

# Wave The Ocean, Wave The Sea

Field recordings from Alan Lomax's Southern Journey  
1959 - 1960



SIDE ONE

Al.

Chilly Winds.

Wade Ward, banjo.

Galax, Virginia. August 31, 1959.

Uncle Wade Ward (1892-1971) was the scion of a musical family whose roots in Southwestern Virginia went back generations. He learned to pick the banjo at eleven and play the fiddle at sixteen; by the time he was eighteen he and his older brother Davy Crockett Ward were playing as a duo popular at dances, house-raisings, and other social functions around their home in Independence, Virginia. Wade had recorded commercially, both solo and with his Buck Mountain Band, for the Okeh label in the 1920s. Alan Lomax's father, John A. Lomax, recorded him in 1937 with Crockett's string band, the Bogtrotters, and solo on fiddle and banjo, before Alan and Pete Seeger met him at the 1939 Galax Fiddler's Convention. Another session in 1941 brought the total number of Library of Congress records featuring Ward to nearly two hundred-one of which was a version of "Chilly Winds." Alan wanted to feature his virtuosic banjo playing in Southern Folk Heritage Series, and went knocking on Uncle Wade's door again in 1959. Lomax wrote of him:



Wade Ward listening to playback, with Alan Lomax.  
Galax, Virginia.

"He had a good few drinks in his time and played a few dances, and all of this mellowed him till he became as kindly and gentle as the green hills among which he spent his life. When he plays, you realize that the real secret of musicianship lies, not in the number of notes per second or in difficult passages mastered, or in surprises or in great ideas, but in the message that each note carries."

A2.

Lonely Tombs.

Texas Gladden, vocal; Hobart Smith, vocal and guitar; Preston Smith, vocal. Bluefield, Virginia. August 24, 1959.

Over a dozen years had passed since Alan Lomax had last seen the talented multi-instrumentalist Hobart Smith and his gifted ballad-singing sister, Texas Gladden. In 1946, the siblings had left their homes in Southwest Virginia's Blue Ridge for a trip to New York, a concert with Jean Ritchie at Columbia University, and a session at Decca Studios, where Lomax

was then serving as a producer of an American folk-music album series. Alan's first stop in 1959 was to visit the Smith family, although he found that failing health had somewhat constricted the abilities Texas had demonstrated in '46 and earlier, in 1941, when he first recorded her. (Lomax returned in 1942 to record Hobart, as Texas had told him that "I've got a brother who can play anything.") Hobart Smith, on the other hand, was as spry as ever - on guitar, fiddle, banjo, even piano. Preston Smith was Hobart and Texas's brother and a Pentecostal Holiness preacher; he joined them for this nineteenth century Baptist hymn they had learned from their mother. By 1959, it had become a country gospel standard recorded by the likes of Wade Mainer, the Stanley Brothers, and Hank Williams.

A3.

Church, I Know We Got Another Building  
(Not Made With Hands).

Ed Young, fife; Lonnie Young, Sr., bass drum;  
G.D. Young, snare drum.  
Como, Mississippi. September 21, 1959.

In 1942, during a joint research project of the Library of Congress and Nashville's Fisk University, Alan Lomax made the first-ever recordings of the fife and drum music of the Mississippi Hill Country, east of the Delta. "Finding this music still alive," he later wrote, "was the greatest surprise of my of all my collecting trips in America." Played now exclusively for entertainment at country picnics and dances, its roots stretch to before the Revolutionary War, when black fife and drum corps accompanied local militias --one of Thomas Jefferson's slaves is said to have

Texas Gladden. Salem, Virginia



played in such a corps. Their music is considered to be one of the oldest extant forms of African music in North America.

Lomax recalled in 1993: "Watching the Young brothers' line of fife and drums sashay across the yard, enclosed by their dancing family, I saw in my mind's eye the jazz parades of New Orleans.... I remembered the Mardi Gras parades in Trinidad and Rio and the wild rara parades of Haiti and the films I'd seen of African processions, and I could see that this family party in northern Mississippi belonged to that African tradition." Sacred pieces have seldom been recorded by fife and drum ensembles; this one is widespread in the black congregational repertoire. The Young brothers' band was later christened the Southern Fife and Drum Corps and appeared at the Newport Folk Festival and a Friends of Old-Time Music concert in the 1960s.

Ed Young. Williamsburg, Virginia.



A4.

Sherburne (#186).

United Sacred Harp Convention.

Led by A.A. Blocker.

