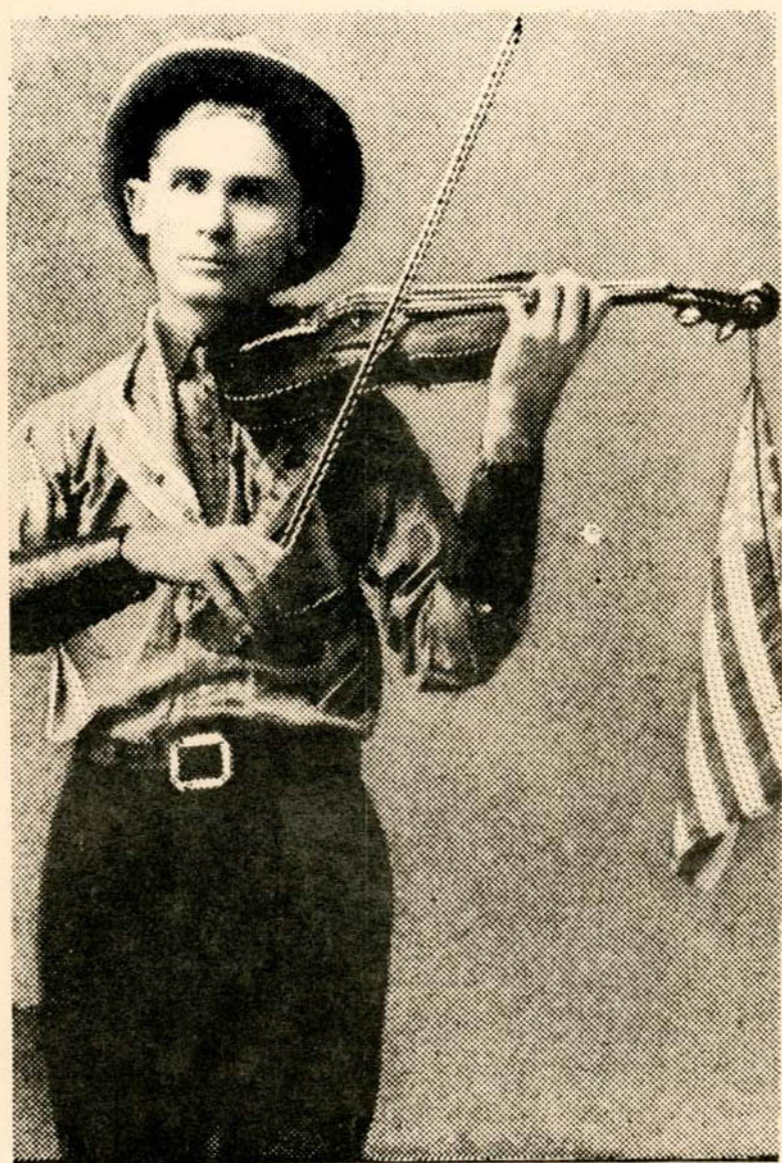


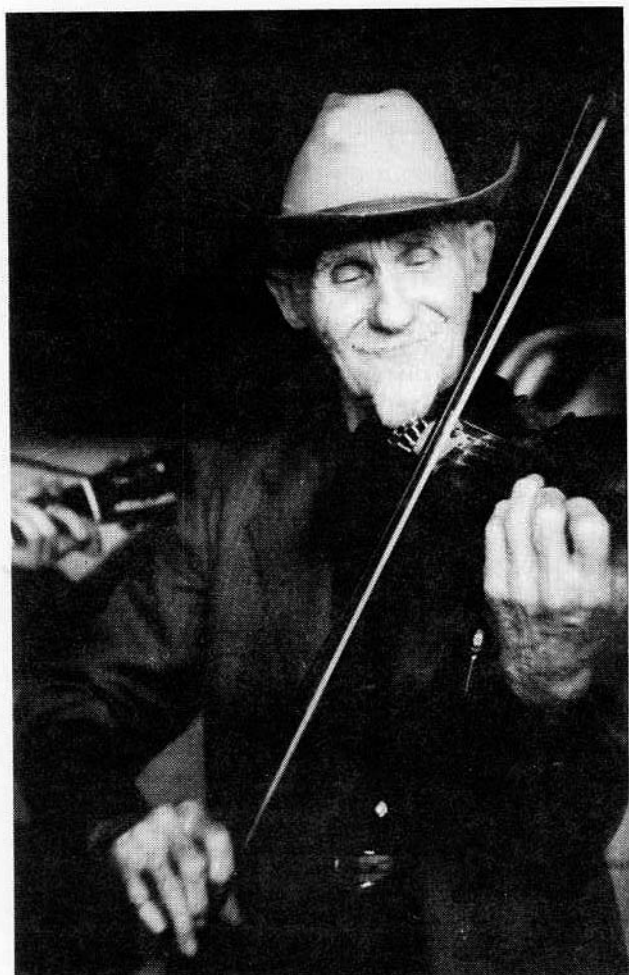


Eck Robertson

ECK ROBERTSON

A Bio - discography

BY PETER FELDMANN

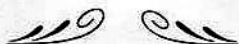


Amarillo, 1963. by John Cohen

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Most works on country music history mention that in 1922, Eck Robertson made the first commercial recordings of country fiddling at the Victor studios in New York City. From our perspective more than half a century later, this event seems quite momentous, beginning as it did the development of a multi-million dollar industry and leading to the simultaneous preservation and obliteration of rural America's musical cultures.

A thorough study of this process would easily fill a large volume. It is the purpose of this record and booklet to present these historic first recordings and briefly examine Eck Robertson's recording career. Certain questions can be at least partially answered, but it is our hope that a biography beyond the scope of this booklet will someday be written. Any comments, corrections and additions will be gratefully received and added to future printings of this Lp.



Alexander Campbell Robertson was born on November 20th, 1897, in Delaney, Madison County, Arkansas. His father, a preacher of the "Camelite" or Church of Christ sect, named him for a famous cleric. When Eck was three years old, the family moved to a small farm near Amarillo in the Texas panhandle region, an area noted for its fine fiddlers.

Music ran strong in Eck's family. Most of his five brothers and two sisters played and sang. His Grandfather, uncles and father had frequented fiddler's conventions in the 19th century. Eck claimed to have learned to play the fiddle before ever seeing a violin, having killed the family tomcat to stretch its skin over a home-made gourd fiddle. He and his older brother Quince would sit up far into the night and play fiddle, often sneaking out to play for dances at neighboring homes.

His father, who had given up fiddling when entering the service of his church at 21, tried turning Quince's attention toward farming by giving him his own pig to raise. Eck's older brother soon traded the pig to a neighbor for a real "store-bought" fiddle. Eck remembers hearing a beautiful tune one morning and rushing into their log house to find his father playing a hoedown on Quince's new instrument....he had never known that his father played until that morning.

Eck soon discovered an inborn ability and feeling for fiddle tunes:

