long to emerge from this region seems to be , in contrast with the cotton belt of the Deep South, there wasn't a sufficient black population in the mountains to sustain a viable blues tradition.

Unfortunately, there are many documented artists that never had a chance to record, and they remain 'unknown except in the memory of musicians who happened to have been around at the time. They recall a thriving blues tradition, even though the anecdotal evidence appears to indicate the opposite. It could be argued that the extent of recording is simply a question of whether or not record companies wanted to expend cost and the energy to seek out musicians in such relatively inaccessible environments and what they chose to record once they got there.

Many didn't record Appalachian blues, but Victor did - In 1927 the Bristol Sessions, often referred to as the *Big Bang of country music* occurred. These sessions produced recordings by both white and black artists: examples are several sides by harmonica player El Watson and the Johnson Brothers, two of which were entitled blues, *Pot Licker Blues* and *Narrow Gauge Blues*.

On November 2, 1928, Victor recorded two more blues sides by the duo Stephan Tarter and Harry Gay, *Brownie Blues* and the descriptive *Unknown Blues*. In October, 1929, two more blues tracks were recorded by Ellis Williams, who played harmonica on *Buttermilk Blues* and *Smokey Blues*. In August, 1929, further recordings, previously unissued blues were released, *Real Estate Blues* and the blues ballad, probably familiar to us all, *Railroad Bill*, these were followed by two songs by Leola Manning and Eugene Ballinger, *He Cares for Me* and *He Fans It*.

During an April 1930 Knoxville session, Howard Armstrong's Tennessee Chocolate Drops, composed of Armstrong, Carl Martin, and Roland Martin, recorded two sides, *Knox County Stomp* and *Vine Street Drag* for Vocalion.

Leola Manning also recorded a further four sides, *Arcade Building Moan*, *Satan is busy in Knoxville*, *Laying in the Graveyard*, and *the blues is all wrong*.

Through the 1940s and 1950s black musicians from Appalachia followed the general African-American population in the Great Migration to the urban North. Although some recording occurred in Philadelphia and New Jersey, New York City served as the major attraction, much the same way as Chicago drew musicians from the Delta and the Deep South. Recording opportunities in New York City included both small rhythm-and-blues labels looking for commercial hits and the Asch, Disc, and Folkways labels with a broader interest in documenting traditional music. This latter position enhanced Folkways importance during the folk revival, making it the principal label documenting Appalachian traditions and South-eastern blues.

The guitar came to the Appalachians relatively late via mail-order catalogues, relatively cheap, it quickly became the poor man's piano and a source of pride for the accomplished player. The harmonica was also inexpensive and expressive as an accompaniment for the guitar; consequently a harmonica/guitar tradition, so familiar today, became an important part of the Appalachian story.

While there was diversity in the guitar styles within the region, based both in location and generation, a fairly complex finger-picking style characterised much of the region. There developed a strong preference for ragtime progressions, up-tempo eight bar blues, and other upbeat music suitable for house parties or other country dancing. In general, the instrumental approach was lighter in texture and more melodic, structurally, it employed a more chord technique than the harsher, more intense Delta guitar styles.

The call-and-response patterns, typical of black music were disappearing with the increased emphasis on faster tempos leaving less space for the response part of call and response. Finally, while there is increased emphasis on instrumental dexterity, there is less emphasis on the nuanced of phrasing and tonal expressiveness found in the Delta.

Similar patterns hold for vocal styling, although once again it is important to recognise diversity within the region, with Reverend Gary Davis at one end of a spectrum and Archie Edwards or John Jackson at the other. Notably, Gary Davis' harshness may be a consequence of his long career as a street singer and his gospel repertoire. Nevertheless, black Appalachian vocal style is generally less intense, less emotional and preaching, than styles from the Deep

South. This may be due to a more frequent racial interaction, performing for mixed audiences or, even, less harsh living conditions coupled with closer ties between black and white communities.

The persistence of a string-band tradition ... shared by both blacks and whites also affected blues development. Essentially, blues didn't so clearly and readily displace earlier forms of African-American dance music in the mountains as it did in other parts of the South. Instead, blues became one of several forms of popular party music performed at country dances, and the eventual transition from fiddle and banjo music to guitar and harmonica-based blues occurred, *although the fiddle remained*, more slowly in the mountains, where set dances and square dancing were part of black rural recreation well into the 1940s.

Certainly, the fiddle and banjo remained a traditional African-American instrument well after the arrival of blues, banjo techniques and tunings influenced the way musicians learned to play the guitar.

Eventually, the string-band tradition fell out of favour in the African-American community, although artists like Martin, Bogan, and the Foddrell family maintained the tradition well into the 1980s on the festival circuit.