Old Corinth Church, Fyffe, Alabama, September 12, 1959.

The recordings made at the 1959 United Sacred Harp Convention in Fyffe, Alabama, were the first made of four-part "fa-so-la" singing in stereo. Lomax had, as he later wrote, "tried and failed, as had many others, to record this music monaurally" at The Sacred Harp Singing Society of Birmingham, Alabama, in 1942, and he hoped to "finally do justice to its haunting beauty." Over the course of the two-day convention nearly two hundred songs, memorial lessons, and prayers passed over the heads of his Ampex recorder, with Alan's notations filling the margins of his notebook: "stately," "militant," "lively," "marvelous," "fascinating performance," "exciting sound," "wonderful sound." This Christmas carol - the text of which was composed in Britain around 1700, and where it is sung as the sprightly "While Shepherds Watched"--becomes the fugueing tune "Sherburne" on page 186 of The Sacred Harp. "Noble and vigorous," Lomax wrote of it. "One of the best recordings." The United Sacred Harp Musical Association commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of Lomax's historic recordings by returning to Old Corinth Church for their annual convention in September, 2009.



Georgia Sea Island Singers, including John Davis (center, rear), Bessie Jones (in blue with hat), and Mable Hillery (far right). Williamsburg, Virginia.

A5.

Reg'lar, Reg'lar Rolling Under.

Bessie Jones, lead vocal, with Nat Rahmings, drum; Hobart Smith, banjo; Ed Young, fife; and John Davis, Henry Morrison, Albert Ramsay, and Emma Ramsay, vocals.

Williamsburg, Virginia. April 28, 1959.

Lomax's "Southern Journey" field recording trip ended in October of 1959, but by April of the next year Alan was back recording in the South, this time in the capacity of music supervisor to the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's film, "Music of Williamsburg". The aim was to recreate the sound of African American music as it might have been

heard in Colonial Williamsburg, and, according to a strikingly progressive 1962 press release from the Foundation, "to portray the important contributions of the Negro race to the nation's heritage." Lomax assembled a novel cast, comprised of many musicians he'd recorded several months earlier, and drawn from disparate locales. Ed Young came north from Como, Mississippi, to provide the necessary fife-blown. Hobart Smith traveled east from Saltville, Virginia, in the Blue Ridge Mountains, with his four-string banjo and a clawhammer technique learned, in part, from an African American. Nat Rahmings, a Bahamian drummer and drum-maker, was brought in from Miami. And the Georgia Sea Island Singers were the vocal group at the ensemble's core. After filming was completed, Lomax wrote, the "musicians stayed on for what turned out to be a day of extraordinary music-making and musical cross-fertilization." Alan had turned up this tune years before, having gone looking for the oldest published black dance songs in Virginia - its references to the drinking gourd evince its slavery-time origin - and he taught it to the group. "I cannot swear to the authenticity of this reconstructed material," Lomax continued. "But the musically conservative Sea Island singers gave it their enthusiastic approval." The Foundation approved of it too, and featured it in the film.

A6.

Dollar Mamie.

Floyd Batts and prisoners, vocals and axes.

Camp 11, Parchman Farm (Mississippi State Penitentiary), Parchman, Mississippi.

September 16, 1959.

Alan Lomax first experienced the group work songs of Southern black prisoners in 1933, when he was seventeen years old. He and his father John A. Lomax visited penitentiaries that year in Texas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Mississippi, making the first audio recordings of a music remarkable for its intensity, creativity, and nobility in spite of the brutal conditions in which it was spawned. The Lomaxes were initially interested in the remote, insulated prison farms as potential repositories of antebellum black song; as Alan Lomax, Bruce Jackson, and others have noted, they were for all intents and purposes twentieth-century replicas of the slave plantation, with unpaid black laborers working under the whip and the gun. But what the Lomaxes found there was nothing less than a new music. The work songs adapted the field holler - the free-metered, unaccompanied solo song of protest and complaint that sired the blues - into many-voiced chants propelled by the rhythmic striking of axes and hoes, and whose purpose was, as Jackson has put it, "making it in Hell."

The Lomaxes returned to Angola (Louisiana) and Parchman Farm in 1934 for further recordings, and Alan made three more trips to Parchman alone in 1947, 1948, and 1959. "In the pen itself," Lomax wrote in 1957, "we saw that the songs, quite literally, kept the men alive and normal." They

Floyd Batts, Mississippi State Penitentiary (Parchman Farm).



came "out of the filthy darkness of the pen, touched with exquisite musicality... a testimony to the love of truth and beauty which is a universal human trait."