It was just natural with me to play them. I didn't have to learn them... I already knew them. I mostly improvised every old hoedown tune that ever was put out. I generally played better than anybody else, a better arrangement of tunes....

In contrast to most rural musicians who looked upon their craft as an avocation at best, Eck decided to make music his career and left his home at 16 to find employment with travelling medicine shows in Indian Territory (as Oklahoma was known at the time). These shows, which featured magicians, indian dancers and humorous skits besides the omnipresent musicians and "pitchmen", were the prime source of entertainment for rural America and were the major employers of country musicians. Clarence "Tom" Ashley, Doc Walsh and many others were swept into show business by the travelling wagons of the patent medicine companies.

The theatrical emphasis placed upon performances with such shows offered Eck a perfect forum to polish his natural talent as a showman. Eck soon built a repertoire of trick fiddling and "pitches" to compliment his musical ability. This combination made him virtually unbeatable in fiddler's contests and caused his reputation to grow rapidly.

In 1906 Eck married his childhood sweetheart Nettie Levy. He had taught her to play mandolin while still a child, to which she added her own talent as a guitarist and pianist. Finding work as a piano tuner for the Total-Line Music Company, Eck made his home in the Amarillo area while travelling to most of the Southwestern states to compete in fiddle contests and play in vaudeville theaters and tent shows.

While being quite conscious of tradition, Eck carefully crafted his fiddle tunes to bring out the best in them:

*Now it's not me a-braggin' or thinkin'
that altogether, 'cause there's lots of
other good fiddlers in the world today..
...some of 'em young fiddlers. But they
didn't have the quality of tune of the
original tune, and they ruin their play-
ing by trying to put too many notes and
too many parts of some other tune into
the tune that don't belong there. I
strictly stick with the original tunes
and improve the execution on them. That's
the way to do it....and that's why the
violinist tells me that I'm an artist
instead of just a fiddler.*

Besides tuning pianos (and thus meeting concert artists such as Rubinoﬀ and Kreisler), Eck found employment in a new field of mass entertainment, the motion pictures. While accompanying silent films (especially cowboy movies) in Texas theaters, Eck's sure sense of showmanship led him to wear full cowboy regalia to help his audiences to get into the western mood. He had learned about costumes while working the medicine shows, whose pitchmen often wore western or indian outfits while hawking their wares.

