Grayson and Whitter, Emry Arthur, the Hickory Nuts, and Kelly Harrell and the Virginia String Band. Among the best on this disc, and the most familiar, are Shelton’s "Pretty Polly," Jenkins' "Burial of Wild Bill," The Carolina Buddies' "Otto Wood the Bandit," Grayson and Whitter's "Banks of the Ohio," The Hickory Nuts' "Louisville Burglar," and Harrell's "Charles Guiteau." As with other County reissues, the LP is produced in "hi-fi" and not geared up into phoney and disturbing "stereo" like most of the major record labels' reissues. Old-Time Mountain Guitar seems to me to be a major event -- as this sort of instrumental guitar material is habitually bypassed by other producers in favor of ballad singing, fiddling, etc. This LP by Freeman contains something which some others (including the one mentioned above) curiously lack: proper documentation and complete liner notes. The notes here, by Robert Fleder, are extremely well done and provide the necessary depth of information which enables full appreciation of the recorded material. This disc contains truly great "unheard" material recorded from 1926-30 by Frank Hutchison ("Logan County Blues"), Roy Harvey and Leonard Copeland ("Lonesome Weary Blues," "Greasly Wagon," "Back to the Blue Ridge"), Harvey with Jess Johnson ("Jefferson St. Rag," "Guitar Rag"), David Fletcher and Gwen Foster ("Charlotte Hot-Step," "Red Rose Rag"), Johnny and Albert Crockett ("Fresno Blues"), John Dilleshow and The String Marvel ("Spanish Pandango"), Lowe Stokes' North Georgians ("Take Me to the Land of Jazz" -- with vocal), David Miller ("Jailhouse Rag"), and Sam McGee ("Knoxville Blues") who until very recently still performed regularly on WSM's Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. My particular favorites are Harvey and Copeland's "Lonesome Weary Blues," Lowe Stokes' North Georgians' "Take Me to the Land of Jazz," Harvey and Johnson's "Guitar Rag" (similar to the later "Steel Guitar Rag"), Hutchison's "Logan County Blues," Fletcher and Foster's "Charlotte Hot-Step," and the Crocketts' "Fresno Blues."


by W. K. McNeil

Although County Sales has been in existence only since 1964 it is already established as one of the best of the record companies specializing in "old time" country music and bluegrass. Both County's 500 and 700 Series and the recently initiated 400 Series contain much material of interest to folk music specialists. An example is Back Home in the Blue Ridge which features Fred Cockerham, Tommy Jarrell and Oscar Jenkins. The musicians, from the Surry County, North Carolina-Carroll County, Virginia area, have appeared on other County Records (notably 713 Down at the Cider Mill) but this is their best recorded effort to date. Back Home in the Blue Ridge consists of four instrumentals and eight vocal numbers, all of the selections except "Dan Carter Waltz" (which was written by Oscar Jenkins) are traditional.

Most of the tunes presented here are often recorded traditional numbers such as "Cumberland Gap," "Arkansas Traveler," "Jack Of Diamonds," "Old Joe Clark," and "Sally Ann." There are, however, a few rarely recorded pieces. These include "Rustic Dance," and the Primitive Baptist hymn 'When Sorrow's Encompass Me Round" which, to me, is the high point of the
album. I have often wondered why folksong scholars have been so little concerned with the hymn, and the powerful performance given here only increases my curiosity for it would be hard to find a better example of traditional singing than Tommy Jarrell's rendition of "Sorrow's." The main emphasis of Back Home in the Blue Ridge, however, is on the contrast between the more rhythmic, and probably older, style of fiddling represented by Tommy Jarrell and the mellower, less rhythmic playing of Oscar Jenkins.

If it can be assumed that the selections on this album are representative of the traditional material found in the sections of northwestern North Carolina and southwestern Virginia where Jarrell, Cockerham and Jenkins live then the folk music repertoire there is composed almost entirely of post-1860 items. It would, however, be incorrect to assume that such numbers have been in local tradition for the past one-hundred and thirteen years. For example, "Cumberland Gap" (originally known in the area as "Tumbling Land Gap") was not known in the region until about 1915 and "Bile 'Em Cabbage Down" did not "come around" until about 1925. A number of other old songs and fiddle tunes were first introduced to this section during the decade after 1915. Their arrival then was perhaps facilitated by improved roads and transportation.

Although the accompanying pamphlet by Richard Nevins does not contain as much song genealogy as some folksong specialists would like it is nevertheless a useful supplement to the album because it provides important information about the lives of the musicians and how they acquired the tunes recorded here. I realize that with the last sentence I have committed the cardinal sin of reviewing by lauding everything about Back Home in the Blue Ridge, but the praise is well deserved. In fact, if this record can be said to have any fault then it is that which all recordings have; namely, that the audio portion by itself cannot supplant the audio and visual aspects of a performance of traditional (or any other kind of) music. While one can hear the interplay between Fred Cockerham's clawhammer banjo and Tommy Jarrell's fiddle on "Sally Ann" his appreciation would undoubtedly be heightened if he could also see the musicians in action. And we can listen and enjoy the skillful use of double stops and open string harmonies used by Tommy Jarrell on "Old Joe Clark" and "Breaking Up Christmas" and yet never fully comprehend Jarrell's technical brilliance or ever achieve the excitement of seeing these feats accomplished. But, given the limitations of a record, this is an outstanding sampling of traditional music and unquestionably one of the best albums of its type on the market today.

Da Costa Woltz's Southern Broadcasters. Ben Jarrell and Frank Jenkins. County 524. $3.50 from County Sales

by Jens Lund

Compared to such luminaries of old-time string band music as Charlie Poole's North Carolina Ramblers, Uncle Dave Macon, and Gid Tanner's Skillet Lickers, Da Costa Woltz's Southern Broadcasters are relative unknowns. Yet, their arrangements have often been used by revivalist string bands, particularly the New Lost City Ramblers. Unfortunately for old-time music buffs no vault masters of this group remain -- only the worn Gennett, Champion, and Challenge discs from which this County LP was apparently