But when he made his last visit in 1959, Shirley Collins remembers, Alan found that "the music had lost something of its grandeur and despair. It may have been that conditions, although still harsh, were not as brutal as they had been, or perhaps it was that the younger prisoners didn't want to keep up the old way of singing and the old songs." This performance - featuring the characters of Dollar Mamie and Dollar Bob, and recorded in some form by the Lomaxes at every one of their Parchman sessions - might have struck Alan this way, what with its laughter and falsetto

asides. But as a prisoner from Texas's Ramsey State Farm told Bruce Jackson: "Sometimes a guy be burdened down and he don't want to pass his burden on to nobody. That's because he don't want nobody feeling sorry for him or thinking he's feeling sorry for himself. So he do it in a song, and he'd make it real sad. ... Well, he's thinking about his family and doesn't want the other people to know it so he makes it into a joke song, a work song." When Jackson made his last recordings in the Texas prison farm system in 1966, the mechanization of prison agriculture was pushing the work songs into obsolescence. By the early 1970s, they had become extinct.

A7.

Bob Johnson's Tune.

George Fields, fiddle.

Lexington, Alabama. September 8 or 9, 1959.

George Fields, seventy-four years old at the time of this recording, had lived in Lexington all his life, and had been a fiddler for nearly all of it. He played for many years at dances, which is why "I play too fast," as he self-deprecatingly told Lomax when he asked Fields about his style. "They all jump up and down fast, you see."

George learned this tune, locally just called "Bob," from Bob Johnson himself, a merchant and musician of some repute around Lauderdale County. "Uncle Bob's gettin' mighty old now," Fields' friend Lonnie Odum remarked after the performance. "He's gone away!" George replied. "He's gone to Abraham!"

A8.

Dark Day.

Silver Leaf Quartet: Cephus Brown, lead vocal; Cordelia Harris, Ellis McPherson, Melvin Smith, vocals.

Ark, Virginia. April 4, 1960.

Founded around 1920, the Silver Leaf Quartet (te) of Norfolk was one of the most popular and respected vocal groups of their era, making a number of influential and brisk-selling records for the Okeh label from 1928 to 1931. They toured the Deep South and Eastern Seaboard extensively in the 1930s; their 1930 engagement at Manhattan's Metropolitan Baptist Church sold out for 21 straight days. When Lomax met them in 1959, two of the original Quartet members - Ellis McPherson and Melvin Smith - were still with the group, which continued to perform on the radio and in churches throughout the Hampton Roads area. Their leader at the time, sixty-seven year old Cephus Brown, remembered this spiritual from his childhood being led by a local deacon and renowned singer named John Scott. Cordelia Harris, Scott's niece, believed it was his composition. The Quartet continued to perform, although increasingly rarely, until 1979.

A9.

Whole Heap of Little Horses.

Texas Gladden, vocal.

Salem, Virginia. August 26, 1959.

Alan Lomax considered Texas Gladden one of the three best ballad singers he ever recorded (the others being Almeda Riddle of Arkansas and Scotland's Jeannie Robertson). He wasn't alone in admiring her - several folklorists had collected her songs in the 1930s, and, two years after hearing her sing at the White Top Festival in 1933, Eleanor Roosevelt invited Texas and her brother Hobart Smith to perform at the White House. Although her singing had been diminished by ill-health, she recorded a number of shorter pieces for Lomax in 1959 - love songs, some ballad verses, and lullabies sung to her granddaughter Cynthia Tuttle, whom Texas addresses here as "Baby Cindy." Despite her popularity, she was never much inclined to travel for the concerts folk revivalists were putting on in the mid-'60s. Besides, when Lomax wondered why she'd never made much "professional use" of her singing, she replied that she'd "been too busy raising babies! When you bring up nine, you have your hands full. All I could sing was lullabies." Texas died in 1967.

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Forrest City Joe, with guitar, and friends. Hughes, Arkansas.

SIDE TWO

B1.

Drink On, Little Girl.

Forrest City Joe & His Three Aces.

Hughes, Arkansas. October 1, 1959.