In 1919, Eck began a series of five annual visits to the Old Confederate Soldiers' Reunions held alternately in Richmond, Virginia and Chattanooga, Tennessee. The 1922 Reunion was held in Richmond and there Eck met Henry C. Gilliland, a Confederate veteran and

indian fighter, former Justice of the Peace in Altus, Oklahoma. Eck was impressed with Gilliland's precise yet flowing fiddle style which blended well with his own. The pair performed for the 4,000 veterans at the opening ceremony in Richmond and then decided to travel together to New York City to interest a recording company in cutting some records.'

It has never been decide

It has never been determined just why Eck decided, at the age of 34, to attempt to convince the Victor Company to make these first recordings. Though foreign recordings on various "ethnic" series had been issued for some time, there were no domestic counterparts of traditional music as played by rural musicians. Eck had absolute confidence that he was a great fiddler, and he had plenty of experience in what is now termed "promotion" from the medicine show circuits (rural America's forerunner of today's hard-sell radio and TV advertising). Eck knew how to sell his talent:

I met lots of musicians....they all taken a liking to me like a hungry boy eating plums. Damn....I was the most popular dang fiddler ever was on the road. I could book every damn town I came to, didn't make any difference where it was. There were lots of places where they turned musicians down, but I come right along and booked them.

One important factor in Eck's decision to approach a record company was Henry Gilliland friendship with an influential New York lawyer, Martin W. Littleton, a legal consultant to the Victor Phonograph Co.

Littleton had worked as a boy for Gilliland while he was Justice of the Peace in Oklahoma, and invited the old man to stay in his Manhattan home. The two fiddlers travelled up to New York following their appearance in Richmond and stayed 10 days at Littleton's residence, taking in the sights of the big city while astounding residents with their cowboy and civil war regalia, fine fiddling and fast talking. It was apparently Littleton's efforts that persuaded a somewhat reluctant Victor staff to give them a chance to record.

On June 30th, 1922, Robertson and Gilliland recorded two of the best-known tunes from the country fiddler's repertoire in a close duet style, with Eck playing a strong lead part, "seconded" by Gilliland. Eck, wanting to demonstrate his own style, returned the next day and recorded four pieces without Gilliland, beginning with the incredible *Sallie Gooden*. Two of the sides recorded that day were accompanied by an unidentified pianist with the Victor Orchestra in a rather archaic-sounding 4/4 rhythm sometimes found on early recordings of country guitar.

The Victor Company, having made these recordings, seemed to be in no big hurry to release or promote them. Their first release information seems aimed at their urban customers. *Arkansas Traveler/Sallie Gooden* [Vi V18956] was released on September 1st, 1922, but

the record did not receive wide distribution until at least April of the following year, when Okeh's success with Fiddlin' John Carson stimulated Victor's interest.

Eck returned to his home in Texas and was not recorded again until the end of the "golden age" of string band music....1929. The Victor executives may have been unimpressed with the sales of the initial records or the may have lost touch with Eck who, like most recording artists at that time, was paid a flat fee per side issued rather than royalties. Eck's family responsibilities and local employment kept him from returning to New York. He made arrangements to travel to California for a chance to appear in films, but this venture fell through.

It was not until the summer of 1929 that a new session was arranged in Dallas by Victor "scouts" who contracted with a local firm, the Sellers Company, to record masters for new releases. Robertson had met Jimmie Rodgers while performing in nearby theaters, and it may have been with Rodger's help that Eck secured the additional sessions, which ran concurrently with those of the *Singing Brakeman*. Dallas was close enough for Eck to bring his family and Dr. J.B. Cranfil to accompany him. Dr. Cranfil (a medicine show Dr.?) played harmony fiddle parts while his wife Nettie, Eck Jr., another son and a daughter accompanied him on guitar, banjo (perhaps two tenor banjos) and possibly mandolin.

Following the Dallas sessions, Eck continued to play at contests but was not able to make any further records. The oncoming depression years and changing tastes cut into record sales. Eck felt dissatisfied with the contract he had signed with the Victor Co. in Dallas, insisting until his death that he had been treated unfairly.

Eck's radio career has not been adequately researched. We do know that he appeared on WBAP in Fort Worth as early as March 29th, 1923 in what may have been the first attempt by a country musician to "plug" his records on radio. He appeared on radio both as a solo performer and with various bands, as well as making personal appearances (as his radio theme song suggests).

