Recording Industry - Part 2: North Carolina Recording Pioneers **[1]**

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Recording Industry

by Michael L. Wells, 2006

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North Carolina Recording Pioneers

The 1923 success of Georgia native Fiddlin' John Carson's recording of "Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane [12]" proved the public's fascination with authentic rural string band music [6] and launched the so-called hillbilly industry. Many rural North Carolina artists and string bands were recorded by the major labels (mainly RCA Victor [13] and Columbia [14]) during the 1920s, though most of these artists traveled to major cities to make the actual recordings while maintaining a home base in the state. Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, the Carolina Tar Heels, and Ernest Thompson became exclusive recording artists and their records were distributed nationally. In 1937 RCA Victor set up a semipermanent recording studio in the Hotel Charlotte, although the major labels had previously made field records of southern artists in several strategic southern locations. Until 1945 many North Carolina country acts recorded in the Charlotte [15] studio, including Wade Mainer [16], the Blue Sky Boys, the Dixon Brothers, the Tobacco Tags, and J. E. Mainer and the Crazy Mountaineers. Although not North Carolina natives, Bill Monroe and his brother Charlie were based out of the state during that time, and their 1936 recording of "What Would You Give in Exchange for Your Soul" (made in Charlotte) became one of the largest selling records of that decade. Some consider it to be the first bluegrass recording.

Black blues [3] and gospel [5] acts from North Carolina were also recorded by the major labels, mainly through the efforts of businessman J. B. Long. While managing the United Dollar Store in Kinston, Long scouted the local area for talent, leading to successful records by the Cauley Family, Lake Howard, and Mitchell's Christian Singers for the A.R.C. labels group. After being transferred to Durham [17], Long hit pay dirt with his discovery of blues men playing in the East Coast Piedmont style: Sonny Terry [18], Gary Davis [19], and Blind Boy Fuller [20]. Fuller, who was probably the most popular and influential of the East Coast blues performers, recorded 130 sides for Columbia Records until his premature death in 1941. Long acted as his personal manager, lining up recording sessions, taking him to recording locations in New York or Chicago, and writing songs and rehearsing Fuller for these sessions.

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