In his "The Land Where the Blues Began" (1993), Alan Lomax told about meeting Forrest City Joe (Joe B. Pugh) one September afternoon in Hughes, a small town in Arkansas cotton country, about eighty miles south of Memphis: "Joe was sitting on the front gallery of a tavern, identified in the shaky lettering of a sign, 'The Old Whiskey Store.' He was playing the guitar for a group of loungers. I listened a while, bought him a drink, and we agreed to round up musicians for a record-

ing session that evening. Joe was quick, energetic, ambitious, and fast-talking. As we drove out into the country to find his musical buddies, he pulled out his harmonica and began to blow in the screaming, far-out style that my old friend Sonny Boy Williamson made popular.... When he finished, he knocked the spit out of the instrument and said, 'This thing gonna buy me a car like yours sometime.'

"By nine o'clock that evening Pugh had rounded up his band, Boy Blue and His Two (when backing him they became Forrest City Joe's Three Aces), and Lomax had set up his recording machine on the bar at Charley Houlin's juke joint. Alan continued: "No New York technician would have approved of the acoustics. Between takes, the place was a bedlam, but the emotional atmosphere was mellow and marvelous.... Boy Blue and his group kept topping Joe, but Joe kept carving his rivals as number succeeded number. He grew steadily more controlled and more professional as he listened to his playbacks. By the end of the evening he was cock of the walk. Not only that, I could see that he was half-way toward becoming a professional, able to leave Hughes and face the big world.

"At three-thirty A.M. I could scarcely see the typewriter to type out the contracts with these young eager beavers of the Arkansas blues. At four, I loaded the machine into the car. The youngsters went off to get two hours sleep before their cotton picking day began. Joe wanted another drink and deserved one."

Lomax, needless to say, was immensely taken with Forrest City Joe, and when he returned to New York in late October, he found that "everyone in the recording business who had heard Joe's records agreed that he had a chance to make it, to own that Buick." Pugh, for his part, was eager for news, and wrote to Alan in early December: "I hope the records are going over good.... I've had the blues ever since you left--I can hardly help myself--wondering how you liked the songs."

But in April of 1960, after Lomax had included several of Forrest City Joe's songs in the forthcoming Southern Folk Heritage Series, a letter arrived from Joe's manager, Lemuel Ramsey: "Joe B. Pugh - Forrest City Joe and His Three Aces - wanted me to write to you and thank you for the check for recordings - so I am taking the opportunity to do so - but Joe is not here to tell me what to write. Joe B. Pugh was killed in a car wreck Sunday morning about seven April 3rd. They had been out all night playing at Negro tonks and juke joints - as customary on Saturday nights. They were returning to Hughes from Bruins when the driver - Robert Williams - lost control of the car and it ipped over throwing all five out - knocked Joe's brains out on the highway - killing him instantly. If I can be of further assistance in the above matter, please let me know".

B2.

Early In the Morning.

Johnny Lee Moore and prisoners, vocals and hoes.  
Camp B, Parchman Farm (Mississippi State  
Penitentiary), Parchman, Mississippi.  
September 19 or 20, 1959.

It's futile to give titles to prison work-songs. With every performance they were created anew, the leader drawing on the vast cache of oating verses at his disposal and often intermingling the lines that sprang to mind with stanzas of his own devising. This performance, led by Johnny Lee Moore, of Greenville, Mississippi, mentions the oft-encountered female figures of Roberta ('Berta) and Mamie (see A6), and includes some of the more strident lines to be found in the prison-song repertoire. They were aimed at the armed white guard, mounted nearby on horseback: "Captain, don't you know me / Don't you know my name / I used to be the porter on the Southbound train ... I'm the same grand rascal stole your watch and chain." Lomax recorded a similar work-song called "Early In the Morning" in 1948 at Parchman, led by a prisoner named Benny Will Richardson, nicknamed "22."

B3.

Pretty Polly Oliver.

Ollie Gilbert, vocal.

Mountain View, Arkansas. October 6, 1959.

Aunt Ollie Gilbert, born in 1892 in Hickory Grove, Arkansas, was sixty-seven when Lomax and Collins visited her and her husband Oscar ("the fightingest man in the county") at home in Mountain View, Stone County. Jimmy Driftwood, de facto folk-music ambassador of the area, introduced them, calling Ollie "a walking storehouse of early American folk songs." This ballad, originally published as a British broadside entitled "Polly Oliver's Rambles" in 1823, is not to be confused with the murder ballad of "Pretty Polly"; its theme is the recurrent one of young girls dressing as men to follow their lovers into war. Aunt Ollie's is the only extant version that places the action in the Revolutionary War, with Polly declaring herself "a United States soldier; from George Washington I came," before she hops into bed with the captain. Shirley Collins remembers Gilbert as having a large repertoire of bawdy material - "ugly songs," Ollie called them - but she only sang them to Shirley in the privacy of the outhouse, so recording any of them was unfortunately out of the question.