Though never achieving stardom through his recording efforts, Eck looked upon himself as a special fiddler, which indeed he was. His reputation survives today among contest fiddlers. His recordings and numerous awards testify to his uncanny abilities as a musician and showman. In the early 1960's he was interviewed by students of Roger Abrams and, in 1964, performed at UCLA through the efforts of the New Lost City Ramblers and D.K. Wilgus. At that time, he had fastened a strap from the end-peg of his instrument around his neck to help in holding the instrument steady, yet he was still able to produce his distinctively clear tone which can be heard on all his recordings. Visitors were welcomed to his home in Amarillo, and found him ready to share his music and recollections, but disappointed that his expectations of commercial success and recognition had eluded him.

THE RECORDINGS

ARKANSAS TRAVELER. This tune, often connected with a minstrel show skit, is certainly one of America's all-time favorite fiddle pieces. It had been recorded several times previously, though not by rural musicians. The comedian Len Spencer recorded at least three versions of it before 1920 (Edison Co. in 1902, Victor Co. about 1911 [# 1101] and a special 7 inch 78 for the Harvard Disc Record Co. [#2]). In all these recordings, the painful struggle of a classically-trained violinist with the subtily of a country fiddle tune is obvious.

TURKEY IN THE STRAW. Another "favorite" tune with links to the minstrel stage, often times with a Yankee or Northeastern flavor. As with the selection above, this tune also exists in earlier, city versions. Did Gilliland and Robertson choose these two tunes for their popularity; were they the only tunes they played together....or did the Victor Co. choose these versions for their own reasons???

SALLIE GOODEN. On his first solo recording (perhaps with Gilliland and Littleton not in attendance?) Eck provides us with a stunning set of variations on a basically simple country tune. Only a fiddler who has attempted to duplicate this performance can truly appreciate Eck's bowing, which keeps an "A" drone sounding almost continuously against the intricate melodic variations. Though Eck stated in his interview with Earl Spielman in 1969 that he played this tune in standard tuning, aural evidence and an earlier interview confirm that he used the so-called "open-A" tuning (AEAE instead of GDAE). Resonance from the re-tuned lower strings (and perhaps from the recording horn itself) may have helped to produce this unique sound. It is unfortunate that Eck's second recording of this tune is unavailable for comparison. The fact that he recorded it twice indicates that it certainly was one of his favorites. He may have been unsatisfied with his earlier acoustic recording.

Here is Eck's account of the origin of this tune:

Many years ago, there lived a beautiful maiden. She sent word to all the lands aroundabout for the fiddlers to come together and have a big fiddler's contest. And to the one that palyed the tune that suited her the best, she'd give her heart and hand.

One young man won the contest, his name was Goodin, and the tune thereafter was called Sally Goodin.

RAGTIME ANNIE. This tune may have originated as a piano piece known as *Raggedy Ann Rag*. It is very well known in Texas and the entire Southwest as a popular contest tune. The first two parts are played in the key of D; the third part, sometimes omitted, is in G.

SALLIE JOHNSON and BILLY IN THE LOWGROUND. Both these tunes are known throughout the South, though I do not believe they have ever been combined as they are here. Eck is accompanied by an unknown pianist (his idea or Victor's ?). Piano is often used in fiddle music, especially in Texas. Eck certainly was familiar with the instrument, having been employed as a piano tuner for many years. The accompaniment sounds stilted, but perhaps Eck thought that this would add some class to the recording.

DONE GONE As above. This tune is credited to Texas fiddler Matt Brown and is played in B flat.

TEXAS WAGONER. The first recording Eck made with his family band is also known as *Wild Wagoner* or simply *Wagoner*. He is here accompanied by at least one tenor banjo and guitar, all played in a percussive style almost banjo and guitar, played in a percussive style devoid of bass runs and emphasising the main beat (a fore-runner of the "Texas sock-chord style" of accompaniment ?). Eck includes some fine variations, including an ascending line not heard in other versions of this tune.

THERE'S A BROWN-SKIN GIRL DOWN THE ROAD SOMEWHERE. Eck is credited with the composition of this tune by Fred Hoeptner, though Charles Faurot (on the liner notes of *Texas Farewell*, County 517) mentions a tune titled *Brown Skin Girl* and credits a fiddler named Lefty Franklin, a member of Dr. Howard's Dixie Fiddlers, with its composition. Since Eck knew Dr. Howard well, there is certainly the possibility of joint authorship.

