

Fieldwork in North Alabama--Bill Allen

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Since completing the ACSI training, I have been fortunate in having had three videos accepted by the Alabama Archives for their files.

The first of these was recorded at McFarland Park in Florence, Alabama, beside the Tennessee River. A group of friends, Jerry Clemmons; Dwight Taylor; Vance Henry; Helen Taylor; and Troy Stanford (left to right in the photo) gather each Thursday at the park to play what they call "Old Time Music." They are very adamant that it isn't bluegrass and they have a point. They might launch just as quickly into "Sweet Georgia Brown" as they would "Darlin' Corey" or a gospel tune.

The second video was recorded across the street from Athens State University in Athens, Alabama. Music from the Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddler's Convention can sometimes be faintly heard in the background. The video focuses on two friends, James Bradford (center) and Dwight Taylor (right). Although Jerry Clemmons (left) is in this photo, he does not appear in the video. James and Dwight have been getting together to play for over fifty years and keep up a running banter throughout the video, both between and during songs.

The third recording was an oral history rather than being about folk art. William Wallace Hayes, Jr., the son of a coal miner, was a child in central Alabama during the Great Depression. He lived in both coal camps like Piper, where the company owned the store; school; and houses; and coal towns like West Blocton, where there were other enterprises in addition to the mines. Hayes describes the difference in living conditions in these two settings and also talks about mine safety and what the miners and their families did for recreation.

Currently, I am in the planning stage for a project aimed at visiting senior centers and retirement homes to record oral histories of longtime residents of Tennessee River Valley communities in the area from Huntsville to the Shoals. The emphasis will be on stories by craft persons, especially those who may still be doing those crafts, but not necessarily limited to that.





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