B4.

Wave the Ocean.

Neal Morris, vocal; Charlie Everidge, mouth-bow.  
Mountain View, Arkansas. October 6, 1959.

Neal Morris was Jimmy Driftwood's father and a font of Ozark Mountain ballads, comic songs, and stories. He also knew how to call a dance, which he proves here while Charlie Everidge provides accompaniment on the mouth-bow or picking bow. Everidge, eighty-four years old at the time and one-sixteenth Choctaw, recalled the instrument being frequently used for front-porch dances in the teens and twenties. He also claimed to invent it, although Lomax noted that a similar instrument appears in a cave painting in Southern France dating from 15,000 B.C. Charlie and Neal, though long-time neighbors in Timbo, Arkansas, had never played together before, and because Charlie refused to pay the \$5 deposit for electricity service, they were recorded in Lomax and Collins' motel room in nearby Mountain View.



Neal Morris, Timbo, Arkansas.

B5.

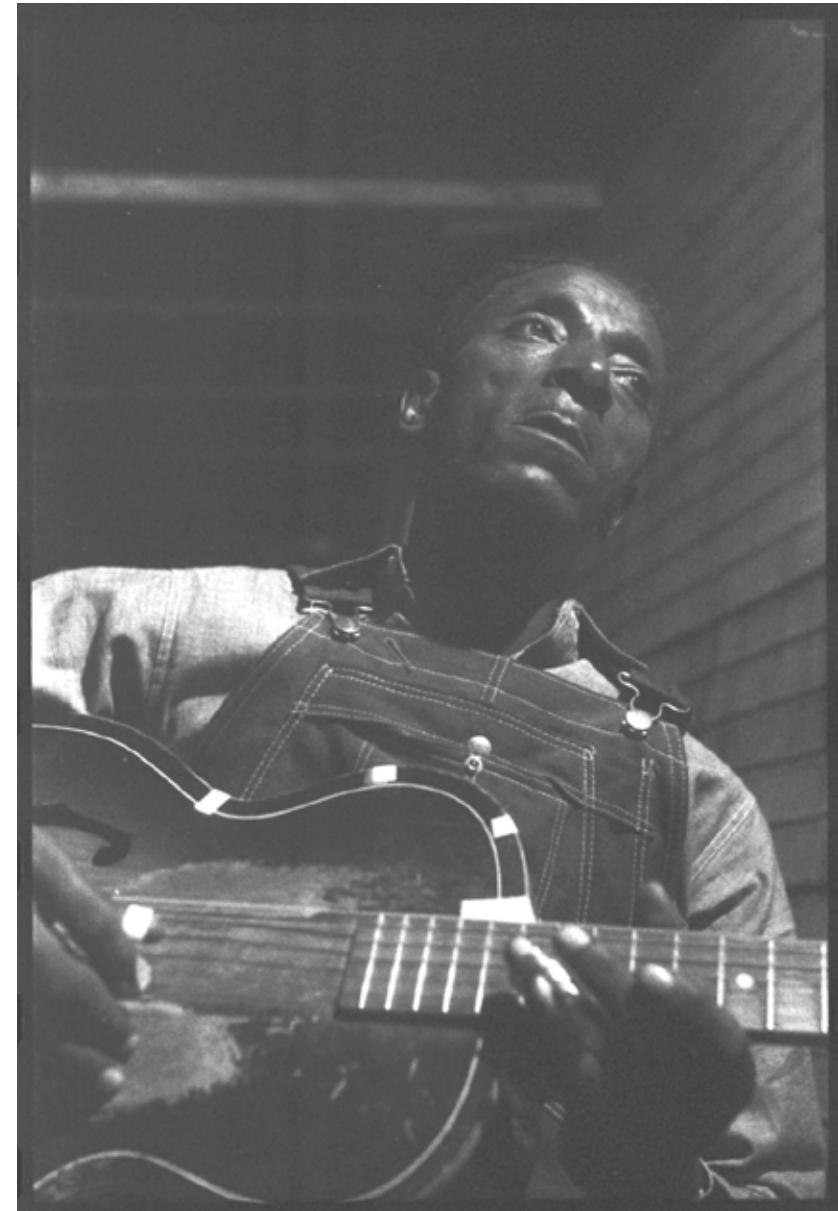
I'm Going Down That Gravel.