AMARILLO WALTZ. A tune composed by Eck which includes some unusual chord progressions, giving it a very haunting quality.

BROWN-KELLEY WALTZ. A Texas waltz tune, credited by Benny Thomasson to Matt Brown (see *Done Gone*, above) and a man named Kelley. Christeson's *Old Time Fiddler's Repertory* titles it *Keller's Waltz*. The large number of German immigrants who settled in Texas makes a combination of Brown and Keller quite conceivable. Here is an example of a rather unusual practice of extending one tune to both sides of the record.

GREAT BIG TATERS IN SANDY LAND. Well known both in Oklahoma and Texas, this tune is sometimes sung with bawdy verses. At one old fiddler's home, all ladies present left the room even though only the tune was played! Dr. J.B. Cranfil seconds Eck on the fiddle, and both are accompanied by Eck's family, as above.

RUN BOY RUN. Often known as *Run Nigger Run* or *The Pateroller's Song*, this Southeastern tune became quite popular in West Texas and Oklahoma. Played with Dr. Cranfil as above.

BRILLIANCY MEDLEY. Eck assembeled this tune from portions of *Brown Skin Girl*, *Bill Cheatham*, and others. He used this tune as a show and competition piece. This tune has for years been the most available record of all the tunes Eck recorded, having been included by Harry Smith on his *Anthology of American Folk Music* [Folkways Records, N.Y. 1952].

THE ISLAND UNKNOWN. A mysterious ballad, showing some connections to Irish balladry in phrasing, but apparently unknown now both here and overseas. Apparently Eck and his wife Nettie made a special trip to Dallas to record this one song, which fills both sides of the original record.

The text reads as follows:

COME ALL YOU KIND FRIENDS, SO FAIR YOUNG AND OLD
A STORY I'LL TELL OF A POOR RAMBLING SOUL
HE LEFT HIS DEAR PARENTS AND STRAYED OFF FROM HOME
HE'S LOST I'VE BEEN TOLD ON THE ISLAND UNKNOWN

MY HISTORY OF LIFE HAS NEVER BEEN READ
A RECKLESS, HARD-HEARTED LIFE I HAVE LED
A RECKLESS, HARD-HEARTED LIFE I HAVE LEFT
'TILL THE HOUR OF DEATH TAKES ME IF IT WILL

IT WAS EARLY ONE MORNING IN THE FAIR MONTH OF MAY
UNTO MY DEAR PARENTS THESE WORDS I DID SAY
OH FATHER AND MOTHER PLEASE WEEP NOT FOR ME
I'VE JOINED A JOLLY BAND TO GO ACROSS THE WIDE SEA

MY CAPTAIN AND COMRADES ARE ALL DRESSED IN BLUE
TOMORROW WE'LL START WITH THE RED WHITE AND BLUE
TOMORROW I'LL REST, ONLY NOW I'M AT SHORE
WE START AT SUNRISE....WE'LL BE ANCHORED NO MORE

I LEFT MY DEAR PARENTS TO WEEP AND TO MOURN
MY FRIENDS AND RELATIONS, MY OWN NATIVE HOME
I LEFT MY TRUE LOVE WITH A SAD BROKEN HEART
THE TIME HAS NOW COME FOR US TO ALL PART

IT WAS LATE IN THE EVENING ON THE CLEAR CURLING STREAM
I LEFT MY TRUE LOVE IN SORROW AND PAIN [STREAM
I LEFT MY TRUE LOVE TO WEEP AND TO SIGH
I HOPE WE'LL ALL MEET IN THE SWEET BYE AND BYE

THREE WEEKS HAD JUST PASSED SINCE I LEFT HER ON SHORE
THE NIGHT WAS SO DARK, THE HIGH WAVES PASSED 'ORE
THE LIGHTNING WAS FLASHING FROM THE EAST TO THE WEST
I THOUGHT OF MY FRIENDS BACK HOME AT THEIR REST

I THOUGHT OF THAT NIGHT ON THE CLEAR CLURLING STREAM
THE GIRL I HAD LEFT IN SORROW AND PAIN
THE GIRL I HAD LEFT WITH A SAD BROKEN HEART
THE TIME HAS NOW COME FOR US TO ALL PART

A DARK CLOUD HAD 'ROSE AND THE STORM WINDS WERE HIGH
AND THE LIGHTNING FLASHED THROUGH THE DARK CLOUDY SKY
THE SHIP WAS ALL WRECKED AND SCATTERED IN FRIGHT
NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW WHAT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT

I CLUNG TO A SHIP AND FLOATED ASHORE
I FOUND THAT NO OTHER'D EVER BEEN THERE BEFORE
I FOUND THAT MY COUNTRY WAS BUT FIVE MILES BY THREE
I FOUND THAT NO ONE HAD EVER BEEN THERE BUT ME

ONE EVENING I RAMBELED THROUGH THE ISLAND UNKNOWN
I THOUGHT OF MY FRIENDS AND RELATIONS AT HOME
I THOUGHT OF THE GIRL I'D LEFT ALL BEHIND
I THOUGHT THAT MY BODY SOMEDAY THEY MIGHT FIND

I CAME TO A PLACE OUT ON THE SEA SAND
A BOOK FROM MY POCKET WITH PENCIL IN HAND
I WROTE OF MY LIFE AND THE COUNTRY BACK HOME
I WROTE A TRUE HISTORY OF THE ISLAND UNKNOWN

UPON SOME GREEN GRASS THERE AMONGST SOME WILD FLOWERS
I STUDIED MY TROUBLES ALL O'ER THERE FOR HOURS
I THOUGHT OF MY PARENTS I'D LEFT ALL ALONE
I THOUGHT THAT THEIR PRAYERS MIGHT BRING ME BACK HOME

FAREWELL TO THE STARS AND THE STRIPES UP ON HIGH
A DEATH NOW HAS COME, IT'S TRUE I MUST DIE
DOWN BY A TRIM OAK I MAKE MY DEATH BED
THE ONE THAT COMPOSED THIS SONG IS NOW DEAD

FAREWELL TO AMERIKY, I'LL BID YOU ADIEU
LIKEWISE TO THE FLAG, THE RED WHITE AND BLUE
FAREWELL TO MY FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES AT HOME
FAREWELL IS MY PRAYER TO THE ISLAND UNKNOWN

RADIO THEME SONG. Eck composed this theme song to begin and end his segment of radio time and solicit mail from listeners. This mail was important, as this was the only method for a station to gauge listener response to a particular program, and was often the reason for hiring or firing a particular performer. It was recorded at Eck's home in Amarillo in 1965 by Michael Bass, a long-time friend and admirer of Eck's. Other field recordings of Eck's fiddling, made by Mike Seeger and others, will be the subject of a forthcoming LP on Rounder Records.

WELL FRIENDS, I'M ON THE AIR, PLEASE LISTEN EVERYWHERE
WELL FRIENDS, I'M ON THE AIR, PLEASE LISTEN EVERYWHERE
AS I WOULD LIKE TO PLEASE YOU, DON'T THINK THAT I DON'T

[CARE]

ECK ROBERTSON IS MY NAME, I'VE PLAYED MY WAY TO FAME
AND IF YOU LIKE MY PROGRAM, WHY I'LL COME BACK AGAIN

CALL IF YOU WILL, AND TELL US WHO YOU ARE
AND I WILL TRY TO SEE YOU, WHETHER ITS NEAR OR FAR
OR DROP ME JUST A LINE AND SEND IT ON ITS WAY
AND I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU UNTIL MY DYING DAY...

DISCOGRAPHY

June 30th, 1922. New York City, the Victor Talking Machine Co.
Eck Robertson, violin; Henry Gilliland, 2nd violin.

2664-2	ARKANSAW TRAVELER	Vi V18956, County 517
2665-2	TURKEY IN THE STRAW	Vi V19149

July 1st, 1922. as above.

Eck Robertson, solo violin (-1); acc. by ukn. piano (-2).

2666-1	SALLIE GOODEN -1	Vi V18956, Old Timey 101
2667-2	RAGTIME ANNIE -1	Vi V19149, LPV-552
2668-1	SALLIE JOHNSON and BILLY IN THE LOW GROUND -2	Vi V19372
2669-1	DONE GONE -2	Vi V19372

August 12th, 1929. Dallas, Texas, recorded for the Victor Talking Machine Co. by the J.E. Sellers Co. of Dallas.

Eck Robertson, violin; Nettie Robertson, guitar; Eck Jr., banjo and a daughter, guitar. (Vi V40298, V40334 and Bb B5777 issued as by The Robertson Family).

55346-2	TEXAS WAGONER	Vi V40105
55347-1	THERE'S A BROWN SKIN GIRL DOWN THE ROAD SOMEWHERE	Vi V40145, LPV-522, RCA RD 7776
55348-1	AMARILLO WALTZ	Vi V40298
55349-1	BROWN KELLEY WALTZ, Part 1	Vi V40334, Bb B5777, RZ G22483
55350-1	BROWN KELLEY WALTZ, Part 2	Vi V40334, Bb B5777, RZ G22483

October 10th, 1929. as above.