Evidence suggests that the blues arrived in Appalachia ... well after it had become entrenched in the Delta. It was brought by itinerant musicians who sought work in the mines or building roads and railroads, and who entertained themselves and other workers in their leisure time. We also see professional musicians working the region, hitting the paydays at various work sites. These would include walking musicians, medicine show performers, and artists associated with minstrel or carnival shows. Most often, however, they were individual artists who stopped off to play in the streets or at social gatherings then moved on. At times musician's paths would cross, and songs and ideas might be exchanged in an impromptu jam session, and then each musician would move on to their next destination.

In town, blues players sang and played on street corners. Pink Anderson, Blind Simmie Dooley, Brownie McGhee played on street corners not only in Tennessee, but also in New York City. Luke Jordan played on the streets of Lynchburg, and Bessie Smith sang on Ninth Street in Chattanooga (Her home town) before she left on the minstrel show circuit.

Job hunters of various kinds came into the region bringing their blues with them. This was especially true during the Great Depression when looking for

work was itself a full-time job. Birmingham piano player Chief Ellis hit the road as a hobo: Quote: I hoboed north. The first encounter of me playing was in Roanoke, Virginia. We stopped at this restaurant to ask for food, and this lady had a piano in there. So I asked her if I could play the piano for food. When she heard me play she liked my playing, she then she kept me over there because she used to have dances on the weekends, she kept me there playing for about three weeks. She gave me food, a place to stay, and maybe fifty cents a night. That was a lot of money in those times. (Chief Ellis quotation 1977)

The Martin, Bogan, and the Armstrong string band were also professional musicians who worked their way through Appalachia more or less on foot, looking for work wherever they could find it. Spartanburg guitarist, Ted Bogan, recalled the hit-or-miss composition of such travelling musical groups who went wherever they thought they could make a dollar.

After the travelling musicians, Appalachian musicians recall phonograph recordings as the second most important source of blues songs and technique. Beginning in 1920, so-called race records made blues available to whoever had a record player and, of course, a few records. At first, such innovations could be bought only in the city, but expanding road and rail systems soon made even the most isolated communities susceptible to travelling salesmen.

They would bring a bunch of records, and some would arrive by mail order. People were listening to the likes the Carter Family, old Jimmie Rodgers, Blind Blake, Lemon Jefferson, and Frank Stokes although the probably didn't know it. It was mostly black blues players from the South, who made these recordings back then

Strangely, people didn't necessarily know who there were listening to - white people singing or black people. There were few pictures and often no names on the labels that came much later.

But even the catalogues made mistakes based on misinformation. For example, Howard Armstrong's 1920 Vocalion track *Knox County Stomp,* and *Vine Street Drag* by the Tennessee Chocolate Drops was marketed as hillbilly records and later Blues.

People grew up listening to blues and old-time country and learning from both. This, possibly, accounts for the racially mixed repertoire and style of Appalachian blues performers, as Edwards, Jackson, and McGhee also noted, black listeners found the so-called country music very familiar. It was, as

McGhee said, black stuff in the first place. However, the mixing pot became whites' listening to and learning from black people, and vice versa. A white blues tradition is by no means unique to the Appalachian region, but Appalachian blues has an interracial, or perhaps even non-racial, quality. Whether one sees this as black people playing in a white style or as white people adapting African-American style (Marion Harris is an example of a White lady singing in the style of Black music), the fact remains that there is an overlap, just as there was in the earlier string band tradition.

Overall, Appalachian blues tradition is far more integrated than Delta or Texas blues. Certainly, bands like the Mississippi Sheiks had a repertoire suitable to either black or white audiences, and some Mississippi artists like John Hurt played with white musicians - in John's case with the legendary fiddler, Willie Narmour.

The blend of black and white tradition appears more prevalent in the mountains, probably due to the closer social interaction between blacks and whites in the region. In the work camps blacks and whites often lived and worked in close proximity despite segregation. The list of Appalachian musicians who played for coal camps is extensive.

Music was one medium where blacks and whites seemed to meet on very common ground. Even in the small towns, they integrated when it came to playing music. Blacks and whites learned from the same phonograph records, they participated together in integrated musical events and drew extensively from the shared string-band tradition. We know from research that both Black and white musicians performed together before both Black and white audiences, sadly not always successfully or harmoniously.

All this is not to say that Appalachian blues is in some way corrupted by white folksong values or that it is less African than other blues styles. It simply means that among the diverse forms of Appalachian blues there is a blend - the result of merging African and European musical values in ways that made sense to local musicians, and so Appalachian blues became the country cousin of Delta blues.