Fred McDowell, vocal and guitar;

Fanny Davis, comb; Miles Pratcher, guitar.

Como, Mississippi. September 22, 1959.

Fred McDowell was a farmer who emerged from the woods on the first day of fall, 1959, and ambled over to his neighbor Lonnie Young's front porch in his overalls with a guitar in hand. Lomax had no idea what he was in for, but after McDowell's first song he knew he was in the presence of one of the most original, talented, and affecting country bluesmen ever recorded. After McDowell recorded several of his solo blues, accompanying himself on guitar and bottleneck slide, he was joined by his neighbor Miles Pratcher on second guitar and his sister Fanny Davis on "kazoo." Lomax recalled Davis "singing along through a comb, her man's felt hat falling over one eye, her plaits sticking out every which way, her legs wide apart, leaning her big body in toward Fred and mixing her notes with his." Davis was also a singer at the Hunter's Chapel in Como, and in 1966 she provided the lead vocal on Fred's first recorded version of "You Got to Move," which the Rolling Stones later made, for better or worse, into his signature song. "I'm Going Down That Gravel" borrows some of its tune and its first two verses from Sleepy John Estes' "The Girl I Love, She Got Long Curly Hair" (1929), replacing Estes' "I'm going to Brownsville" with "I'm going down that gravel." This recording has previously been issued under the erroneous titles of "Going Down to the Races" and "Going Down the River."



Fred McDowell. Como, Mississippi.

B6.

Riding In A Buggy / Candy Gal.

Vera Ward Hall, vocal.

Livingston, Alabama. October 10, 1959.

Adele "Vera" Ward Hall (1902-1964), who worked all of her life as a washerwoman, nursemaid, and cook, was regarded by the Lomaxes as one of America's greatest singers. She first came to the attention of John A. Lomax in 1937, when Ruby Pickens Tartt, folklorist and chair of the Federal Writers' Project of Sumter County, Alabama, introduced them. Lomax recorded Hall during three separate sessions in 1937, 1939, and 1940, writing that she had "the loveliest voice I have ever recorded." She sang Baptist hymns with her cousin Dock Reed and other Livingston friends, but she was also willing to record blues, ballads, and "worldly songs" such as "Stagolee," "John Henry," and "Boll Weevil," learned from her friend Rich Amerson, and forbidden by her family. Alan Lomax met Hall in 1948, when he arranged for her and Reed to come New York City for an American Music Festival. Their time together resulted in six-and-a-half hours of recordings and the raw material for her oral biography, which Lomax published in "The Rainbow Sign" (1959). In that book, Vera is called "Nora" to protect her identity and honor her confidences. Making his first trip to Vera's home in Livingston, Alan found her voice and her eagerness to sing undiminished. Simple as they are, these brief ring-play verses nonetheless exemplify the delicacy and pathos of her ability. Five years later, Lomax wrote in her

obituary in "Sing Out!": "The sound comes from deep within her when she sings, from a source of gold and light, otherwise hidden, and falls directly upon your ear like sunlight.... It is from singers like Vera Hall that all of us who love folk music in America have everything to learn. Her performances were all graced with dignity and love."

B7.

DJ Daddy Cool on WEUP Huntsville.

In transit between Scottsboro and Huntsville, Alabama.

September 12, 1959.

Lomax captured this fascinating piece of what is now radio nostalgia while he was driving, onto a machine called a Midgetape. This forerunner of the Dictaphone was promoted by the Mohawk Business Machines Company as "the World's First Battery-Operated Pocket Tape Recorder." WEUP (1600 AM) had been launched in March of 1958 in Huntsville and was Alabama's first black-owned and operated radio station, broadcasting gospel, R&B, live sermons, and hourly news bulletins compiled and edited in-house (as heard here). The station is still independently owned, and broadcasts on both 1600 AM and 103.1 FM as "The Most Hip Hop and R&B," as well as gospel music on 1700 AM - "Huntsville's Heritage Station." Efforts made to identify and locate DJ Daddy Cool have been unsuccessful.



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All recordings made by Alan Lomax on an Ampex 602-2, "Suitcase Model" tape machine. Assisted by Shirley Collins (1959) and Anna Lomax (1960). Photo of Alan Lomax and Wade Ward by Shirley Collins. All others by Alan Lomax.

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Also available as an LP through Mississippi Records  
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Front cover photo:  
Vera Ward Hall, Livingston, Alabama.

Left:  
Prisoners, Mississippi State Penitentiary  
(Parchman Farm).