Eck Robertson, violin (-1), vocal & violin (-2); acc. by Dr. J.B. Cranfil, violin and Robertson Family, as above.

56360-2	GREAT BIG TATERS IN SANDY LAND -1	Vi V40205, County 517
56361-2	RUN BOY RUN -1	Vi V40205
56362-2	APPLE BLOSSOM -2	Vi unissued
56363-2	MY FROG AIN'T GOT NO BLUES -2	Vi unissued

October 11th, 1929. As above.

Eck Robertson, violin (-1), vocal & guitar (-2); acc. by Robertson Family (-3); acc. by Eck. Jr., vocal & guitar (-4).

56364-2	BRILLIANCY MEDLEY -1,-3	Vi V40298, Folkways FP 252 FA 2952, County 507
56365-2	MY EXPERIENCE ON THE RANCH -2,-4	Vi unissued

as above, Eck Robertson, vocal & violin; Eck Jr., vocal & guitar.

56366-2	THE ARKANSAS TRAVELER	Vi unissued
56367-2	SALLY GOODIN (vocal Eck only)	Vi unissued

October 20th, 1929. as above.

Eck Robertson, violin & vocal; Nettie Robertson, guitar & vocal.

56433-2	THE ISLAND UNKNOWN, Part 1	Vi V40166
56434-2	THE ISLAND UNKNOWN, Part 2	Vi V40166

Several attempts made to contact RCA Victor to locate the masters to the unissued takes proved fruitless.

INTERVIEWS

Listed in chronological order with name(s) of interviewers and place on file.

December 30, 1962. By Pat Riggs and Szabi Nagy. JEMF.

June 29, 1965. By Michael L. Bass, Graham Wickham and John Fahey. Author's collection.

March 20, 1969. By Earl Spielman. Published in *JEMF QUARTERLY*, 8:4 pp. 179-188, 1972.

ARTICLES

By John Cohen in *Sing Out!* 14:2 [April-May 1964], pp. 55-57.

By Michael L. Bass in *COUNTRY MUSIC WHO'S WHO*, 1967, part 7, pp. 8-9.

By Chris Comber in *COUNTRY MUSIC PEOPLE*, 2:10 [October, 1971] pp. 22-24.

BOOKS

Eck is discussed in short sections in the following publications:

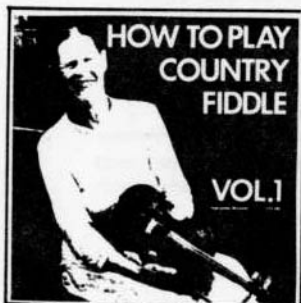
1] *COUNTRY MUSIC U.S.A.* Bill C. Malone. U. of Texas Press, 1968.

2] *STARS OF COUNTRY MUSIC* ed. Bill C. Malone and Judith McCulloh. U. of Illinois Press, 1975.

3] *SAN ANTONIO ROSE* Charles R. Townsend. U. of Illinois Press, 1976.

Eck is mentioned in other works, but no new material is added.

These and other releases are described on the following page.



The STI series (Instructional Records)

- STI-101 *HOW TO PLAY COUNTRY FIDDLE, VOL. 1*
STI-102 *HOW TO PLAY COUNTRY FIDDLE, VOL. 2*
STI-103 *HOW TO PLAY COUNTRY FIDDLE, VOL. 3*

A basic course of instruction in country fiddling by Peter Feldmann, whose 15 year's teaching experience has been recorded in 3 volumes, complete with instruction booklets. They are designed to take the complete beginner and show him all the necessary fundamentals of fiddle playing by ear, in much the same way that fiddle tunes have been taught and preserved for hundreds of years.

- STI-104 *HOW TO PLAY CLAWHAMMER BANJO.*

Old time mountain style banjo taught from the fundamentals to fairly advanced instrumental techniques. As in the fiddle records above, a booklet is included with tabs to all the 24 exercises which teach the 13 tunes included here. *Old Joe Clark, Cripple Creek, June Apple, Cumberland Gap, The Coo-Coo Bird, Arkansas Traveler* and others.

- STI-105 *HOW TO PLAY CARTER-STYLE GUITAR.*

At last, an instruction record which covers the essential guitar style popularized by Maybelle Carter. For beginners through advanced lead styles. Words to songs are included in the accompanying booklet. The 13 tunes and songs include: *Worried Man Blues, John Hardy, Wildwood Flower, Gospel Ship, Kitty Waltz, East Virginia Blues, Alabama Gals* and others.

The ST series (Original Artist Recordings)

- ST-1001 *Nobody Knows You When You're Down & Out. The Scragg Family.*

Old-time songs and tunes from a great string band from Santa Barbara, featuring Kajsa Ohman, Peter Feldmann and Gene McGeorge.

*Some of the best latter-day old-time music
to come from the West Coast.....Pickin'!*

- ST-1002 *The Dixie Cowboy. Big Jim Griffith.*

Hailing from Tucson, Big Jim has a reputaion throughout the Southwest for his fine interperations of old-time banjo tunes and songs, especially those of the King himself, Uncle Dave Macon. This new release is just stuffed full of rare but fine old time music. The sixteen selection include: *Cluck Old Hen, Quit That Ticklin' Me, The Lord Will Provide, I Believe, Joe Harris, Prewar Medley* and others.

Ask your dealer for these and other Sonyatone releases or send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to us for a free catalog and ordering information.

SONYATONE RECORDS

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Santa Barbara, CA. 93102

Printed in U.S.A.



Henry C. Gilliland

Eck Robertson * Master Fiddler * Comp.



UCLA, 1964

Photo: P. Feldmann

A NOTE CONCERNING THE RECORDINGS

Until the transitional period of 1925-27, all sound recordings were of the acoustic rather than the electric type, since there were no microphones. In other words, the sound waves themselves provided the energy used to drive the cutting stylus on the wax master disc. In a typical studio setup, the studio was linked to the recording booth by a large, megaphone-shaped horn which collected as much of the sound "pressure" as possible and mechanically transmitted it to the recording stylus.

We have made every effort to reduce the surface noise generated by this process, but have decided not to do so at the expense of the recorded signal. It has been left to the individual to adjust his tone controls to provide the optimum listening enjoyment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the help of Joe Bussard, John Cohen, David Freeman, Michael Mendelson, Mike Seeger, Paul Wells, Joslyn Wellman, D.K. Wilgus and Bob Young with making this album possible.

Send a stamped envelope to:
Sonyatone Records
PO Box 567
Santa Barbara, CA 93102
for a complete catalog.



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Side One

- 1 ARKANSAS TRAVELLER
- 2 TURKEY IN THE STRAW
- 3 SALLIE GOODEN
- 4 RAGTIME ANNIE
- 5 SALLIE JOHNSON/BILLY IN THE LOW GROUND
- 6 DONE GONE
- 7 TEXAS WAGONER
- 8 THERE'S A BROWN SKIN GIRL DOWN
THE ROAD SOMEWHERE

Side Two

- 1 AMARILLO WALTZ
- 2 BROWN KELLEY WALTZ, Parts 1 & 2
- 3 GREAT BIG TATERS IN SANDYLAND
- 4 RUN BOY RUN
- 5 BRILLIANCY MEDLEY
- 6 THE ISLAND UNKNOWN, Parts 1 & 2
- 7 RADIO THEME SONG

Alexander Campbell "Eck" Robertson is generally acknowledged to be the first country musician to record a commercially-released phonograph record, yet this historic "coincidence" tends to overshadow something more important.....Eck Robertson was a true master musician, a fiddler whose name is legendary throughout the Southwest.

Through his appearances on early radio, at fiddlers' contests, and his phonograph records (some re-issued here for the first time), Eck influenced countless fiddlers who were struck by his clear, "archaic" bowing style, immaculate notation and consummate sense of timing. His showmanship, polished and refined with several years' touring on the medicine show circuit, made him virtually unbeatable at the many contests he entered and a sensation at every performance, be it on the rear of a snake-oil wagon or at a governor's inaugural ceremony. Though his venture into the field of commercial recording was to prove a disappointment to him, his early efforts have provided us with a selection of fiddle tunes and a rare ballad which will continue to reward the attention of any lover of fine music.

This album includes his historic first recordings and all his ensuing releases, as well as a booklet which contains biographical information, notes and comments on the recordings, photographs, and a complete discography. It is to Eck's memory and to all his fans around the world that this album is respectfully dedicated.

Peter Feldmann
Santa Barbara, California
November, 1976

This booklet was originally included with my reissue project of the complete recordings of Alexander Campbell "Eck" Robertson of Amarillo, Texas. Eck was the first country musician ever to make a record, and one of the finest fiddlers to ever draw a bow across the strings.

You are free to share this information, but please credit me if you re-publish it anywhere.

Thanks,

**Peter Feldmann
Los Olivos, California
April, 2012
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